

This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Rajamäki, Sari; Mikkola, Leena

Title: Membership negotiation in the first workplace : newcomers' experiences

Year: 2021

Version: Accepted version (Final draft)

Copyright: © 2020 Emerald Publishing Limited

Rights: In Copyright

Rights url: <http://rightsstatements.org/page/InC/1.0/?language=en>

Please cite the original version:

Rajamäki, S., & Mikkola, L. (2021). Membership negotiation in the first workplace : newcomers' experiences. *Journal of Communication Management*, 25(1), 18-33.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/jcom-12-2019-0162>



Membership Negotiation in the First Workplace – Newcomers’ Experiences

Journal:	<i>Journal of Communication Management</i>
Manuscript ID	JCOM-12-2019-0162.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Employee Communication, Organizational Communication, Communication Management, Organizational identification

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

Membership Negotiation in the First Workplace
– Newcomers’ Experiences

Substructed abstract

- **Purpose:** This qualitative study aims to understand young professional newcomers’ experiences of communication processes in membership negotiation in their first workplace after graduation.
- **Design/methodology/approach:** Instead of a one-time interview, the participants were contacted five to ten times during the four to ten months beginning when they entered the workplace. The data were analyzed using a constant comparative method.
- **Findings:** Three communication processes during membership negotiation were identified: developing reciprocity, seeking and perceiving acceptance, and becoming an active member. To experience membership, newcomers need to achieve acceptance and engage in reciprocal communication in early interaction situations with managers and coworkers.
- **Research limitations/implications:** Only the experiences of newly graduated newcomers were studied. This study illustrates the communication processes and social interaction evolving in membership negotiation during newcomers’ entry.
- **Practical implications:** Organizations need to re-evaluate their short orientation programs to support membership negotiations in workplace communication.
- **Social implications:** By recognizing the communication processes during membership negotiation, the practices of newcomers’ entry can be developed to support the membership development.
- **Originality/value:** This study contributes to membership negotiation by showing how newcomers join the flow of membership negotiation through the processes of developing reciprocity, seeking and perceiving acceptance, and becoming an active member.
- **Keywords:** employee communication, organizational communication, organizational identification, communication management
- **Paper type:** Research paper

Introduction

The first workplace after graduation is the place where young professionals begin to construct a ground for their career expectations and professional development (Smith, 2018). An overall understanding of work life begins to grow. When entering a work life, newly graduated newcomers face changing workplaces, where project work and temporary contracts are general: This shapes the young professionals' understanding of their membership and emphasize the importance of their early career experiences in the workplaces.

Early career newcomers in professional work are the younger generations in the workplaces and they tend to desire repeated, supportive, and open communication, including feedback from others and a willingness to show their expertise (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010). These features are seen as a challenge to management, how to assure employees' need of feedback, possibilities for professional development or work-life balance (Nolan, 2015). Communication programs focusing on strengthening employees' experience of open and job-related communication are important for early career employees (Walden et al., 2017). However, more information is still needed of young professionals' experiences to understand how they adapt to interactions with other employees in the workplace (Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010); learning this can help promote organizational communication practices (Omilion-Hodges and Sugg, 2019), ensuring that both organizations' and employees' needs are met (Elkins, 2018).

When entering into a new workplace, it is through membership negotiations which newcomers constantly constitute their membership (Scott and Myers, 2010). The newcomers face organizational expectations and communication structures, and must reflect on their own expectations and beliefs. This study approaches newcomers' entry into their first workplace after graduation by examining their experiences of early membership negotiation. An examination of newcomers' experiences of communication processes during the ongoing

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

entry phase broadens our understanding of communication in the development of one’s membership. In organizational role transitions, an employee’s identities are constructed through one’s ability to learn and adapt in different ongoing communication processes (Ashforth, 2001, p. 296), but to understand what these processes are, more information is needed regarding how these communication processes develop over time (Gómez, 2009). In this study, we pursue to identify what kind of communication processes are meaningful in membership negotiations during the entry phase.

Newcomers’ Entry

In organizational communication studies, newcomer’s entry has been approached from the perspective of organizational socialization (van Maanen and Schein, 1979), assimilation (Jablin, 2001), and organizational identification (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). Newcomers’ entry is crucial for organizations because problems with inclusion can lower newcomers’ self-efficacy and identification with the organization (Smith et al., 2017). New employees are always investments, which is why management should take into account individual experiences to support newcomers’ entry.

Social exchange in workplace relationships and managing uncertainty are key for assimilating into a new workplace (Lapointe et al., 2014). Therefore, information sharing is necessary. Through information-seeking, a newcomer seeks out information and manages uncertainty in workplace interactions (Kramer, 2004). Younger newcomers with less work experience engage in information-seeking for a longer period of time than newcomers who have previous workplace experiences (De Vos and Freese, 2011). The information flow supports their job engagement, but there is a need for closer observation of how openness, reciprocity, and feedback can enable the engagement (Walden et al., 2017). Younger employees value communicative teamwork with older employees, which, together with mutual learning and feedback, support employees’ job satisfaction (Wok and Hashim, 2013).

1
2
3 Social support and information from peers and managers help newcomers become members
4 of their workplace (Kramer and Sias, 2014), enabling the development of job competency
5 and preventing turnover (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). Support from people with
6 different areas of expertise promote membership in coworking spaces (Walden, 2019).
7
8 Employees work in different kinds of workspaces with multiple purposes and possibilities for
9 social support. Understanding employees' personal experiences of social interaction in the
10 workplace can show what processes are meaningful during various newcomers' entry.
11
12

13
14 This study approaches newcomer's entry from the perspective of membership
15 negotiation by focusing on young professionals' experiences of workplace communication.
16
17 Newcomers' experiences in their first workplaces can provide information about the
18 occurrence and quality of communication processes' during early membership negotiation.
19
20

21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60

Theoretical Background

Membership negotiation is a communication process in which newcomers become members of the workplace through the ongoing social exchange with others (Scott and Myers, 2005). Through membership negotiation, newcomers understand their own expectations and can compare them with the expectations of others. The relationships new employees create with others are meaningful because they affect job competency and the emotions of their work (Myers, 2010). Therefore, becoming a member is a foundational part of the organizing processes in a workplace.

Involvement in the workplace supports newcomers' experiences of acceptance because it eases membership negotiation (Myers and McPhee, 2006). Acceptance occurs when newcomers experience themselves as insiders and are treated as fellow coworkers (Moreland and Levine, 2001). However, acceptance from coworkers is not guaranteed, which can complicate membership negotiation (Scott and Myers, 2005). It is important to explore the communication processes that enable newcomers' experiences of membership.

Membership negotiation describes a form of reciprocal communication between members, workgroups, and organizations because the membership is created and reproduced through communication (Scott and Myers, 2010). Workplace structures inform social interaction (McPhee et al., 2014), but employees produce their own experiences of membership by sharing, creating, and reconstructing its meanings with others (Scott and Myers, 2010). To understand organizational structures, newcomers learn the emotional rules of the workplace to adapt their emotions and seek information with which to construct their membership (Scott and Myers, 2005). Myers and Oetzel (2003) have shown that familiarity can ease newcomers' entry, allowing them to participate in organizations more quickly. More explicated information is needed of how individual newcomers gain recognition from other members (Woo and Myers, 2020).

Membership negotiation was originally presented as one of the Four flows in McPhee and Zaug's (2000) model, which explains the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) through four separate contents of communication processes: Membership negotiation is the first flow, in which a newcomer becomes part of the organization and negotiates different kinds of boundaries in the communication. Second, reflective self-structuring focuses on the creation of organizational hierarchies and groups through interaction. Third, activity coordination involves work coordination, roles and responsibilities, and work processes. Fourth, institutional positioning describes the organizational level at which reputation and the organization's place in the public environment are managed.

The Four Flow model aligns with other approaches, which all show organizations as communicative constitutions (Brummans et al., 2014). For example, the Montreal school approach focuses on conversations and agency, while Luhmann's system approach sees communication as a social system (Brummans et al., 2014). Different approaches of CCO "seem to be united in their quest to develop theories that explain how to generality emerges

from performativity” (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 187). The four flow model, nevertheless, is grounded on Giddens’ (1984) idea of the duality of structure, which separates it from other CCO approaches. It explains employees’ experiences through organizational structures and rules, but it simultaneously sees how members of the organization assign new meanings to the structures through communication. Workgroups form organizations in which members actively reconstruct their relationships and identities (McPhee and Zaug, 2009). Thus, exploring membership negotiation enhances the understanding of workplace communication in general.

Even though the CCO has initiated a lot of empirical research, the four flow approach has been applied less frequently (Kuhn and Putnam, 2014). So far, only a couple of studies have empirically focused on Four Flow model and newcomer’s membership negotiations with it. Woo and Myers (2020) showed that organization’s boundary spanning—employees need to manage information and relationships across different units, hence complicating their membership negotiation. Endacott and Myers (2019) showed that earlier work experience enables membership negotiation to transform: earlier work experience leads to improved role positioning, influenced decisions and practices, and facilitated interorganizational collaboration; in addition, membership negotiation was constructed through the interaction of past and new organizational experiences. Here, we can assume that young professional newcomers construct their expertise during membership negotiations. To understand their early experiences, this study focuses on communication processes appearing in membership negotiation.

The aim of this study is to examine the communication processes involved in membership negotiation in the entry phase. This is studied by analyzing the communication processes described by the newcomers when they talk about their experiences of social interaction in their first workplace after graduation. *The research question:* How do young

professional newcomers experience proceeding of membership negotiation as a part of workplace interaction while entering in their first workplace? This is studied by constructing membership-related communication processes during their first three to 10 months of the beginning entry.

Method

This study sought to uncover newcomers' experiences of membership negotiation in workplace communication over time. To catch up and understand these experiences and identify the communication processes, the study was conducted with a qualitative methodology following the symbolic interactionism approach, in which meanings are seen as created through social interaction (Mead, 1935) and experiences are understood as individuals' interpretations (Blumer, 1969). Here, the newcomers are seen as active agents in the world whose experience and understanding of the self are constructed through dynamic and interpretive social interactions "where people create, enact and change meanings and actions" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7).

The study was conducted by two researchers. The first author carried the main responsibility of data collection and analysis. However, the authors critically discussed about the choices in data collection and interpretations in analysis to increase the credibility of the study.

Participants

The goal of data collection was to follow participants' early career experiences by capturing their descriptions of communication and experiences of the transition phase at multiple time points. Recurring interviews were used to understand the dynamics of these experiences in time and the different meanings participants' create in workplace interactions. An invitation to participate was shared on social media and in several Finnish universities.

The participants were 23 young Finnish professionals working in their first position after graduation at different kinds of organizations. Twenty-one were female, and two were male; they ranged in age from 23 to 32 years (born between 1985 and 1994). Eleven had bachelor's degrees and twelve master's degrees in diverse fields: nursing, education, humanities, economics, engineering, social sciences, natural science, and police and law studies. They worked in small and large companies, public-sector organizations, and other associations. The participants and the amount of the data are detailed in Appendix 1.

Ethical principles were carefully followed; the autonomy of the research subjects was respected, harm was avoided, and privacy and data were managed (National Advisory Board on Research Ethics, 2019). The participants were informed about the research and that participation was voluntary; they were provided with written consent before data collection started. Their anonymity was ensured throughout all phases of the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected during the 2017–2018 by the first author. Instead of conducting nonrecurring interviews, the participants were contacted every two or three weeks. Every participant was contacted five to 10 times during their first three to 10 months in their new workplaces. The data collection process was inspired by a naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), in which a researcher describes, observes, and interprets the experiences and actions of specific groups or people (Salkind, 2010). In this case, the group under study was newly graduated newcomers, and the experiences concerned their entry phase. The approach was emergent in nature, and the first author created new questions during data collection and actively engaged in the process to understand participants' experiences (Salkind, 2010). Being in constant contact with the participants during the data collection produced understanding of the participants' unique experiences.

The participants were asked to freely describe their personal experiences (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002), but as a researcher the first author also asked questions. Data were collected via e-mail, phone, and WhatsApp voice messages. The participants chose which channels they wanted to use. If they chose e-mail, the researcher sent questions, and the participants reflected on their answers when it was suitable. If a participant wanted to answer with voice messages in WhatsApp, the researcher sent questions via written messages. If the participants chose phone calls, questions were asked during the call. During first contact, the researcher asked everyone the same questions. As data collection proceeded, the researcher asked more specific questions related to the participants' personal descriptions. The questions were related to social interaction, belonging, coworkers, managers, roles, relationships, and the workplace environment.

Data collection was an emergent process, meaning that every time a new description was revealed, it was analyzed to create questions for the subsequent contact. Thus, the participants' descriptions guided the data collection process, making it inductive. For example, if during the first contact one participant described that they had spent time with coworkers outside of working hours, as the researcher the first author would ask other participants, "Do you spend time with your coworkers outside work, and are there any differences in communication?" This was done to identify variations and similarities in their experiences, and it allowed the researcher to ask specific questions over several iterations to observe participants' experiences with communication dynamics. The data include oral and written material. The oral material (WhatsApp voice messages and phone discussions) were later transcribed (340 MS word pages, font Arial 12).

When planning long-term data collection, the challenges of different communication platforms were considered by being aware of the quality differences between face-to-face interviews and Internet interviews (James and Busher, 2014). The different communication

platforms give the participants the freedom to use the channel they wanted and did not require synchronous presence. Hence, the participants could choose the most natural channel to express themselves (i.e., through writing or speaking). Some of the participants switched from e-mail to WhatsApp voice messages or from phone calls to e-mails.

The data collection was heuristic and produced rich data. The method captured the participants' multivoiced experiences and the communication processes of membership negotiation during entry. The first author had a recent experience of entering her first workplace after graduation, which supported the data collection and analysis process. This might have produced biases in the analysis (Sword, 1999), but these biases were managed through self-reflection.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was executed concurrently with data collection, leading to the adoption of the comparative constant method (Charmaz, 2006). This method is part of the grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and the aim is to first compare the initial data and then subsequent codes to understand the similarities and differences in participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2006). When a participant provided a response, it was analyzed to form questions for the next interview. Thoughts and observations were written down and the data were transcribed. When data collection was completed, all data were read through several times to make notes and compare descriptions. Because the participants had the opportunity to say whatever was on their minds, some content was irrelevant (e.g., descriptions of specific work tasks or questions/comments about the study). Data that did not describe the experiences of communication or belonging were disregarded.

The essential analysis began with initial open coding. All data were given descriptive codes to represent the newcomers' experiences. These open codes included labels such as "getting to know your coworkers," "support," "feedback from supervisor/coworker," and

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

“easy to participate in conversations.” Memos containing ideas and comparing different participants’ experiences were created. Then, focused coding was performed, in which the most significant and frequent codes were looked for. These two coding processes partly overlapped (see Charmaz, 2006).

As part of axial coding and category defining, codes and memos were sorted and the connections between participants’ experiences were compared. Through this process, the dimensions of the newcomers’ experiences of communication involved in membership negotiation were constructed. The eight dimensions were as follows: impression management, newcomers’ communication orientation and coworkers’ interest, self-disclosure, feedback and social support, appreciation of expertise, creating atmosphere, social influence, and shared trust. Then, the temporal occurrence of the communication dimensions were examined to structure the dimensions into the communication processes. These dimensions and their timing are presented in Table 1.

<Table 1 here>

Finally, the level of abstraction was raised to designate the three communication processes of membership negotiations: *development of reciprocity*, *seeking and perceiving acceptance*, and *becoming an active member*. The repetitive data collection method enabled the following development of communication processes over time.

Results

The aim was to examine the communication processes involved in membership negotiations. Three processes were identified that were formed from various dimensions and appeared differently in time. *Developing reciprocity* consisted of feedback and social support

and appreciation of expertise. *Seeking and perceiving acceptance* consisted of impression management, newcomers' orientation and coworkers' interest, and self-disclosure. *Becoming an active member* consisted of creating atmosphere, social influence, and shared trust. Different processes emerged phase to phase, but they also overlapped and were dynamic. Three or four months after entering the workplace, concurrent negotiating of reciprocity and acceptance allowed the newcomers to experience their membership. Most of the newcomers had become members of their workplace, and their descriptions of communication within the workplace had altered. Figure 1 presents the communication processes the newcomers described. Arrows show the timing of the communication processes in membership negotiation, and the circle describes the ongoing membership negotiation in workplaces.

<Figure 1 here>

Developing Reciprocity

The process of developing reciprocity occurred throughout the newcomers' time at the workplace, and it consisted of feedback and social support and appreciation of expertise. The direction of feedback and social support became two-way over time. *Feedback and social support* focused on work tasks, allowing the newcomers to develop their professional skills. The newcomers sought support and feedback for their work, choices, and emotions experienced at the workplaces. For Jenny, positive feedback supported her participation:

I think I have found my place in our team, especially because all the positive feedback my supervisor has given me. It gives me courage to trust and share my own visions of work. My supervisor also said to me that I can disagree and challenge her thinking because it is a good thing. (Jenny, five months at the workplace. The time after data extract represents how long newcomer has worked in a workplace.)

When the newcomers perceived themselves as accepted, they were able to share their opinions and thoughts in workplace relationships. They also started to give feedback and support to others. *Laura* describes how small things, such as asking “how are you,” can be supportive:

Relationships where people take others into account, greet, and catch up support my belonging at my workplace. That is why I also try to remember to ask how everyone’s doing and to greet everyone I meet when I go to the work. (*Laura*, five months at the workplace)

The newcomers noted that a growing *appreciation of expertise* expressed by coworkers in conversations made it easier to adapt. The newcomers wanted to be appreciated as professionals and feel that their ideas were valued. *Marianne* describes how becoming part of decision making supported her expertise:

It feels nice when my opinion is asked and they [coworkers] take that into account in the same way, like someone experienced would have said that. (*Marianne*, two months at the workplace)

The importance of appreciating expertise emphasizes that suspicion and mistrust of newcomers’ skills can negatively affect the development of reciprocity. The newcomers were very sensitive about their expertise, and negative experiences with coworkers or managers bothered them. For *Sophia*, it was challenging to express her expertise:

With some work tasks, others may think that new employees could not do them. I think it is a bit of that they don’t trust that things would get done.... I have a different perspective to do my work than others. In a way, I have felt that I am stepping on someone’s toes if I do my work in a different way than others are used to. (*Sophia*, two months at the workplace)

Ida instead describes how her questioned expertise affected her communication with others:

That kind of interaction with coworkers, where you don't get some work tasks to do because you are a young woman and instead those tasks are given to someone only because he happens to be man (which they never say aloud, of course, but it is clear), dilutes the experience of belonging, I think. (Ida, seven months at the workplace)

Developing reciprocity appeared constantly in newcomers' experiences, along with seeking and perceiving acceptance supported membership development.

Seeking and Perceiving Acceptance

Seeking and perceiving acceptance was a core process that became apparent at the beginning of the newcomers' entry through impression management, newcomers' orientation and coworkers' interest, and self-disclosure. At first, the newcomers constantly developed an understanding of how to behave in different situations by observing different coworkers and comparing their own behavior to develop their *impression management*. In this way, the newcomers tried to fit in. Leila describes the change in her self-expression:

In the beginning, I tried to give a more neutral expression of myself, but now I can bring more of my own personality. I have recognized that here is space to be who you are; there are different kinds of people, and overall everyone's approving toward others. (Leila, one month at the workplace)

The newcomers emphasized the importance of being noticed and having a clear *communication orientation* to understand their tasks, communication practices, and with whom they would work. When *coworkers expressed interest*, the newcomers found it easier to participate in conversations. This was particularly true during group encounters at the workplace, such as coffee and lunch breaks. These kinds of early interaction situations are crucial when seeking out and perceiving acceptance. A lack of orientation and conversations with coworkers negatively affected the acceptance. Marianne highlights the importance of coworkers' interest and active role:

Coworkers offered help and told me that “you are not alone in any case.” In my first day, my supervisor introduced me to everyone, and we had our team’s internal orientation meetings. [--] Coworkers’ friendliness was shown from that they had time to talk with me on my first day; they were not in a hurry. They were ready to help me, which made me feel welcome, so it was easier to approach my coworkers and ask for help. (Marianne, two months at the workplace)

Seeking acceptance in social interactions focused on work-related information, but personal information was also desired. Reciprocal *self-disclosure* with other members helped the newcomers control uncertainty while developing relationships. For these newcomers, it was easier to share personal issues when coworkers shared something about themselves first. This was significant for perceiving acceptance, but differences appeared in how much they shared. Sharing jokes, personal details, emotions, and thoughts about work increased self-disclosure. It was easier for Carl to participate in future interactions after self-disclosure:

Interaction with others has become easier because of shared issues and experiences, so there are more topics to talk about. It is easier to trust someone when I know that person better, and to participate in conversations. (Carl, one month at the workplace)

Petra experiences the different forms of self-disclosure as an indicator of acceptance:

Especially in our team, but with other coworkers too, casual chatting, joking, and sharing of personal information has grown. I have gotten to know some coworkers so well that if we pass by, we will stop and start to talk. This would have never happened in the beginning. (Petra, three months at the workplace)

Experiences of perceived acceptance in workplace communication supported the membership negotiation and led to the newcomers’ active membership.

Becoming an Active Member

Remarkable change was observed after three to four months, when most of the newcomers stated that they could be themselves in the workplace because of the perceived atmosphere. They described how coworkers started to show interest in them by giving them responsibility, providing deeper support, and expressing trust. The newcomers started to express their expertise and values more openly to *create an atmosphere*. This was a starting point for active membership; the newcomers described that perceived safe and open communication helped with participation in conversations. Natalia describes how open communication encouraged her to be reciprocally active in a workplace:

I would describe that open communication in a way where the workplace atmosphere is safe so that everyone dares to say their opinion and there occurs spontaneous conversations and dialogue with others. You can express your thoughts, and you feel that others appreciate your sayings and yourself, too. And in a way, others welcome you warmly or your new ideas or new people into the workplace. (Natalia, ten months at the workplace)

The communication atmosphere of the workplace created possibilities for communicating with others and guided membership development. Workplace values, the rush at work, and changes in personnel affected communication and the time that could be spent interacting with coworkers. Joanna's experience of the workplace's atmosphere makes it difficult to adjust:

Even though others recognize my face now, they don't have the energy to make contact with me because everyone is in a crazy rush and stressed all the time. That is a shame, I think. (Joanna, three months at the workplace)

After becoming acquainted with coworkers, the newcomers perceived that it was easier to interpret coworkers' communication behavior, which affected the newcomers' *social influence* in different situations. In particular, their motivation to make an influence at

the workplace started to increase when they described themselves as members. Active membership emerged in the workplace's communication practices, and the newcomers started to support reciprocally coworkers' membership. When developing active membership, the newcomers gained more information about their coworkers and their expertise, which naturally made it easier to participate in interactions. Sanna describes how her own and coworkers' behavior support her membership:

I have tried to be consciously active, interested and open toward other members, but our workplace has been an ideal environment for that: I want to create positive working environment for all, but it would have been very difficult if my coworkers would only see me as an assistant, who is here only for short period. (Sanna, eight months at the workplace)

Some of the newcomers had difficulty expressing their expertise and participating in conversations, diminishing their opportunities to become active members. This resulted in uncertainty or difficulties in workplace communication and feeling that others did not respect the newcomers' expertise. Feelings of being an outsider were common, but they were usually temporary. If difficult experiences in the workplace were encountered, a perception of exclusion emerged, and even an intention to leave appeared. Nina describes her difficulties with experiences of exclusion:

Sometimes, it still feels that I'm not fully member of team x. In speech, I am not included in team x. Before our new supervisor arrived, others always said about that x team includes two people, Anna and Ben. Every time I hear that, it bothers me, but I haven't said anything about it. Also, in meetings, I feel like an outsider because I have nothing to contribute. (Nina, three months at the workplace)

The experience of *shared trust* was shown, for example, in communication in which the newcomers could talk with coworkers about workplace targets for development. Most of

the newcomers began expressing critical opinions or disagreement when they felt themselves as fully accepted members. At this point, they felt they had gained enough trust among their coworkers, as Tilda describes:

I think I have been able to be more open and be myself. I have learned to disagree with my coworkers about issues and, maybe, dare to be more effective to step into situations. (Tilda, four months at the workplace)

Expressions of shared trust were experienced when the newcomers became part of the negative talks, which is found as talking behind people's backs. Even though criticism was seen as negative, it was also an indicator of shared trust. Ellen experiences negative talk as an expression of trust:

Always when I am in an interaction with someone, it adds solidarity with them. When someone tells me something negative, it feels like I am worth the trust. If I wouldn't say anything to that person, who is saying something bad about some other coworker, I think I would end up as an outsider. So that is why I always at least listen and say "ok" or something like that. (Ellen, seven months at the workplace)

To conclude, developing reciprocity and seeking and perceiving acceptance are crucial processes when becoming an active member. Newcomers pursued acceptance from other members and actively sought it in the workplace. At first, they managed their impressions more and wanted to identify other members' communication behavior and compare this with their own expectations. Coworkers' sensitivity toward the newcomers and experiences of a positive orientation made it easier for the newcomers to adapt to their workplaces. Sharing work-related and personal information helped the newcomers' membership and supported the construction of relationships in which perceived acceptance was experienced after three to four months. When there were difficulties regarding orientation or disclosure, it took longer for the newcomers to experience acceptance. Thus,

supportive communication showed the newcomers that they had something to offer as professionals, increasing the experience of acceptance. This, in turn, allowed the newcomers to participate in interaction situations more actively to fulfill their professional and personal needs to achieve active membership.

Discussion

This study contributes to the research on organizational entry and membership negotiation by identifying the communication processes that emerge during a newcomer's entry. The findings show that membership negotiation consists of developing reciprocity, seeking and perceiving acceptance, and becoming an active member. These ongoing communication processes evolve in the entry phase; the results suggest there is certain order in occurrence. The findings confirm earlier notions that becoming a member is a complex, overlapping, and changing communication process (Scott and Myers, 2010; Woo and Myers, 2020).

According to the findings, developing reciprocity and perceived acceptance leads to membership. This is in line with earlier findings of increasing familiarity and emotion sharing in membership negotiations (Myers and Oetzel, 2003; Scott and Myers, 2005); the findings also support Moreland and Levine's (2001) suggestion that acceptance is a precondition for membership. The development of reciprocity and achieving acceptance took time, depending on the newcomer's expectations and workplace structures. In this study, it was easier for newcomers to share information and disclosure when a coworker did this first, emphasizing the importance of the attentive behavior of coworkers during membership negotiations. This supports the earlier findings of Woo and Myers (2020), where other members' recognition toward a newcomer was significant for membership negotiations.

Developing reciprocity, especially sharing personal information at some level and receiving social support from others, was important for newcomers. These findings confirm

earlier studies of information sharing (Lapointe et al., 2014) and social support in newcomers' entry (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Kramer and Sias, 2014; Walden, 2019). Reciprocal self-disclosure enables the experience of inclusion. Newcomers valued repeated, supportive, and open communication, which is in line with the findings from Myers and Sadaghiani (2010). However, there were different ways of experiencing communication processes: some newcomers were less actively participating than others yet still might experience being accepted as active members.

While becoming an active member, the newcomers needed to construct their expertise during entry. With early career employees, this might take longer to seek information and adapt because of their work history (De Vos and Freese, 2011). Earlier work experience reproduces membership negotiation by improving role position and influencing decisions and practices (Endacott and Myers, 2019). In the case of young professional newcomers, their lack of professional work experience might explain why they express a greater need to develop their expertise before they can focus on their membership. The newcomers' individual expectations of communication revealed the challenges they faced (e.g., difficulties with coworkers and experiences of exclusion) in membership negotiation, which could delay active membership. The results suggest that experiences of acceptance and memberships take time, in this case approximately three months. Thus, this produces new insights into newcomers' entry by showing that time matters in orientation processes, challenging the idea of short orientation programs.

Theoretically, this study contributes CCO approach and McPhee and Zaug's (2000) Four flow model by describing how early career newcomers join the membership negotiation flow and become part of the flow. Figure 1 describes how the membership negotiation flow constantly runs in organization, constituting the organization and illustrating the processes through which a newcomer becomes a part of the flow. Thus, the results show how an

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

individual employee can become attached to an organization through membership negotiations and how they experience the process. The findings also broaden the theoretical understanding of Scott and Myers’ (2010) membership negotiation model by showing the complexity and variation of communication processes and the quality of communication during membership negotiations.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the communication processes involved in membership negotiation in newcomer’s entry. The objective was pursued by analyzing young professional newcomers’ descriptions of communication processes in their first workplace after graduation.

The data collection aimed to catch the participants’ descriptions of changes in their experiences over time. This produced multivoiced, extensive descriptions of the participants’ experiences with rich rigor (Tracy, 2010). However, in a qualitative inquiry, a researcher cannot separate the self and subjective biases, assumptions, or personality from the research (Sword, 1999), but this was pursued to manage with the researcher’s reflexivity.

In addition, the long-term data collection might have affected the participants’ motivation, including the quality of their descriptions (James and Busher, 2014); this carried the risk of participants dropping out. On the other hand, the first author’s active role as a researcher might have affected the participants’ experiences of familiarity with the researcher (Tracy, 2010), which could motivate participants to commit to the study. The type of data collection may also have had positive consequences for the newcomers’ transition. The participants described that the method “make[s] it easier to adapt to a workplace” and that it “support[s] the transition from student to professional.” The credibility of the data also has a gender limitation because only two participants were men.

The credibility of the data analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) relies on the credibility of the interpretations of the data. Here, the credibility of the interpretations was strengthened by the authors' critical discussions, and to confirm the transparency of the study, the data analysis was described step by step; data examples are shown, making it easier to evaluate the results.

The characteristics of the communication process are transferrable to other organizations but with certain limitations. First, the data cover mainly knowledge-based professional work, meaning there would be variations in different fields of work. Second, the data were collected from newcomers in their first workplaces, so one should be careful when applying the results to a more experienced newcomer's entry.

Despite the limitations, this study showed that young professional newcomers create their membership in the workplace through the communication processes of developing reciprocity, seeking and achieving acceptance, and becoming an active member within membership negotiation. This study illustrates how newcomers become part of the membership negotiation flow in workplaces and how they start to influence organizational existing structures within communication processes. The focus was on young professionals' experiences: further studies are needed to discover whether these kind communication processes of membership negotiation appear when newcomers are more experienced. The current study showed that time is important in achieving membership, but more research is needed to confirm this.

The study has some practical implications. Newcomers' orientation processes should be focused on both work and workplace communication. To improve and develop orientation practices in moving toward active and reciprocal communication with newcomers, it is important to recognize the communication processes during membership negotiation and re-evaluate the duration of newcomers' entry. In this study, it took over three months to develop

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

full membership, which is longer than often used orientation programs are in organizations. To feel like they fit in, newcomers must engage in communication in which coworkers and managers are responsive. Managers and coworkers can consciously support newcomers during the first three months by involving newcomers in interactions so that both the newcomer and other members can actively support the development of membership negotiations. There is not one ideal process to follow; instead, an understanding of the differences in newcomers' experiences can support and enable membership development individually.

References

- Ashforth, B.E. (2001), *Role Transitions in Organizational Life: An Identity-Based Perspective*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ.
- Blumer, H. (1969), *Symbolic Interactionism. Perspective and Method*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Brummans, B.H.J.M., Cooren, F., Robichaud, D. and Taylor, J.R. (2014), “Approaches to the communicative constitution of organizations”, in Putnam, L. L. and Mumby, D. K. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication. Advances in Theory, Research and Methods*, 3rd ed., SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 173–194.
- Charmaz, K. (2006), *Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- De Vos, A. and Freese, C. (2011), “Sensemaking during organizational entry: changes in newcomer information seeking and the relationship with psychological contract fulfillment”, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 84 No. 2, pp. 288–314.
- Elkins, D. M. (2018), “Welcome to the workplace: the shift from orientation to onboarding in the socialization of millennial newcomers”, in Smith, S. A. (Ed.), *Recruitment, Retention, and Engagement of a Millennial Workforce*, Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, pp. 63–81.
- Endacott, C.G. and Myers, K.K. (2019), “Extending the membership negotiation model: previous work experience and the reproduction and transformation of structures”, *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 455–483.
- Giddens, A. (1984), *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

- Glaser, B.G. and Strauss, A.L. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Aldine, Chicago, IL.
- Gómez, L.F. (2009), "Time to socialize: organizational socialization structures and temporality", *The Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 46 No. 2, pp. 179–207.
- Jablin, F.M. (2001), "Organizational entry, assimilation, and disengagement/exit", in Jablin, F.M. and Putnam, L. L. (Eds.), *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory Research, and Methods*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 679–740.
- James, N. and Busher, H. (2006), "Credibility, authenticity and voice: dilemmas in web-based interviewing", *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 6, pp. 403–420.
- Kammeyer-Mueller, J., Wanberg, C., Rubenstein, A. and Song, Z. (2013), "Support, undermining, and newcomer socialization: fitting in during the first 90 days", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 56 No. 4, pp. 1104–1124.
- Kramer, M.W. (2004), *Managing Uncertainty in Organizational Communication*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers, Mahwah, NJ.
- Kramer, M.W. and Sias, P.M. (2014), "Interpersonal communication in formal organizations", in Putnam, L.L. and Berger, C.R. (Eds.), *Interpersonal Communication*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin, pp. 173–194.
- Kuhn, T. and Putnam, L.L. (2014), "Discourse and communication", in Adler, P.S. Du Gay, P., Morgan, G. and Reed, M. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook Of Sociology, Social Theory, and Organization Studies: Contemporary Currents*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 414–446.
- Lapointe, E., Vandenberghe, C. and Boudrias, J-S. (2014), "Organizational socialization tactics and newcomer adjustment: the mediating role of role clarity and affect-based

- trust relationships”, *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 87, pp. 599–624.
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985), *Naturalistic Inquiry*, SAGE, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Lindlof, T.R. and Taylor, B.C. (2002), *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, 2nd ed., SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Mael, F. and Ashforth, B.E. (1992), “Alumni and their alma mater: a partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification”, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 103–123.
- McPhee, R.D., Poole, M.S. and Iverson, J. (2014), “Structuration theory”, Putnam, L.L. and Mumby, D.K. (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication. Advances in Theory, Research and Methods*, 3rd ed., SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 75–101.
- McPhee, R.D. and Zaug, P. (2000), “The communicative constitution of organizations: a framework for explanation”, *The Electronic Journal of Communication*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 1–16.
- McPhee, R.D. and Zaug, P. (2009), “The communicative constitution of organizations: a framework for explanation”, in Putnam, L.L. and Nicotera, A.M. (Eds.), *Building Theories of Organization: The Constitutive Role of Communication*, Routledge, New York, NY, pp. 21–47.
- Mead, G.H. (1934), *Mind, Self, and Society*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Moreland, R.L. and Levine, J.M. (2001), “Socialization in organizations and work groups”, in Turner, M.E. (Ed.), *Groups at Work: Theories and Research*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 69–112.

- Myers, K.K. (2010), "Workplace relationships and membership negotiations", in Smith, S.W. and Wilson, S.R. (Eds.), *New Directions in Interpersonal Communication Research*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 135–156.
- Myers, K.K. and McPhee, R.D. (2006), "Influences on member assimilation in workgroups in high-reliability organizations: a multilevel analysis", *Human Communication Research*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 440–468
- Myers, K.K. and Oetzel, J.G. (2003), "Exploring the dimensions of organizational assimilation: creating and validating a measure", *Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 51, pp. 438–457.
- Myers, K.K. and Sadaghiani, K. (2010), "Millennials in the workplace: a communication perspective on millennials' organizational relationships and performance", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 225–238.
- National Advisory Board on Research Ethics. (2019), "The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland", available at: https://www.tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/Ihmistieteiden_eettisen_ennakkoarviointin_ohje_2019.pdf (accessed 9 October 2019).
- Nolan, L.S. (2015), "The roar of millennials: retaining top talent in the workplace", *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, Vol. 12 No. 5, pp. 69–75.
- Omilion-Hodges, L.M. and Sugg, C.E. (2019), "Millennials' views and expectations regarding the communicative and relational behaviors of leaders: exploring young adults' talk about work", *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 82 No. 1, pp. 74–100.
- Salkind, N.J. (2010), *Encyclopedia of Research Design*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA.

- 1
2
3 Scott, C. and Myers, K.K. (2005), "The socialization of emotion: learning emotion
4 management at the fire station", *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, Vol.
5
6 33 No. 1, pp. 67–92.
7
8
9
10 Scott, C. and Myers, K. (2010), "Toward an integrative theoretical perspective on
11
12 organizational membership negotiations: socialization, assimilation, and the duality of
13
14 structure", *Communication Theory*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 79–105.
15
16
17 Smith, L.G.E., Gillespie, N., Callan, V.J., Fitzsimmons, T.W. and Paulsen, N. (2017),
18
19 "Injunctive and descriptive logics during newcomer socialization: the impact on
20
21 organizational identification, trustworthiness, and self-efficacy", *Journal of*
22
23 *Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 38, pp. 487–511.
24
25
26 Smith, S.A. (2018), "Formation of career expectation: what organizations can do", in Smith,
27
28 S.A. (Ed.), *Recruitment, Retention, and Engagement of a Millennial Workforce*,
29
30 Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, pp. 49–62.
31
32
33 Sword, W. (1999), "Accounting for presence of self: reflections on doing qualitative
34
35 research", *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 270–278.
36
37
38 Tracy, S.J. (2010), "Qualitative quality: eight 'big-tent' criteria for excellent qualitative
39
40 research", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 16 No. 10, pp. 837–851.
41
42
43 Van Maanen, J. and Schein, E.H. (1979), "Toward a theory of organizational socialization",
44
45 *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 1, pp. 209–264.
46
47
48 Walden, J. (2019), "Communicating role expectations in a coworking office", *Journal of*
49
50 *Communication Management*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 316–330.
51
52
53 Walden, J., Jung, E.H. and Westerman, C.Y.K. (2017), "Employee communication, job
54
55 engagement, and organizational commitment: a study of members of the Millennial
56
57 generation", *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol. 29 No. 2-3, pp. 73–89.
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

Wok, S. and Hashim, J. (2013), “Communicating and sharing working relationships with older employees”, *Journal of Communication Management*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 100–121.

Woo, D. and Myers, K.K. (2020), “Organizational membership negotiation of boundary spanners: becoming a competent Jack of all trades and master of . . . interactional expertise”, *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 85–120.

Table 1

Communication Dimensions, First Appearance, and Examples of Data

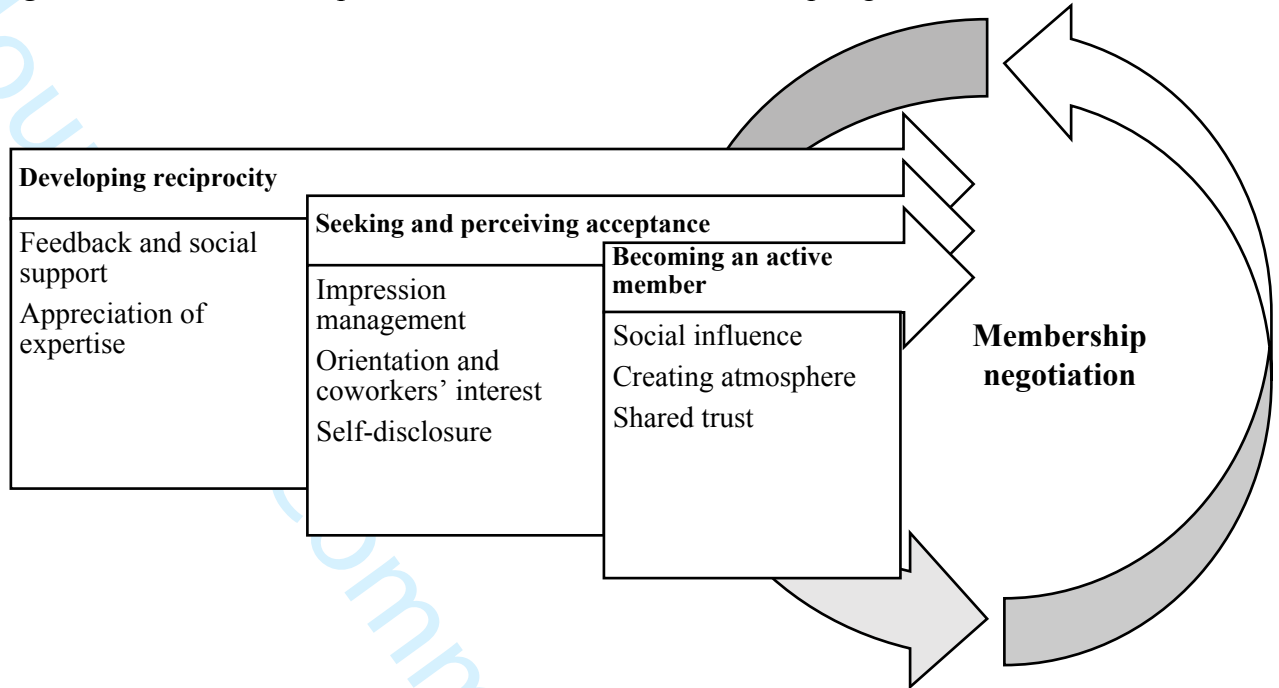
Dimensions	First Appearance	Data Example
Impression management	2 weeks to 1 month	“I think about what kind of image I am giving of myself to the others.”(Natalia)
Newcomer’s communication orientation and coworkers’ interest	2 weeks to 1 month	“In my first day, others greeted me and manager introduced the whole building of employees. My team members have breaks always together at the same time, so I got to know my close coworkers better.”(Elsa)
Self-disclosure	2 weeks to 1 month	“More and more, I share my own stuff and hear coworkers’ personal stuff.”(Paula)
Feedback and social support	2 weeks to more than 6 months	“I want hear coworkers’ opinions on work tasks or if I need peer support for something. Also, talking with someone usually helps, if something feels frustrating.”(Aurora)
Appreciation of expertise	1st month to more than 6 months	“To me it is important, that my opinions are taken account. I also heard that I could get longer work contract, which shows me that my skills are noticed.”(Maija)
Creating atmosphere	3 to 6 months	“Communication doesn’t meet up with my expectation. I wish that we could have more communicative atmosphere, but instead I receive all my work tasks as orders. I tried to

talk about this on a meeting and shared my thoughts.”(Hanna)

Social influence	3 to 10 months	“Knowing that I am doing my work fine and others accept me makes it easier to share my expertise. I can help my coworkers too.”(Daniel)
------------------	----------------	---

Shared trust	4 to 10 months	“I can trust my coworkers, and they can trust me—we can share our ideas but also express disagreement.”(Anne)
--------------	----------------	---

Figure 1. Communication processes in newcomers' membership negotiations



1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

APPENDIX 1: Detailed Information of the Participants and the Data

Pseudonym	Age	Education (Bachelor / Master)	Workplace	Times of follow-up interviews and months	Platform	Amount of data (MS word pages, Arial 12)
Joanna	25	Education(M)	Public-sector	10 (9 months)	E-mail	21
Sophia	31	Nursing(B)	Public-sector	10 (9 months)	Phone & E-mail	13
Natalia	32	Education, sport(M)	Public-sector	10 (8 months)	E-mail & voicemail	20
Jenny	24	Humanities(M)	Public-sector	10 (8 months)	E-mail	24
Ellen	27	Social science(B)	Public-sector	10 (7 months)	E-mail	22
Maija	23	Media studies(B)	Public-sector	10 (7 months)	E-mail	16
Ida	27	Social science(B)	Public-sector	10 (7 months)	E-mail	11
Laura	27	Police(B)	Public-sector	10 (6 months)	E-mail	12
Daniel	27	Nursing(B)	Public-sector	7 (4 months)	Phone	27
Mia	26	Psychology(M)	Public-sector	7 (3 months)	E-mail	8
Helena	32	Nursing(B)	Public-sector	5 (3 months)	E-mail	7
Tilda	27	Nursing(B)	Company, Public-sector	10 (6 months)	Voicemail	15
Petra	29	Humanities(M)	Company	10 (7 months)	E-mail	9
Paula	27	Humanities(M)	Company	10 (7 months)	E-mail	12
Marianne	32	Law(M)	Company	10 (6 months)	E-mail	9
Carl	25	Economics(M)	Company	10 (6 months)	E-mail	10
Nina	29	Natural science(M)	Company	10 (6 months)	E-mail	13
Elsa	26	Engineering(B)	Company	10 (6 months)	E-mail	16
Leila	27	Humanities(M)	Company	10 (6 months)	E-mail & voicemail	15
Aurora	24	Economics(B)	Company	10 (6 months)	E-mail	14
Hanna	27	Economics(B)	Company	10 (6 months)	E-mail	17
Sanna	26	Social science(M)	Association	10 (6 months)	E-mail	16
Anne	26	Humanities(M)	Association	10 (6 months)	Phone & E-mail	13