

Social Identification and Group Cohesiveness in a Multicultural Work Group

Sosiologian Pro gradu -tutkielma

Jyväskylän Yliopisto

Yhteiskuntatieteiden ja

Filosofian laitos

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Since its invention in the 1940s group cohesiveness has been a cornerstone concept in small group research describing the essential qualities of group behaviour. Cohesiveness is generally understood as the mutual positive attitudes among the group members and is associated with various favourable effects for the group and its members. Cohesiveness was a popular target for research in the mainstream sociology until the late 60s, but due to its problematic operationalisation and definition, interest towards the concept decreased significantly. After the formation of the social identity theory, new signs of rising interest can be seen from 1980 onwards especially in the social psychological orientation. The concept of social identification refers to the underlying generative mechanism that makes the group formation and processes, such as cohesiveness, possible. Social identification is described as the personal cognitive connection between an individual and the group that leads to perceptions of oneness and belongingness with the group.

The empirical target of this research is a multicultural work group with 14 members representing 9 different nationalities. The work group is part of a big Japanese organisation, and is located in the company's European headquarters near Amsterdam in The Netherlands. Therefore, another relevant pair of concepts for this study is cultural diversity and work groups. For this purpose, a group was defined as multicultural when it consists of at least three or more members with differing cultural backgrounds. Cultural diversity was specified to refer to national differences rather than societal ethnic subcultures. The starting point for the research was the assertion that the greater the degree of cultural diversity in a work group is, the less cohesive the group is likely to be, or the greater is the risk that the members would fail to identify with the group.

Following from this, the research problems were roughly divided into three main themes. First, the purpose was to explore how strongly do the members identify with their work group. Secondly, group cohesiveness was assessed based on the current group processes and behaviour. And thirdly, cultural diversity's relation to identification process and forming of cohesiveness was considered. The empirical material is based on two separate observation periods (participative and non-participative) and 11 interviews with the group members and their team leader, using a semi-standardised interview method.

In general, identification and cohesiveness were assessed as being on a rather high level within the group – not extremely high, but clearly above average. Despite of the various cultural backgrounds, differences between the group members were considered as marginal and did not form any major obstacles for the group's interaction. Thus, cultural diversity's interference with the identification process or creation of cohesiveness was assessed to be minimal in this work group.

Key concepts: Identification, identity, cohesiveness, social attraction, cultural diversity, work groups.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in the labour market, such as internationalising organisations, advances in technology, and increasing mobility of personnel are making workforce more diverse, especially from their cultural aspects. Therefore, the challenge increasingly facing many international organisations is related to making multicultural work environments and teams function smoothly towards the shared goals, despite of the varying cultural backgrounds. Rather than creating a “cultural melting pot”, organisations need to design themselves as “cultural mosaics” in which each element preserves its unique value, and still is capable of functioning as part of the organisational entity.

Against this background, two concepts can be distinguished that are relevant for this study: cultural diversity within a work group and group cohesiveness. During the recent years, teamwork as well as cultural diversity has become hot issues in organisational research. As described above, the fundamental question is how to combine different cultures and to get diverse individuals work together as a functional team. The concept of group cohesiveness approaches this question by asserting that sufficient group-belongingness is a factor that enables the success and sustenance of multicultural work groups (or work groups in general). Groups and teams are not new targets for studying as such. Systematic research on group dynamics dates back to 1940s when the term group cohesiveness was invented to describe the essential qualities associated with a group, such as feelings of solidarity, unity, we-ness etc.

The third and perhaps the most important concept for this study is social identification. Social identification refers to the process of group formation in which an individual locates oneself (or another person) within the social categories. Social identification can be understood as the personal cognitive connection between an individual and the group that is manifested in the person’s perception of oneness and belongingness to a group. The concept of social identification is a more recent invention providing an alternative analytical tool for approaching the phenomenon of group cohesiveness.

The purpose of this study is to explore how strongly do the members of a particular work group identify with their group and to assess the degree of cohesiveness based on the group processes and behaviour. Another issue for consideration is the influence of cultural differences in relation to identification process and forming of cohesiveness. The aim is to form as complete picture as

possible of these three mechanisms by exploring the group members' attitudes and ways of interaction. The empirical target of the research is a multicultural work group in a Japanese organisation that has worldwide operations. The work group has 14 members representing 9 different nationalities and is located in the organisation's European headquarters near Amsterdam in The Netherlands. The research is mainly based on qualitative interviews of the work group members and their group leader.

The contents of this study are organised as follows: first, I will introduce the background for the study from the viewpoint of cultural diversity and explain the concept of cohesiveness in more detail. Secondly, I will take a closer look at the process of identification and introduce the theoretical background that forms the cornerstone for this study. Thirdly, I present the relevant research questions based on the theoretical framework and explain the used methods and ways in which the data was analysed. The second part of the report, starting from chapter 5., is dedicated for describing the current situation of the work group in the light of the empirical material. In the final chapters (chapters 7. and 8.) conclusions over the concepts of identification, cohesiveness and cultural diversity are presented, and eventually, the research concepts and the empirical material are being assessed.

2. CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND GROUP COHESIVENESS

2.1. Culturally Diverse Work Groups in Organisations

2.1.1. Definitions of Groups and Teams

Throughout their lives, people tend to form and be part of various kinds of social groupings. It is commonly believed that working in groups or teams can in many cases be more fruitful than a single contribution of an individual. Therefore, groups and teams are essential means for organisations in reaching their goals and outcomes that might not be achieved by individuals working in isolation. Although group forming is acknowledged as a fundamental part of human behaviour, the very essence of groups has been defined in various ways depending on the theoretical viewpoint. Different theoretical traditions value some factors as more important than others, and their focus can in varying degrees be based on affective, cognitive or interactive elements. Differences can also be found in the ways of explaining the reasons for group forming or the motivation to join a group. Additionally, the group behaviour may include different phenomena.

Based on the relevant literature, I have collected together some of the attributes that are most commonly used to describe a group. (e.g. Cartwright & Zander 1968, 46; Francesco & Gold 1998, 108; Hogg 1992, 2-4; Homans 1950, 1; King 1962; Shaw 1981, 11; Turner 1982, 15-18; Turner *et al.* 1987, 19.) First of all, most theoretical traditions define group as a social unit consisting of two or more individuals that engage in some form of interaction in such a manner that each person influences, and is being influenced, by others. The point where many traditions diverge is the nature of the interaction. Some theorists emphasise that the interaction has to happen face-to-face at least to some extent, whereas others accept that a mere perception of belonging to a group is sufficient basis for group formation. The interaction can be based on varying degrees of interdependency among the group members, which in turn, can entail fulfilling of shared goals, performing on a task, satisfying individual needs, and/or validating attitudes and values. In addition, some writers include that individuals should have collective awareness of themselves as a distinct social entity and to some degree share an idea of a common identity. Secondly, over the time, the interaction among the individuals most likely becomes structured by a set of norms and values as well as role and status differentiations that prescribe beliefs, attitudes and behaviour in matters relevant to the group. This type of interdependency between the individuals can lead to co-operative social interaction,

communication, influence, and mutual attraction. Thirdly, groups tend to differ from each other in all sorts of respects: the number of members, time of duration, structure, purpose, leadership, cohesiveness etc. It must also be noticed that during their existence, groups go through different developmental stages ranging from “forming, storming, norming, and performing to final adjourning”. (Tuckman & Jensen 1977; see also Smith & Noakes 1996, 488.)

It is also debatable how groups and teams should be distinguished from each other. As in the case of defining a group, different theorists use different attributes to describe a team. Francesco and Gold (1998, 115), for example, reckon teams to be similar to groups because they also experience developmental stages, differentiate into roles, create norms, establish a culture, and have a communication structure. The issue that makes a team different from a group is that team members are considered to be more highly committed to a common purpose, for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. In many instances a team is also more task oriented, whereas a group might not have specifically distinguished and time-wise monitored tasks. Furthermore both, teams and groups, have a defined structure, processes and decision-making styles, but in teams these may be more precisely established. In addition, teams use more often self-management techniques, and have more responsibility and cohesiveness than other groups do. Ever increasingly teams are being used to meet the demands of new types of organisations that require creativity, flexibility, and high levels of performance. (Francesco & Gold 1998, 108, 115.)

In this study, I have chosen to use the term “work group” instead of a “team” when referring to the whole group. This is due to the fact that speaking about a team might not be fully correct and applicable to the empirical target in its strictest sense of definition. In fact, the target of this study is also in some instances, referred to as an organisational department. At the moment, the work group consists of 14 members, including the leader. Internally the work group is divided into two smaller groups, each consisting of approximately 5-6 members, to enhance work sharing and communication. When there is speak about these smaller sub-groups, I use the term team, since the work group members also use this term. (More detailed information of the empirical target in chapter 5.)

2.1.2. Multicultural Work Groups

The composition of any particular work group is complex: the members of a work group can be diverse in various respects, such as age, gender, education, nationality etc. Diversity may be low in one dimension and higher on another. The point is that it is important to specify the type of diversity in question. One common way to distinguish between different types of diversity is the distinction between diversity on observable or readily detectable attributes (such as ethnic background, age, or gender), and diversity on less visible or underlying attributes (such as education, personality characteristics, or values). One reason for this distinction is that when differences between people are visible, they are particularly likely to evoke biased, prejudiced, or stereotypical responses. It should also be noted that visible characteristics can be, and mostly are, accompanied with some underlying features. For example, people with different ethnical backgrounds most likely differ from each other also from their values. (Jackson 1996, 56-57; Milliken & Martins 1996, 404.) In this study the primary focus is on cultural diversity and its effects on the social identification and group cohesiveness. For the purposes of this research, the concept of cultural diversity is specifically meant to refer to diversity in terms of differing national backgrounds rather than to societal ethnic subcultures.

Work groups that are viewed as multicultural are groups that consist of at least three or more members with differing cultural backgrounds. Despite of representing different cultures, the group members can have rather similar values, education and worldview, or then there might be radical differences. In order to function effectively, multicultural groups should recognise and integrate all represented cultures to their action. (Adler 1997, 129-130.) In fact, culturally diverse groups have to create a right tension between integration and differentiation, to build shared expectations while also preserving the enriching differences (Schneider & Barsoux 1997, 156).

To what extent the cultural diversity of the work group is desirable, depends on the nature of the work assignment. When the task craves for innovation or requires very specialised roles or profits varying expertise, is a diverse group usually an advantage. In the assignments where everybody should do the same things or work at the same pace, it is easier if the employees think and act in considerably same ways. A work group's diversity will lead to good results the better the members understand each other and are able to effectively use and combine various ideas. (Adler 1997, 138.) Another managerial argument for using culturally diverse work groups is that they may be more effective in understanding the needs and desires of various customers. Diversity may also be

preferred, because the composition of the group may then better reflect the overall workforce of the organisation in question or the ethnic distribution of the society in general. This way multicultural work groups advance the social responsibility of companies by creating an equal opportunity for all social groups. (Francesco & Gold 1998, 117.)

2.1.3. The Impacts of Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity can have both positive and negative influences on the functioning of a work group and thus, can offer a great opportunity for organisations as well as an enormous challenge. Diversity might augment productivity, but it can also complicate the work processes that must occur in order to realise the group's full potential. Multicultural work groups seem to have more potential for creative solutions because a greater range of perspectives is being considered. On the other hand, multicultural groups have a greater risk for failing than less diverse groups. Cultural diversity makes functioning more complicated, because seeing, understanding and acting on situations in similar ways is more difficult. Employees with similar cultural background might be easier to manage, because communication is easier and they tend to trust each other more readily. In culturally diverse groups possibilities for misperception, misinterpretation, misevaluation and miscommunication are greater, and therefore, the levels of uncertainty, complexity and confusion in interaction can easily increase. (Adler 1997, 131; Milliken & Martins 1996, 403, 408-409.)

Most of the problems facing multicultural groups have to do with different perceptions of the environment and various interpretations about causes and intentions of behaviour. This can often lead to communicational problems, stereotyping, ethnocentrism, prejudice and lack of trust. As a consequence, these problems may form a serious hindrance for the development of group cohesion, decline job satisfaction, and eventually lead to high member turnover. Most groups are prone to problems that may affect cohesiveness, but this is especially true in culturally diverse groups. (Elron 1997.) However, when diversity is well managed it can become an asset and productive resource of the work group, when ignored, it can cause problems that make working slow and diminish productivity. By managing the work processes well, most of the potential problems can be avoided beforehand and the heterogeneous groups are enabled to reach their goals. In addition, group members must establish how to structure their work, how decisions will be made, how to define roles and responsibilities as well as how to assure equal participation, and promote learning.

(Adler 1997, 137-138.) The aim is not to neutralise or hide cultural differences, but to build on them (Schneider & Barsoux 1997, 156).

Studies in organisational behaviour imply that reaching sufficient group-belongingness and social cohesiveness in multicultural groups are seen as important factors for the success and sustenance of culturally diverse work groups, because group cohesiveness involves the ability of the individual group members to act as one. Variation in cultural values, norms, perceptions, and assumptions not only affect organisational practices and interaction between the group members, but they also have an impact on social cohesiveness. It seems that the greater the amount of diversity in a work group or organisational sub-unit is, the less cohesive the group is likely to be (Elron 1997). Various studies also confirm that people tend to be more attracted towards similar attitudes and values, and therefore groups that are more homogeneous in these terms, tend to be more cohesive. For multicultural work groups it can be more difficult and time consuming to achieve cohesiveness and to get all members equally integrated into the group. Thus, diversity appears to be a double-edged sword as it increases the potential of the group, but also the likelihood that group members will be dissatisfied, and fail to identify with the group. (Adler 1997, 132; Milliken & Martins 1996, 403, 408-409.) In the following chapters I will highlight the concept of cohesiveness in more detail as well as explore the underlying mechanisms of how a collection of individuals becomes a cohesive entity and a functional group with shared goals and values.

2.1. The Phenomenon of Group Cohesiveness

2.2.1. Traditional Conceptualisations and Research on Group Cohesiveness

In the 1940s sociology and social psychology experienced a rapid growth of interest towards the small group dynamics.¹ A theoretical term was required to describe the essential qualities associated with a group: the objectively observable phenomena as well as subjectively experienced feelings of closeness, “esprit de corps”, we-ness, solidarity, unity etc. During these years the term “group cohesiveness” (e.g. French 1941; Lewin 1952) very soon became the cornerstone concept in the

¹ In 1945 under Kurt Lewin’s directorship The Research Centre for Group Dynamics was established, and was joined by various social psychologists (e.g. Lewin, Festinger, Schachter, Newcomb, Back, & French) whose ideas have significantly influenced the contemporary research on group dynamics (Hogg & Abrams 1988, 93).

analysis of small group behaviour. Despite the fact that now in the 21st century, the concept of cohesiveness is 60 years old, its core definitions have surprisingly much stayed the same. (Hogg 1987, 90; 1992.)

Although different theorists attach somewhat different conceptual meanings to the term, most agree that group cohesiveness particularly refers to the degree to which the members of a group desire to remain in the group. In the 1950, Festinger, Schachter and Back (1950, 164) produced a formal statement of group cohesiveness² and their classic work has significantly influenced most of the research done on group cohesiveness until these days. In their analysis group cohesiveness is defined as “the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group”. These forces are considered to be particularly determined by the attractiveness of the group and its members. Therefore, social cohesiveness has traditionally been defined as “the degree to which members of the group are attracted to each other” (Shaw 1981, 213), and understood as a tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in order to achieve its goals and/or to satisfy the group member’s needs. This model of social cohesion asserts that a person is attracted to or likes others that are considered to be “rewarding” to oneself or able to satisfy individual’s needs, desire or motive. Thus, it is believed that a collection of individuals is likely to come together to form a group to a degree to which they like each other and/or are dependent on each other in terms of mutual need satisfaction. (Hogg 1987, 91.)

In addition to previously mentioned ways of defining cohesiveness, there are various traditions that reckon attractiveness as the basic force underlying the phenomenon, but have different perspectives to it. These theories either emphasise explicit interindividual interdependence or interindividual similarity as the basis of attraction. (Hogg 1992, 26.) Just to mention a few, social exchange, reinforcement, and equity approaches are based on assumptions of interdependence and attraction. Social exchange theories (e.g. Thibaut & Kelley 1959, Homans 1974) expect that interaction between the group members continues to the extent to which rewards outweigh the costs in a social relationship. Reinforcing approach (Lott & Lott 1965) sees attraction as a tool for mediating goal achievement, and hence resulting in interpersonal attraction. Equity theory (e.g. Berkowitz & Walster 1976) claims that just or fair interdependence between individuals results in attraction and

² Based on Lewin’s Field Theory approach 1952.

further, to cohesiveness. Festinger's (1954) tradition is an example of treating similarities in attitudes and values as a basis for attractiveness.

Whatever the emphasis, it is commonly believed that cohesiveness arises from mutual positive attitudes among the members of a group and is associated with various positive effects for the group as well for the individuals. Research shows that group cohesiveness generally enhances group productivity and performance, increases conformity to group norms, improves morale and job satisfaction, as well as facilitates intra-group communication. (Hogg 1992, 120.) The members of highly cohesive groups have been perceived to be more motivated to develop and maintain social relationships within the group and to participate in its activities as well as to be more co-operative towards one another. Consequently, cohesiveness contributes to a group's vitality by improving the group spirit and increasing the value of the membership for those who belong to the group. (Cartwright & Zander 1968, 91.) It is most likely that cohesiveness within the group develops, decreases, and changes over time depending on the nature of the group and the motivational needs of its members. (King 1962, 7; Carron & Brawley 2000.)

Despite the various years of studies, there are still no straightforward ways of explaining or discovering all the forces affecting the cohesiveness, which makes the operationalisation of the concept very hard in practice. Since a standard all-purpose procedure for measuring group cohesiveness does not exist, there seems to be almost as many different ways to measure cohesiveness as there are studies concerning it. Hogg (1992, 41) reminds that this is a natural consequence, because as far as the concept of cohesiveness remains to be imprecisely defined, it continues to be "an open season for the measurement of cohesiveness". While some studies employ a single measure, some others use multiple measures. Most researchers have tried to solve the practical problems by focusing mainly on one component of the force and thus, equating cohesiveness with "attraction to a group". As a result, the literature on group cohesiveness contains, for the most part studies of attraction between individual group members and satisfaction with the group membership. This tendency seems to hold true for the early as well as for the more recent work. (Cartwright & Zander 1968, 92; Hogg 1987, 90.)

In most cases, attraction has been assessed by asking the group members for example: how much they like one another or how long they would like to stay in the group. Another way is to use questions that are designed to reveal how strongly members identify with a group or feel personally involved in it. There have also been attempts to measure cohesiveness by monitoring overt

behaviour, membership turnover, non-verbal cues, signs of mutual affection, or expressions of group belongingness and commitment. The overwhelming majority of measures involve some form of self-report, which are done via sociometric choices or simply having subjects rate how much they like one another. (Cartwright & Zander 1968, 93; Hogg 1992, 41-42.) Recently some attempts have been made to construct multidimensional, and perhaps more reliable, multi-item group cohesiveness questionnaires. (e.g. The Group Environment Questionnaire. See Brawley *et al.* 1987.) However, it appears that also these questionnaires unfortunately have to confront a thorny problem of deciding whether a group is “cohesive” or not. One measure may indicate different than the other and this makes interpretation of multidimensional measures difficult and eventually, a preference of any one type of operationalisation over another inadvisable. (Hogg 1992, 31, 49.)

2.2.2. Theoretical Limitations of the Concept

Various critiques point out that the concept of group cohesiveness has largely failed to live up to its theoretical expectations, because the whole history of group cohesiveness has been a continuous and unresolved debate about how to define and operationalise the concept. Due to the lack of a clear and unambiguous conceptual definition, there are no obvious criteria for a preferable operationalisation. A group, which is cohesive by one definition, may not be so by another. And since no operationalisation covers all aspects of group cohesiveness, interpersonal attraction has many times been accepted as an incomplete, but at least as a partial explanation. Therefore, the main limitation of the theory seems to be the fact that the term group cohesiveness became very quickly simplified and reduced to interpersonal attraction. One understandable reason for this originates from the problem of conceptualising and operationalising complex concepts, such as “the total field of forces” or “group mind”, in a reasonable way. It is many times argued that because the concept seems too broad and complex to be captured operationally, it fails to meet scientific criteria for an adequate theory. Especially sociologically oriented researchers have criticised experimental social psychology of reducing the complexity, variety and historical significance of social groups to individuals’ liking for each other. (Hogg 1987, 96-97; 1992, 56.)

The second problem with cohesiveness as interpersonal attraction is related to the group size. The concept was originally developed to address a certain type of group, namely, a numerically small and mostly task-oriented group interacting face-to-face. Determining a group as “small”, relying on adequate criteria, can be very problematic from which Shaw (1981, 3) gives an elaborate example:

A cohesive 25-person group can be considered as “small”, while a non-cohesive 15-person group is large. Therefore, group size cannot serve as a real parameter for cohesiveness. As it seems logical that attraction diminishes along the growth of the group size, the concept of interpersonal attraction may have relevance only for analysing smaller groups. (Hogg 1987, 99.)

Thirdly, the explanations concerning the motives for group formation are considered to be insufficient. According to the social cohesion model, people join groups primarily in order to satisfy needs. The critique asserts that these needs represent “reasons” for joining a group rather than “causes” of group membership, and hence no causal process for psychological group formation is stated. (Hogg 1987, 97.) And finally, the technique of sociometric choice is accused to be largely one-dimensional and fails to allow monitoring of qualitative differences between the choices (Hogg 1992, 64).

Practically, the concept lost its popularity in the late 1960s. Although cohesiveness is now less researched in the mainstream sociology or social psychology, there still is continuing interest in more applied areas. Levine and Moreland (1990, 621), for example, argue that new advances will be made especially in organisational and interdisciplinary areas. Despite its theoretical limitations and conceptual problems, the group cohesiveness concept has proved its practical relevance and importance and remains as a useful concept for analysing small interactive groups. Recently there have been some promising attempts to re-conceptualise group cohesiveness in terms of being critical to its original reductionist metatheory (Hogg 1992, 151).

Despite of the lively debates and critique around the concept of cohesiveness, there still are only few real re-conceptualisations. The new theories rather tend to refine the previous assumptions than to offer completely new solutions. In many cases the current definitions of the social group employ an admixture of components drawn from previous theories, while the problematic idea of interpersonal attraction still lies at the heart of the concept. Multidimensional conceptualisations offer one alternative by making a distinction between task-related and social-related processes. In addition to these dimensions, some researches have suggested the existence of a third or more dimensions. Recently cohesion has also been defined as commitment-to-task: as a motivation toward achieving the organisation’s goals and objectives. (See Carron & Brawley 2000.) However, this is a difficult choice to justify, since the actual relation between commitment and cohesiveness is not clear. It has also been suggested that commitment could be the “individual-psychological-level” process responsible for “group-level” phenomena, such as cohesiveness. Some new

perspectives have also been offered by studies of cohesiveness in communities, or group socialisation and integration processes. (Hogg 1992, 30, 70, 77-78, 111.)

Based on the limitations and critique of the traditional social cohesion model, a more focused attempt for re-conceptualising group formation and analysing group cohesiveness has been offered by Turner and his colleagues. (See Turner *et al.* 1987.) The self-categorisation theory proposes that psychological group formation would be a distinct process from attraction and that group cohesiveness cannot be equated with interpersonal attraction. Instead, this model implies that group cohesiveness can be based on a special kind of intra-group attraction that is grounded in the saliency of shared social category memberships. Therefore, in the creation of group cohesiveness the basic causal direction is from in-group identification to attraction rather than vice versa. (Hogg 1987, 89.) In the following chapter, I will explain the basic ideas of the social identification model and give some arguments why this theory might serve as a plausible alternative for analysing group cohesiveness.

3. THE SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY OF GROUP PROCESSES

3.1. From Self-Categorisation to Social Identification

The social identity theory, originally developed by Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (See Tajfel 1957, 1959, 1982a, 1982b), is based on the assumption that society is hierarchically structured into different social groups that stand in power and status relations to one another. These social categorisations provide members with a social identity that describes who one is and prescribes appropriate behaviour within the group. Social categorisations are not only unavoidable, but they also are necessary for organising the social environment. The categorisation mechanism provides an individual with a systematic means for defining oneself and others within the social systems.

Based on the conceptualisations of the social identity theory, Turner and his colleagues (Turner 1985, Turner *et al.* 1987) developed the analysis further and formulated the self-categorisation theory. The self-categorisation theory differs from the original social identity theory more in emphasis than in content: it elaborates the categorisation processes of group formation in greater detail and focuses more on intra-group processes than on macro-social inter-group relations.

The self-categorisation theory has often been referred to as social identification model and also as the social identity theory. However, the important difference is that the theorisations based on self-categorisation are representing the social identity theory in the framework of *group processes* and therefore, distinguished from Tajfel's conceptualisations of social identity theory as *inter-group relations*. In order to avoid confusion between these theories it needs to be noted that in this study both concepts, the self-categorisation theory and the social identity theory, are used interchangeably and meant to refer specifically to Turner's formulations of intra-group processes in terms of the self-categorisation mechanism.

According to the self-categorisation theory, the basic mechanism underlying group formation is the human tendency to classify ourselves and others into various social categories (e.g. gender, age cohort, race, organisational membership, religious affiliations etc.). These categorisations define people by systematically including them within some, and excluding them from other related categories. The self-categorisation analysis re-conceptualises the social group as a "collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category" (Tajfel & Turner

1986, 15). The social categories form a reference point for individuals to define, describe and evaluate themselves and to apply norms of conduct.

The categories are determined by the perceived similarities among a group of people (or objects) as well as by the perceived differences between those members and other potential members. The contrast between “we” and “they” is fundamental, since the categories cannot exist independently from each other. Therefore, in order to have “us”, there must be a contrast provided by “them”. This principle led Turner and his colleagues (1987, 44) define self-categorisations as “the cognitive groupings of oneself and some class of stimuli -- as the same in contrast to some other class of stimuli.”

Social identification refers to the process in which an individual locates oneself (or another person) within the social categories. Although many social categories are categorical as such and seem to be natural groupings (e.g. “American”, female, a member of a work group), the extent to which the individual *identifies* with each category is clearly a matter of degree. Only when a self-category is formed and internalised, that is, when an individual identifies with a certain category, group behaviour is possible. The idea of the group membership is then cognitively represented in the mind of the individual member and in this sense begins to exist as a social identification. Thus, social identification can be understood as a personal cognitive connection between an individual and the group. It is the individual’s perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group and a tendency to experience the group’s successes and failures as one’s own. When an individual identifies with a group, that individual begins to define himself/herself by the same attributes (e.g. qualities, faults, common destinies) that define the group. Through the identification process, individuals develop a sense of who they are and what is the appropriate behaviour within the group. (Ashforth & Mael 1989, 21; Hogg 1987, 101; Riordan & Weatherly 1999; Turner 1982, 17-18.)

In its most extreme, the process of identification does not presuppose interaction or any physical contact between the persons. To identify, an individual only needs to perceive himself/herself as psychologically intertwined with the group. (See Turner’s idea of the “psychological group membership” 1984, 530.) In this conceptualisation, behaviour and affect are treated as potential antecedents or consequences of identification, and thus, the concept of identification is distinguished from other related concepts. Social identifications are primarily considered to stem from the categorisation of the individuals, but other factors, such as the distinctiveness and prestige of the group, the salience of out-groups and the factors that traditionally are associated with group

formation, are also viewed as possible antecedents of the identification process. (Ashforth & Mael 1989, 20-21; Deaux 1996, 777; Turner *et al.* 1987, 50.)

Social identification is seen as an important construct for studying since it is related to number of desirable group outcomes. Just to mention a few, the consequences of social identification include greater commitment to the group, cohesion, altruism, positive evaluations of the group, and less withdrawal behaviour such as absenteeism, social loafing, and turnover. (Riordan & Weatherly 1999.) Both, the antecedents and consequences will be handled in greater detail further on in the report. (See chapters 3.1.2. and 3.3.)

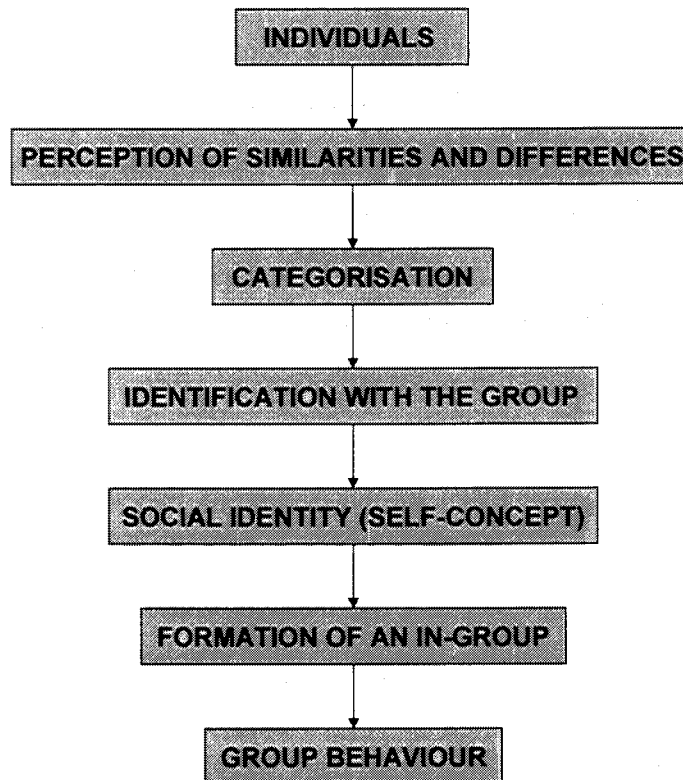


Figure 1. The process of group formation.

3.1.1. Identity Concept

The social identity theory makes a clear distinction between interpersonal and group processes. Social behaviour and relations among people are regarded to vary along a continuum, personal relationships at one extreme, and group behaviour at the other. In this behavioural dimension, the self-conception is characterised by shifts from *personal* identity to *social* identity. The social and personal identity together, are considered to form the most part of our self-concept. Personal identity is highlighted as one's conception of the self in terms of unique attributes, whereas social identity operates when an individual thinks in terms of similarities to other members of an in-group and differences of an out-group. Social identity derives from social identification with the relevant category and describes one's attributes as a group member. According to Tajfel (1982a, 2), social identity can be understood as "that part of individual's self-concept, which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership". Social identities provide a relatively consensual sense of who we are and locate us in the complex network of social relationships existing in a society. (Deaux 1996, 780-781; Hogg 1992, 90.)

Along the continuum of personal and social identity, there is a dynamic tension between individuation and depersonalisation. Depersonalisation is understood as the mechanism that accentuates perceived similarities between self and fellow group members. As a consequence, perception and behaviour is depersonalised so that people are perceived not as unique individuals but as (primarily) representing group members. Depersonalisation is not described as a negative process or does not imply loss of identity (not the same as de-individuation or dehumanisation); it rather refers to a contextual change in the level of identity. Depersonalisation may lead to relative in-group uniformity of perception, attitudes and behaviour and, in this way, account for conformity to group norms. (Hogg 1992, 93-94; Turner *et al.* 1987, 50-51.)

Rather than being unified and consistent, one's identity seems to be an "amalgam" of various identities. People can have a repertoire of as many social and personal identities as they have groups with which they identify, or close relationships in terms of which they define themselves. Usually people identify with numerous social groups or categories and as a result, these multiple identifications can exist simultaneously under the more general self-conception. Importance of these identities and memberships to self-concept and behaviour vary as a function of contextual factors. Over time and situation, different identities may come into play, exercising priority, but not

negating the existence of other identities. Therefore, short-time changes in identification are primarily an issue of expression: in some particular situation people choose to act on the basis of one identity rather than another. In some contexts the perceptions of ourselves and others can be more influenced by group memberships, and therefore the social identity can occasionally be stronger. Due to the context-dependency, different conceptions of self in different situations enable us to adapt our social behaviour to fit better the circumstances. Given that individuals belong to various groups and have multiple identities, the demands of the situation can sometimes impose inconsistent demands upon a person. Conflicts can occur not only within the conceptions of social identity, but also in relation to the personal identity. In many instances the chance of role conflicts exists, but mostly they remain latent: only when individuals are forced to simultaneously fulfil different role expectations their ability to manage the conflict between the identities can break down. (Ashforth & Mael 1989, 30-31; Deaux 1996, 779, 792; Hogg & Vaughan 1995, 328; Turner 1982, 18.)

3.1.2. Antecedents of Identification

Traditional research on group dynamics was likely to consider group formation and its determinants from more affective or instrumental points of view. In general, group membership was seen attractive if it could provide emotional significance for its members or satisfy personal needs. In contrast, the analysis of Turner and his colleagues (1987) views identification in more cognitive terms and as seemingly inevitable conceptual process that is driven less by motivational goals than by perceptual circumstances. Originally, Tajfel and Turner (1979, 40-41) hypothesised that the need for positive self-esteem would provide motivational explanation and determinant for identification. However, lately numerous other possible motives for identification have been distinguished. For example needs for self-knowledge, meaning, balance, consistency, power, control, and self-efficacy can be other possible driving forces. (See Hogg & Abrams 1990, 42-46.) In any case, it is now acknowledged that explanations relying on any single motive or determinant are too limiting. As Deaux (1996, 791-792) points out, there still is a need to determine which motives are important to whom on what occasions. In this chapter I will focus on the antecedents that are so far considered to be most influential for determining identification: salience of categorisations, positive self-image, distinctiveness of the group, and similarity. In addition, I will consider the possible relation between

identification and the factors that traditionally were associated with group formation (such as cohesiveness).³

Since identification is based on the categorisation processes, identification is likely to be associated with the salience of the out-groups. Awareness of out-groups reinforces awareness of one's in-group. The extent a group can clearly be distinguished with other groups, determines how easy it is to identify with the group in question. And in general, the more accessible the category is, the less input is required to invoke the relevant categorisation. (van Knippenberg & van Schie 2000; Turner *et al.* 1987, 55.)

In addition to the degree of saliency, identification depends on the degree of prestige and status attached to the categories. Namely, categorisation processes inevitably involve social comparisons between the groups. The basic assumption is that people are motivated to evaluate themselves positively and therefore also seek positive social identity. The need for positive self-esteem motivates the group members to create and enhance positive distinctiveness of one's own group in comparison to other groups. By maximising inter-group differences, group members attempt to secure an evaluative advantage for the in-group. Prestige of the group is important for identification in the sense that people often cognitively (if not publicly) tend to identify themselves with the "winner" or with high status groups. However, it needs to be noted that the theory does not suggest that people would always have positive social identity, but rather that there is a strong tendency to build positive distinctiveness. Language groups, for example, provide a particularly interesting arena for considering the role of distinctiveness as a motivational basis for social identity. In some cases emphasising ethnolinguistic identity can be a means for communicating power and status that the group has within a society. (Ashforth & Mael 1989, 25; Deaux 1996, 790-791; Hogg 1992, 91; Turner 1982, 43; Turner *et al.* 1987, 30, 46.)

Many times individuals are being assigned into categories by others regardless if they desire to be part of that group or not. This is especially the case when it is a question of categories that are ascribed by birth (such as nationality or language groups). Despite the fact that others perceive the category as appropriate, the person in question may not choose to endorse that identification. Instead of identifying with the assigned category, people may strive for more generic and

³ The list of antecedents mentioned here is not meant to be exhaustive.

undifferentiated definitions of self. The “labelling” by others can be very powerful especially when it comes to individuals’ visible characteristics that can readily be used as a basis for categorisation (such as gender, age or race). If categorisation by others results in increased status, reactions usually are more positive than when the assignment is associated with a decrease in status. It has been suggested that individuals tend to customise their social representations to suit their personal goals. (Deaux 1996, 789.)

The group size is one major determinant of identification as well. Brewer proposes (1993, 3-4) that in addition to optimal distinctiveness with the group (inclusiveness), people also aim for individual differentiation (exclusiveness). According to her, identification with large-sized groups can form a threat to individual distinctiveness since a large group implies sameness with a large number of people. Following from this, identification with smaller groups may be more preferable in providing a sufficient level of individual distinctiveness and at the same time fulfilling the needs for inclusiveness. In their study of work group identification, van Knippenberg and van Schie (2000) also concluded that individuals are more likely to identify with smaller work groups rather than with the entire organisation. Since employees are in closer contact with their work group or persons within their department, these persons become more familiar to them and therefore are easier to identify with.

Similarity among the group members also plays an important role in identification. Interaction with more similar others is often experienced to be easier and more comfortable, and therefore people tend to prefer situations in which others are similar to oneself with respect to abilities, opinions, values, or life experiences. Since identification is based on the categorisation of the self as similar to others within a category, individuals are likely to identify with a group the more similar they are to the group. This assumption holds both for the similarity among people that are in the group as well as for similarity between the group’s activities and the individual’s preferences. Group heterogeneity may decrease individual’s sense of identification within a group, and thus influence negatively his/her feelings of satisfactory membership. As a conclusion, the higher the degree of similarity is, the more likely it leads to higher levels of identification. (van Knippenberg & van Schie 2000; Milliken & Martins 1996, 415; Turner *et al.* 1987.) In fact, some experiments show that even in the case where individuals are assigned to groups on a random basis tend to look for some unifying traits or try to invent common group characteristics from the available information. However, it must be noted that in reality the relationship between similarity and identification might not be this straightforward. Social identification and cohesiveness might not always come true,

especially when it is a question of arbitrary social categorisations. And sometimes dissimilarity may also be a source of social attraction. (Turner 1982, 26.)

Language can be both a cause and a consequence of social categorisation. (See chapter 3.3. for consequences.) Language similarity or preferences can provide a ready basis for choosing to identify with a certain group. The ability to choose which language to use on which situation serves as an important way to indicate and strengthen the shared social identity. For many ethnic groups language is an indispensable symbol and cultural marker of the collective membership. The greater the vitality of a group within a society, the greater the likelihood is for continued language usage. (This also holds true within culturally diverse work organisations.) Linguistic divergence is also a powerful means to accentuate group distinctiveness. (Deaux 1996, 787-788.)

The set of factors traditionally associated with group formation, such as interpersonal interaction, attraction, liking, proximity, shared goals or threat, common history and experiences, may affect the extent to which individuals identify with a group. However, social identity theory points out that these factors are not necessary for identification to occur. These factors may facilitate group formation in the sense that they can be used as a basis for categorisation and they may directly or indirectly cue individuals towards an appropriate grouping. (Hogg & Turner 1985, 62; Turner 1984, 524-525.)

Many theorists have emphasised that the concept of identification should not be confused with other closely related concepts. (e.g. Ashforth & Mael 1989; Riordan & Weatherly 2000; Turner *et al.* 1987.) They argue that theoretical and empirical work has often equated identification with constructs such as commitment and internalisation or with affect and behaviours (e.g. cohesiveness, communication), which are more appropriately seen as antecedents and/or consequences of identification. As Turner (1987, 67) reminds, the self-categorisation theory sees in-group identification as an adaptive social-cognitive process that makes pro-social relations such as social cohesion, co-operation and influence possible. It is assumed that identifying with a group is precisely the mechanism that allows human beings to be more than just individual persons. In the following chapter I will once more take the phenomenon of cohesiveness under inspection, but this time in the light of the social identity theory.

3.2. Cohesiveness as a Result from Social Identification

To recapitulate, the social cohesion model asserts that group belongingness has an affective basis, that individuals are bound together by their cohesiveness – particularly by the attraction to each other, to the group as a whole, and to its activities. According to this model, cohesiveness is understood as a group property, which is inferred from the number and strength of mutual positive attitudes among the members of the group. In other words, cohesiveness is understood as *interpersonal* attraction. Therefore, a collection of individuals becomes a group insofar as they develop mutual positive emotional bonds and express an array of group behaviours (e.g. coordinated interaction, adherence to norms, mutual attraction etc.). (Lott & Lott 1965; Hogg 1987, 103; Turner 1982, 16.)

As mentioned before, the social cohesion approach has been criticised especially from its straightforward reliance on the interpersonal attraction -concept. The social identification model can be seen as an alternative that offers one way to re-conceptualise the concept of cohesiveness. This analysis is focused on explaining the group formation in cognitive and perceptual terms and argues that group cohesiveness cannot merely be based on attraction. (Hogg 1987, 115.)

In comparison to the traditional social cohesion model, the social identity theory offers many advantages for analysing group formation and the related phenomena. It provides a plausible explanation of social categorisation mechanism in group formation and cohesiveness as such, as well as circumvents many of the theoretical limitations appearing in the social cohesion model. One important advantage of the self-categorisation perspective on cohesiveness is that it can deal with various types of groups and thus, has possibilities for broader range of applications. Conceptualising group solidarity in terms of social identity rather than an interpersonal process broadens the scope of analysis beyond the small interactive groups. As a result, the phenomenon of cohesiveness can be assessed in all sorts of groups ranging from small, interactive, task-oriented groups (e.g. small work groups) to large-scale social categories (e.g. also applicability to larger organisational groups). Furthermore, instead of considering attraction alone, other aspects of group solidarity (e.g. ethnocentrism, conformity, discrimination, stereotyping, intra-group liking) can also be taken into account. (Hogg 1987, 103; 1992, 110, 148.)

The fundamental difference between these two models can be found in their ways of approaching the group formation. According to the social identification model, group formation is initiated by

the processes of social categorisation and identification, which then lead individuals to internalise certain social norms and to use them as a guide for their attitudes and behaviour. This can happen independently from group cohesion or without direct interaction with other people. As Turner (1982, 16-17) points out, the group belongingness would then be a matter of how we perceive and define ourselves rather than how we feel about others. In his formulation the first question determining group belongingness is not “Do I like these individuals?” but the question of “Who am I?”. Therefore, social cohesion cannot be seen as either necessary or sufficient condition for group formation, whereas the mere perception of common category membership may be both. Relevant laboratory experiments confirm that minimal conditions for group belongingness do not include cohesiveness among the group and that developing social cohesion always presupposes categorisation and identification processes (Turner 1982, 23-27).

Although social categorisation may lead to intra-group cohesion, it is mostly regarded as a consequence rather than an antecedent of group formation (Turner 1987, 28). As Turner (1982, 23-27) puts it: “social cohesion can then be seen as a factor, which *facilitates* group formation and functions as sufficient condition for *increasing* group belongingness”. In many cases social groups do have a tendency to be cohesive in some sense: people tend to be attracted to the members of their in-group and to identify with individuals who share some positive common attribute. Once individuals are already perceived as group members, attraction can increase attachment to a group and thereby affirm our identification with it. Thus, interindividual attraction among group members is an important aspect of group solidarity. However, this sort of attraction, or attitude, is a product of group level processes and therefore, must be distinguished from the interpersonal attraction. (Hogg 1992, 99-100.)

The social identity theory makes a clear distinction between two forms of attraction or interindividual attitude: *social* attraction in contrast to *personal* attraction. Both forms of attraction are based on a positive feeling that one person has about another, but the generative mechanism underlying each is quite different. Personal attraction is an individual level phenomenon, whereas social attraction refers to a group level process: attraction among members of a salient social group. Personal attraction is grounded in specific interpersonal relationships and is highly personalised form of attraction. Hogg (1992, 100) argues, that these two forms of attraction vary according to the interactive context, that is, to the extent to which the interindividual attitude is depersonalised. As a consequence, depersonalised social attraction will prevail when interaction is almost entirely based upon common category membership, and personalised personal attraction will prevail when

interaction is more based upon an interpersonal relationship. In addition, within these attraction dimensions attitudes can range from highly positive interindividual attitudes to highly negative ones (Hogg 1992, 101).

Group life can produce conditions (e.g. propinquity, mutually enjoyable interaction, co-operation, general attitudinal similarity) that foster the creation of social as well as personal attraction (Hogg 1992, 106). In many cases both forms of attraction will coexist within a group. In other words, the social identity theory acknowledges that both forms of attraction are basic elements of group solidarity, but it is the social identity that is relevant for the analysis of group level phenomena. According to Hogg (1992, 101), one major limitation of the traditional cohesiveness concept especially is that it does not make such a distinction between these two forms of attraction.

As a conclusion, the relationship between cohesiveness and identification seems two-folded. First of all, cohesiveness can act as a facilitating force in group formation and in this sense affect the identification process. Secondly, cohesiveness can arise as a direct product of social identification. Identification can indeed produce intra-group cohesion in terms of mutual attraction between group members. Attraction arises as a function of the saliency of categorisation and mutually perceived similarity between the members of an in-group, leading to mutual positive evaluation between in-group in contrast to the less valued out-group. Based on the social identity theory, a cohesive group can be defined as a group in which members identify strongly, via the process of self-categorisation, and exhibit to varying degrees group phenomena such as social attraction, respect and liking, in-group trust, ethnocentrism, stereotypic perception, normative conduct, and inter-group differentiation. These components of group behaviour are produced by self-categorisation, but local situational factors and the wider context of inter-group relations may influence the specific mix of behaviours that are being manifested. (Hogg 1987, 102; 1992, 99, 110; Turner 1982, 39.) In the following chapter I will shortly review some of these group phenomena, that is, consequences of social identification, and try to highlight their meaning for the overall functioning of the group.

3.3. Consequences of Group Formation

Once individuals' common social identification is "switched on", they tend to perceive themselves and others in terms of that category membership. Therefore identification can be understood as the basic mechanism that underlies various group outcomes, such as co-operation and altruism, intra-

group cohesion, social stereotyping, ethnocentrism, emotional contagion and empathy, collective behaviour and social influence processes. (Turner 1982, 29.) It can be expected that some of these consequences may also serve as determinants of identification (or cohesiveness). More specifically, it is likely that social identification will reinforce the very antecedents of the whole process (Asforth & Mael 1989, 26). For instance, as identification usually leads to increase of the perceived similarity among the group members, perceptions of others as similar to oneself reinforce the degree of identification further by increasing the positive evaluations concerning the group. Thus, similarity is one factor that both implies identification in the first place as well as confirms the identification later on. Various theorists (Cartwright & Zander 1968, 106-107; Deaux 1996, 785; Riordan & Weatherly 1999.) support the idea of causality and have suggested that a more adequate model of identification (or cohesiveness) and its consequences would be needed to represent these circular processes of causation. However, Cartwright & Zander (1968, 106-107) remind that cohesiveness may also be involved in a degenerating circular causal system that can reinforce negative outcomes in a same manner as it does enhance the positive ones. Figure 2. below presents these possible causal processes in a graphic form:

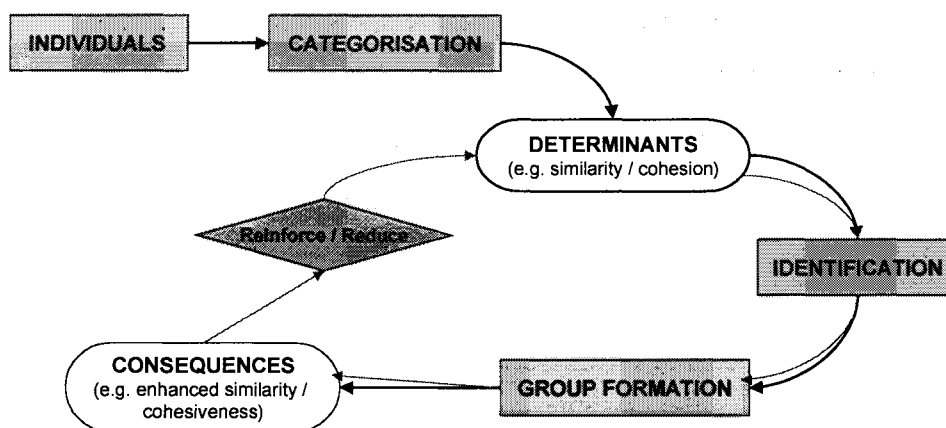


Figure 2. Outline of the circular causal processes involved in social identification and group cohesiveness.

While evidence on the relationship between social identification and its consequences is still lacking, there is an impressive body of research done in group cohesiveness and its consequences. The empirical evidence shows that group cohesiveness generally enhances group productivity and

performance, increases conformity to group norms, improves morale and job satisfaction, facilitates intra-group communication, reduces intra-group hostility and directs it towards an out-group. However, there are many exceptions. Numerical studies have also reported that the expected relationship between cohesiveness and its consequences was not obtained. From the viewpoint of the self-categorisation theory, these disconfirming data are strongly suggesting the importance of social-cognitive processes in the development of cohesiveness rather than positive interpersonal attitudes and affective relations between the individuals. (Hogg 1987, 101; 1992, 120.)

It is not clear to what extent the consequences of the social identification are similar to the ones measured in the framework of group cohesiveness. Further research is still needed in order to obtain more detailed understanding of the mechanisms between identification and the related phenomena. For the present, only the more general associations can be assessed. Therefore, I do not specifically distinguish between the consequences of cohesiveness and identification, but will assume that they both have similar kinds of consequences and are part of the same causal system in the above-described way. However, it is important to shortly review some of the consequences here, since they offer a practical tool for analysing the identification process as such, as well as contribute to gaining better comprehension of the situation within the group.

3.3.1. Similarity versus Diversity

Perceived similarity is a central phenomenon of the identification process since it functions as the basis for initial categorisation and as one of the consequences resulting from social identification. The social identity theory (Turner *et al.* 1987) predicts that the categorisation process activates social influence within a group in such way that it eventually results in greater actual similarity among the group members and conformity to group norms. Presumably, pressures towards similarity and conformity are higher the more important the identification is to a person. When the group membership is valued positively, the perceptions of similarity among members tend to increase. In contrast, when the group membership appears unattractive people are likely to emphasise their unique characteristics and perceive less similarity between themselves and other members. Therefore, it can be speculated that the cultural differences within a group are more extremely highlighted when the members of a culturally diverse group identify themselves less strongly with the group or attach negative values to the group membership. (Deaux 1996, 787.)

In addition to the overall positive distinctiveness of the group, the extent to which the members perceive themselves similar to the others depends on the attributes involved. It is important for the group members to perceive similarity on dimensions that are significant for the existence and activities of that group. Usually, the dimensions that are central to the group definition easily evoke perceptions of similarity, whereas the more irrelevant dimensions are less likely to elicit beliefs in similarity. Perhaps these more irrelevant domains allow the individuals to feel uniqueness and distinctiveness while still remaining identified with the group. (Deaux 1996, 787.) For instance in the case of a multicultural work group, cultural barriers are overcome when cultural dissimilarity is not perceived as an obstacle for acting as a functional group. Moreover, the members of a culturally diverse group may be more different on other dimensions (such as education, professional skills, age etc.) that might have far greater impact on the group's practices.

3.3.2. Structural Properties of a Group

Although categorisation is based on perceived member similarity, the individuals within a group differentiate from each other in terms of their personal characteristics, roles, responsibilities, access to resources, dominance, and power control. A group's structural properties (such as role, status and communication structure) may also influence the degree to which the members want to identify with that particular group.

Every group tends to create some kind of norms and rules that become standards for behaviour in the group. Norms enable a group to organise its social relationships and interaction into an orderly system. An individual is introduced to the prevailing norms through the process of socialisation. Thereafter, he/she is expected to conform to those norms and is being sanctioned in the case of deviation from the group standards. (King 1962, 33.)⁴ In addition to the norm structure, the functioning of a group is determined by different roles among the members. Roles are very much like norms insofar as they describe and define the expected behaviour of individuals in relation to the positions and tasks within a group. Not all roles are equal, some of them are consensually more valued and respected and thus, are related to higher status or greater power. In most groups the highest status role exercising most power is the role of a leader. The leadership style can take a

⁴ The basic idea of norms and rules is only shortly mentioned here, since the purpose of the study is not to discover the whole complexity of these phenomena.

variety of forms; it can be, for instance, informal, formal, democratic, supervisory, autocratic, intrusive or modest. (Francesco & Gold 1998, 109; Hogg & Vaughan 1995, 252, 243.) How significant is the role of the leader in each group depends on the leadership style, degree of autonomy the members have, and how the tasks have been divided among the members. However, in most groups, it is the leader who mainly guides the group's actions in reaching its goals as well as from his/her part influences the overall group atmosphere.⁵

In addition to the role structure, other factors may also lead to an unequal balance of power between the group members. Often in culturally diverse groups one or two cultures may form a dominant culture, either because of the power over resources, choices of language, stereotypes about others or the high number of group members representing that culture. These structural inequalities might have far more impact than cultural differences per se. Dominant nationalities are likely to create patterns of interaction that suits their own cultural norms the best and thereafter base their responses on their attitudes towards others. This in turn raises the potential for misunderstandings, for missing opportunities, and for offence to be taken. In this situation intentional or unintentional exclusion or underestimation of some group members is prone to happen more easily. The feelings of being left outside from the group's practices may lead to greater segregation of certain individuals and this can further reflect to the way the group members get along with each other as a whole. By resolving, fusing and integrating individual cultures, groups might create a new or a "third team culture" and thus, a unified result. (Davison & Ward 1999, 2, 29.)

The distribution of roles within a group usually also determines how the internal communication networks are being structured. The communication structure of a group can determine a member's participation in the group and the degree of power or autonomy one has. Depending on the informal or formal nature of the network, these structures regulate the ways and degree of communication accordingly. An established communication structure provides guidelines for its members by indicating who can communicate with whom on what moments. (Hogg & Vaughan 1995, 246.) Bavelas (1968, 503-511) has suggested that the number of communication links from one person to another is important in determining group's interaction and co-operation as well as specifying positions to each individual group member. According to Bavelas, more centralised communication networks seem to improve group performance when relatively simple tasks are in question. Then

⁵ In this study the role of the leader will be assessed only with regards to the group and its functioning, more specific issues concerning leadership will not be in the centre of interest.

the “hub” person is able to receive and pass on information efficiently while allowing the more peripheral members to concentrate on their tasks. For more complex tasks, a less centralised structure is often beneficial. In this case the central person would most likely be overwhelmed by the complexity and quantity of the information and therefore would cease to be capable to pass it on efficiently, causing peripheral members to experience delays and miscommunication. Many times serious co-ordination problems can be associated with overly centralised communication networks.

Communication networks relate to the division of power with regarding individual’s position within a network. Central and peripheral positions result in different degrees of autonomy: being dependent on the “hub” person for all information flow gives less power to the members in peripheral positions. Having a sense of power and autonomy many times results in higher satisfaction. In this way a member’s location within a certain group structure may have implications to his/her identification and attachment with the group. It appears that members occupying the most central positions in a communication network are likely to be more satisfied with their jobs and with the group’s performance than the persons in the most peripheral positions. Following from this, Bavelas (1968, 511) concluded that the average level of satisfaction is often higher in groups with a decentralised network than in groups with a centralised one. Thus, it can be stated that decentralised network will more likely increase group satisfaction, harmony and solidarity as well as improve the communication flow between the members. In addition to this, the size of the group influences the communication patterns. In a larger group it is more difficult to get everyone’s voice heard and as a consequence, larger groups tend to have more communicational problems and lower levels of job satisfaction (Cartwright & Zander 1968, 103).

The choice of language can be one factor that also influences individuals’ position and impact in a group. The linguistic inequality favours native speakers or members of the dominant culture by giving them more power and influence. Research done in multicultural teams implies that second language speakers are more easily being excluded from the conversations and are less likely to interrupt. Having the advantage of working in their own mother tongue, native speakers tend to be more committed to the group and more involved in its tasks. (Davison & Ward 1999, 59, 75.)

3.3.3. Group Atmosphere

It is common that a group develops a general atmosphere that determines members' reactions towards the group as a whole. The prevailing group atmosphere might be business-like, impersonal and efficient, or in contrast, warm, relaxed, and friendly. Some groups might be full of tension and suspicion, or continually struggling against perceptual problems and negative attitudes. Without a doubt, a group where members feel well accepted is perceived as more attractive and easier to identify with. An increase in the level of cohesiveness has been noted to lead in improved interpersonal relations. The improvements can lead to higher acceptance, trust, and confidence among members, and that each member consequently develops a sense of security and personal worth (Cartwright & Zander 1968, 104).

One of the most frequently studied consequences of social identification is the case of inter-group bias that refers to the positive evaluative bias towards one's in-group and differential evaluations regarding the out-group. (Deaux 1996, 786.) These evaluative differences between one's own group and another group are manifested in stereotypes and differential attribution patterns (Hogg & Abrams 1988, 78). The main function of prejudices and stereotypes is to generalise and simplify the complexity of information, and thus, function as a basis of categorisation and as a guide for directing our behaviour towards other groups. As Tajfel (1981) sums up, at the individual level stereotypes have cognitive and evaluative purposes, and at the social level they accentuate the differences between groups. It must be noted that stereotypes can function as both causes and consequences of identification. Once the sense of "we-ness" has been established and the identification with the group has occurred, there is a shift in evaluation concerning the other group members. Instead of perceiving the fellow group members as part of some out-group categories, they are perceived as representing the stereotypic features of the established in-group. (i.e. Members are perceived in terms of the group prototype. For further details over prototypes see for example Hogg 1992, 94, 102-103.) It has been noted that when some external event threatens a person's social identification, patterns of bias tend to intensify. In these cases people who identify more strongly with their group show greater extremity in favouring their in-group members (i.e. greater levels of ethnocentrism). (Deaux 1996, 786.)

In general, proximity and verbal and physical interaction tend to increase positive influences and favouritism among group members. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that forced proximity can produce negative intra-group attitudes. Especially interaction among people with different ethnic

backgrounds is not necessarily transforming negative attitudes into positive or even merely neutralising negative attitudes. Instead it seems that positive effects can only occur if there are no deep schisms between the persons prior to the interaction. (Hogg 1992, 33.)

Dislike and mistrust are examples of attitudinal problems that can form a serious hindrance for developing a functional group atmosphere. Continuous trust building among the group members is important because the degree of trust may significantly affect the performance of the group. Mutual trust can turn a low performing work group into a high performing cohesive team. Due to mutual trust, members of the work group feel free to perform at their best and produce superior performance for their team. Only continual, open and scrutinised actions and communication among the group members keep them away from non-trustworthy temptations. (Gehani 1998, 373, 375)

The formation of trust is many times more complicated in culturally diverse groups in comparison to culturally homogeneous groups, because the ways of building trust are relying on culturally different criteria. For example, there might be big variations in the amount of time used before an individual is ready to trust and rely on the counterpart (Davison & Ward 1999, 53). In general, cultural variations within a group might make group members more careful and timid in their social encounters than normally. This can lead to a situation where the members do not actively suspect their fellow employees (mistrust), but real reliance and trust between the individuals can still be lacking. As Gehani (1998, 373) sees it: trust can be seen as the invisible reinforcing glue that marginalises the destructive effects of diversity and synergises the strengths of multicultural members. In order to function effectively, all groups need time and effort to develop trust and establish the ways of co-operation.

3.3.4. Social Co-operation

Social co-operation is regarded as one of the important group level consequences resulting from identification. The fundamental question is: what makes a collection of individuals function as a group in order to reach its shared goals? And why do people start behaving in an altruistic manner in order to help their group members? Turner (1982, 31) explains altruism and co-operative behaviour between individuals in terms of the perceived common category membership. “We-group” ties between individuals are created through a common social identification, which makes

co-operation possible by unifying the interests of the members (such as needs, goals, and motives). Shared interests may imply first of all empathic altruism, whereby the goals of other in-group members are perceived as one's own, and secondly, empathic trust whereby other in-group members are assumed to share one's own goals. Based on this, Turner (1987, 65) suggests that intra-group co-operation will follow from the shared and mutual perception of interests as interchangeable among the group members. We help each other selflessly apparently because we perceive others' needs and goals similar to our own. This provides undeniably a simple and elegant mechanism for bypassing the supposed egotism of human beings (Turner 1982, 31). There is some evidence that increasing the salience of a shared social identification can indeed raise the level of social co-operation. The factors increasing salience of in-group membership include, for example, similarity, common fate, proximity, social interaction, and inter-group competition. In contrast, the factors that lead in-group members feel private, isolated, separate, distant, anonymous, and different, are likely to personalise intra-group relations. (Turner *et al.* 1987, 66.)

In a practical level, social co-operation manifests as group productivity and performance. Traditionally the group cohesiveness was believed to be the mechanism behind heightened performance and productivity of the group. Considering that members who are less linked with the group are also likely to be less willing to take part in the group's activities, it seems as a logical consequence to assume that cohesiveness would improve productivity through higher participation and loyalty (Milliken & Martins 1996, 419). However, after 50 years of considerable research, the relationship between group cohesiveness and performance remains to be uncertain. Some studies find that increased cohesiveness is associated with improved productivity and performance, sometimes there is no relationship, and sometimes there is a negative relationship (Hogg 1992, 142). Hence, it has been suggested that effects of cohesiveness on performance would be dependent on another factor. Lott and Lott (1965, 298), for example, explain the findings to be inconsistent, because other variables, such as the demands of the situation itself or the standards of performance (i.e. group norms) would moderate the relationship between group cohesiveness and group effectiveness. As a conclusion, it can be assumed that in general cohesiveness and heightened co-operation can lead to better performance, but that the relationship between these two is not straightforward.

One other possible phenomenon influencing group performance is the case of social loafing. Social loafing refers to the tendency for individuals to work less hard (to loaf) on a task when they believe others are also working on the same task. Social loafing is not an inevitable consequence of group

performance, but the chance of loafing is considered to grow in accordance with the increase of the group size. In most cases identification seems to be negatively related to social loafing. If the members identify with the group, it is likely that due to the attached value on the membership, individuals will show effort on behalf of the group. (Hogg 1992, 148; Hogg & Vaughan 1995, 227.)

Unlike usually being mentioned, strong identification or a high level of group cohesiveness might have some negative influences as well. The performance of highly cohesive groups may be threatened by so called groupthink- effect. According to Janis (1982, 9), groupthink occurs when the group members' strive for unanimity overrides their motivation to consider some alternative solutions. The principal cause of groupthink is excessive cohesiveness. Nevertheless, in multicultural work groups groupthink is less a frequent problem, because group cohesiveness is harder to reach and more attention needs to be paid on the members' differing viewpoints of the members (Adler 1997, 136-137).

A strong focus on one's own work group can have some other less beneficial effects as well. Although a sense of competition might boost performance, high competitiveness can sometimes elicit feelings of hostility towards an out-group. Strong identification with one's own work group might also restrain within-organisation mobility: employees may become highly unwilling to transfer to another work group, and when forced to do so, may feel unmotivated to work within their new work group. Moreover, if work group's norms differ substantially from those of the organisation, strong identification and conformity to these group norms may hinder the accomplishment of organisational goals. (Turner *et al.* 1987; van Knippenberg & van Schie 2000.)

3.3.5. Maintenance of the Membership

The behavioural consequences of social identification and the duration of the membership are likely to vary depending on the motive being satisfied. When the prevailing stereotypes and the person's identification with the group match, questions of motivation and maintaining the group membership are less problematic. To the extent that the comparison is favourable, individuals are expected to be satisfied with their group membership. In contrast, when the in-group lacks positive distinctiveness, members will be motivated to attempt some form of change. These long-term changes in identification are less frequent shifts when compared to the short-term shifts between multiple

identities. Changes in identification have a significantly broader range of impact on the person's life, involving fundamental changes in their basic social relationships. These changes are often referred to as role changes or life transitions and they can take several forms. First of all, a person can simply leave the group and take on a completely new membership category. In many instances when the group lacks positive distinctiveness, members aspire for a membership of a higher status group. Secondly, members can "dis-identify" with the previously claimed category by dissociating from it psychologically. Thirdly, members can try to adopt various strategies to restore the positive distinctiveness of the group and/or to alter the importance attached to a social identity. (Deaux 1996, 791-793, 789; Turner 1982, 43.)

The more strongly an individual identifies with a certain group, the more he/she is likely to think and act in terms of this group membership. Employees that identify strongly value their group membership more and are less willing to leave that particular group. Therefore, group identification should be negatively related to turnover intentions. (Mael & Ashforth 1995.) The decision to "dis-identify" often results from aversive circumstances that make the continued maintenance of an identity uncomfortable, as in the case when an identity fails to satisfy the needs of a positive self-esteem. Some theorists have suggested that an instance of "negative cohesiveness" would also exist. This refers to a situation, where membership is involuntary and the members remain in the group simply because the restraints against leaving are too great or there is a lack of better alternatives. (Cartwright & Zander 1968, 106.) However, Deaux (1996, 793) reminds that the reasons for a person to discontinue a group membership and to change an identity are undoubtedly complex and not well mapped out.

As mentioned before, identification should be related to the willingness to expend effort on the group's behalf, and thus, it can be expected that feelings of identification would also be positively related to employees' job motivation and involvement (or commitment). Since identification leads to ascribing the group characteristics to oneself, the job basically becomes in some sense "part of the individual" and is therefore evaluated positively. Although this might not be sufficient to lead to job satisfaction as such, it may be expected that identification can contribute to the feelings of job satisfaction. (van Knippenberg & van Schie 2000.) After all, social influence is regarded as an important determinant of job satisfaction (Berry 1998, 273). Nevertheless, the relationships between identification and job satisfaction and commitment still seem to be fairly vague and need further investigation.

4. RESEARCH PROBLEMS, METHODS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Operationalisation of the Concepts

4.1.1. How to Operationalise Identification and Cohesiveness?

As indicated in the previous chapters, both social identity and group cohesiveness are so called by-products that result from, and basically cannot exist without, some other phenomena or underlying mechanisms. This makes these concepts very intangible and difficult to approach in practice. In fact, neither of these can be measured directly in a straightforward manner. Thus, as already mentioned, many researchers have been struggling with practical operational problems in trying to develop systematic measures for these concepts. However, the self-categorisation theory is regarded as a good reference point for analysing the identification process also in practice. The self-categorisation theory differs starkly from the traditional treatments on group cohesiveness, because it offers theoretically clear principals about the nature of the group membership, which then allows the construction of appropriate measures. The underlying process of categorisation produces systematic general effects (that is, consequences) that can be measured, such as depersonalised perception of self and others, normative behaviour, ethnocentrism, in-group favouritism, inter-group differentiation and in-group liking. (Hogg 1992, 98-99.)

Although the self-categorisation theory provides a functional basis for operationalisation, it still is a model that can be best applied in experimental or laboratory research settings. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the current empirical research within the framework of social identification is following social psychological traditions and mostly uses experimental research settings and/or the minimal group paradigm. From a sociological point of view, this type of research settings can be criticised from being many times overtly focused on creating quantitative measures for group phenomena, instead of taking a more comprehensive approach to the group processes within empirical, real-life situations. Thus, the operationalisation in this study is based upon the principals of the social identity theory and its assumptions of categorisation processes, but in contrast, the group is being approached in its natural surroundings. As Hogg (1992, 98) reminds, the measurement of social identification should be approached in a manner that is mindful of the general effects of the categorisation process, but that also takes into consideration the nature of the

group itself and its immediate social context. In order to gain complete understanding over the identification process and group cohesiveness, it is crucial to form an idea of the whole situation.

The self-categorisation theory has also been criticised from emphasising (or even solely focusing) on the cognitive aspects of the categorisation and meaning making. Deaux (1996, 785) argues that despite of the cognitive focus, it would be reasonable to also consider emotional associations and interdependence of behaviour. She further speculates that there would be a demand for defining the elements involved in a more precise manner as well as to establish more sophisticated and sequential models of the identification process. Greater understanding over these different elements would allow charting the ways in which identification develops and linking the social identities to their behavioural consequences in a more complete manner. Various other theorists (e.g. Ashforth & Mael 1989, Riordan & Weatherly 1999.) also acknowledge the need for longitudinal research on the antecedents and consequences as well as for establishing a more clear-cut distinction towards the related concepts (i.e. commitment, cohesiveness and communication).

Based on these arguments, the aim of this research is to focus on one work group in greater detail by taking all the significant phenomena related to the identification process into consideration, that is, the context and consequences, cognitive, interactional as well as the affective elements. Naturally, in this study it is not possible to do longitudinal charting of the situation and hence, the antecedents of identification will be less at the centre of focus. (In this case, the group formation has already happened.) Instead it is more important to discover the consequences emerging in the current situation (a cross-sectional study), since they provide a practical means for understanding the degree of identification and the nature of cohesiveness within the group. Although the aim of this research is to assess to what *extent* do the members identify with the group or the *degree* of cohesiveness within the group, it is not possible or even plausible to try to indicate this with some clear-cut figures. Therefore, the evaluation of the current situation is mostly relying on the members' perceptions and assessments of the ways in which identification and cohesiveness manifest themselves in the light of the group processes.

4.1.2. The Research Problems and Questions

Initiative for doing this type of study originally came from my own experiences of working in a multicultural work group. The question that constantly kept on occupying my mind was: "How is it possible that individuals coming from a variety of countries and cultures suddenly start working

together as a team, become familiar to each other, and begin to trust each other?" Therefore, the starting point for this study was: "How does a heterogeneous work group function in practice, despite of the different backgrounds of its members?" After getting acquainted with the relevant literature, another question seemed to gain importance. The literature on organisational behaviour and international team management seemed to emphasise the potential problems and the stumbling blocks of multinational teams. One common assumption was that it is very important to reach sufficient group belongingness and cohesiveness within a multicultural team in order to guarantee its success, but that this is very hard (if not impossible) to reach in practice. (e.g. Adler 1997, Francesco & Gold 1998, Davison & Ward 1999 etc.) Based on these claims, it can be asked: "Is it possible for a multicultural team to be cohesive in general?" or "To what extent does a team have to be cohesive in order to function well together?"

Based on these questions I chose the concept of group cohesiveness and, later on the social identification, as the cornerstone concepts for this study. These concepts seemed to offer a good theoretical basis for studying the group processes within a multicultural work group. As explained earlier, cohesiveness can be regarded as the phenomenon that reflects the group spirit and belongingness within the group, and social identification serves as the underlying generative mechanism that makes the group formation and processes possible. These concepts were considered flexible enough to allow forming as comprehensive picture as possible of the group's functioning, yet giving room to assess the influences of the cultural diversity in the process. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to explore the extent of group cohesiveness and social identification currently prevailing in the group as well as to consider them in relation to cultural diversity. In order to reach this goal, all three aspects of group behaviour are taken into consideration: the values and attitudes attached to the group membership (cognition), co-operation (member interaction / interdependency) and attitudes towards the other group members (affection). Naturally, the wide applicability of these concepts and their heavy reliance on the theory brings a challenge to the research: how to apply them in practice, bring these concepts in a concrete level and to reach conclusions in the light of empirical, real-life interview material.

The research problems of this study can be roughly divided into three main themes: identification, cohesiveness and cultural diversity.

- 1) First of all, the purpose is to explore how strongly do the members identify with their work group and to what extent they feel personally involved in it. This is done by discovering the

meanings and motives that are being attached to the group membership and by finding out how the members perceive working in that particular group and how they are co-operating with each other. In addition to these, perceived or experienced similarity among the members and the relationships towards out-groups are being assessed and used as indicators of identification.

2) Secondly, and most importantly, the aim is to make assessments of the degree of cohesiveness within the group based on the current group processes and behaviour. The challenge is to determine whether the group is cohesive or not by discovering the ways in which cohesiveness manifests itself in the group. Thus, cohesiveness is assessed in practice with regards to the social and personal attraction as well as regarding the interpersonal interaction between the members.

3) The role of cultural diversity in the process is considered from two perspectives:

First of all, the purpose is to find out what kind of influences cultural differences might have on the group's daily practices and what kind of individual differences can be found in values attached to the group membership.

Secondly, the aim is to estimate in what ways do cultural differences influence the identification process or forming of cohesion in this particular group.⁶ Does the hypothesis hold true in this particular group that identification and forming of cohesiveness would seriously be hindered by the group members' various cultural backgrounds?

4) Finally, the attempt is to form an idea about the nature of the two main concepts, identification and cohesiveness, as well as to consider their connection to each other. Thus, under this theme the concepts are being considered specifically from the viewpoint of their causal relationship. However, it must be noted that this theme is not an actual research question and that the aim of this study is not to provide evidence on the causality, but just to treat it as an interesting point for discussion within the possibilities provided by the empirical material at hand.

⁶ It must be noted that the aim of this study is not to measure the extent of cultural differences per se, but to mainly consider them in relation to member identification and cohesiveness.

4.1.3. The Method and the Questionnaire

Most of the empirical material of this study was collected by interviewing the group members and their team leader. The method used was a semi-standardised method, which falls in between of a fully standardised questionnaire interview and a totally open interview. (See Hirsjärvi 1985, 35.) A semi-standardised interview method is particularly suitable for phenomena that relate to interviewee's opinions or attitudes, or to issues that are not frequently being discussed. Since there are no clear-cut measures and ways of finding out the degree of member identification or group cohesiveness, a semi-standardised interview offers enough flexibility to discuss these kind of complicated subjects. The characteristic that distinguishes this method from a structured interview is that a semi-structured interview does not have exactly formulated and/or sequentially organised questions. Only the theme areas that the interview is about to follow are known beforehand. This makes specifying questions and adjusting the interview possible, yet it still provides a certain framework for following and monitoring the discussed items. (Hirsjärvi, 1985, 36.) Another criteria for choosing this method was to approach these phenomena in some alternative way, as most of the research in this area has been done in a fully standardised way or in experimental circumstances where manipulation of different variables is possible.

The questions and themes used in this study were especially designed for interviewing this particular target. Therefore, the questionnaire was not based on a certain format or standard drawn from previous studies. Concerning identification and cohesion, the questions were combined on the basis of various different studies (Brown & Williams 1984, Carless & de Paola 2000, Langfred 1998, Riordan & Weatherly, 1999, Wech *et al.* 1998.) and then modified to fit the previously observed circumstances. All questions were divided under four main themes according to the research problems. In addition to these, the interviews started by asking some background information from each of the interviewees.

The first main theme was designed to discover the structural properties of the group, that is, to find out how the ways of working are established within the work group. The questions under this theme related to the internal team system within the work group, leadership, choices of language and communication. The second theme was the most difficult to operationalise in practice, but very important for this study: it was primarily designed for discovering the degree of cohesiveness and identification. The questions related to the evaluations of the group atmosphere, meaning and motives of the membership and social relationships within the group.

In the third section the interviewees were asked to evaluate the overall performance and ways of interaction within the group. The last theme was related to issues of cultural diversity. Under this section the interview ended with question of how the members perceive working in an international work environment and if this type of arrangement would be their preferred choice also in the future. The outline of the themes and questions is presented in the Appendix 1.

4.2. Getting Acquainted with the Empirical Target and Realising the Interviews

The empirical reality of the research subject is to be found in The Netherlands, in Amstelveen, a smaller town that is practically attached to Amsterdam. The interviewed work group, the Order Management Department, is working in this location as part of a big Japanese company called Ricoh Europe B.V., which is the European headquarters of Ricoh Company Ltd. of Japan. (A closer description of the work group and the company is presented in Chapter 5.)

My first contact with the company, and with some of the current group members, was in September 1999. Then I entered the company as a “regular” employee to work as a member of Order Management Department. At that time I did not have any intentions to do interviews with this particular group, or in fact, had no research plans whatsoever. During this period I worked for the company during three months and then returned back to Finland to continue studying. However, this short but fruitful work experience proved later to be more important than expected. Working as a member of this multinational work group later inspired me to focus more closely on issues that relate to international work places. Surprisingly I found myself back in Holland, and at Ricoh, quicker than ever planned.

Now looking back, the first experiences of working in the Order Management group seem as a valuable source of information. In a way, that time can also be regarded as a participative observation period. Actually then the observation was as natural as it can be, because in this case the group members did not have a feeling of being observed. During these three months I got well acquainted with the procedures the work requires, as well as with the social settings within the group and outside of it.

The second time I walked in the Ricoh building to start with another assignment was in August 2000. To my surprise, during the half a year I was away, a lot of changes had occurred within the

whole company as well as within the former department I used to work for. Almost half of the employees in Order Management had left the company, so most of the group members were totally new to me. Also a change of leadership had taken place and the whole department had physically moved to another floor. As I now was employed by another department I was not in such a close contact with the Order Management anymore. Therefore it took me a while to get acquainted with the new situation and to assess whether it would be reasonable to interview that particular group. Slowly I got to know some of the new members and started to understand the changes that had taken place while I was away. Actually, this time can be regarded as the second observation period, which now was non-participative from nature. During this period I became assured that Order Management would offer a suitable empirical example for my study subject. Having members with nine different nationalities and being in line with other definitions for a multicultural work group, the Order Management group matched to all pre-set criteria for the research subject.

After getting a permission to do the interviews within Order Management, I refined the questionnaire based on the new observation material to better correspond with the current situation. First interview was with the group supervisor and took place in the beginning of April 2001. Thereafter, during two months, I interviewed all other group members, one after another, whenever a suitable time for it could be found. The interviews were done during the employees' working hours in the company's meeting rooms or canteen. All interviews were taped and their average duration was from 45 minutes to one and half hours. By the beginning of July 2001, all currently available group members had been interviewed, 11 altogether.⁷ The language used was English.

All group members were very helpful and willing to participate in the research and therefore I did not have to use much time for persuasion. In that sense my position as another Ricoh employee was useful to raise a sufficient amount of trust in contrast to a researcher coming from outside. After all, most of the group members I knew already before hand. Being familiar with the group and its assignments also allowed me to ask very precise questions and to easily understand what the respondents meant. This in turn reduced significantly the chance of misunderstandings. On the other hand, familiarity allowed the interview situations to be as relaxed as possible and to be closer to a "normal conversation". Many times the order or structure of the questions was totally different depending on the interviewee. In this respect, the semi-structured interview proved to be a handy

⁷ Due to some member's maternity leave or long-term absence, not all members could be interviewed. The employees included in the research were the ones that were available and regularly working at the office in April-July 2001.

method by offering enough flexibility to direct the conversations to a desired direction, yet giving good guidelines for the issues that needed to be covered. Also previous knowledge of the social settings within the company and mastering the subject well before doing the interviews gave good support for interviewing. Some questions or theme areas proved to be less important in the course of the interviews and were therefore given less focus towards the last interviews. In general, the questionnaire was well structured and the questions seemed to give answers to the issues that were supposed to be discovered, but also revealed issues that were totally new or not considered before. In addition, my current position as a member of another department offered enough distance and objectivity for dealing with the results.

4.3. Analysing the Empirical Material

All eleven taped interviews were first transcribed into text, amounting to approximately 10-15 sheets per interview, which meant a lot of material for the analysis. Despite the amount of work that handling such amount of information takes, this was a better starting point for the analysis than running across the problem of missing information. So, already when designing the questionnaire, it was a conscious choice to make it rather extensive and thereby trying to minimise the risk of having “not-asked-essential-questions”. Not only having a huge amount of information to work on, but also the fact that I was dealing with two rather intangible and abstract concepts turned out to be a real challenge for the analysis.

Not surprisingly, the biggest analytical problem occurred with finding out the most relevant indicators for identification and cohesiveness and relating them to the theoretical background. The practical facts about procedures and daily functioning of the group were easy to pick out, but the challenge was how to link the practice back to the abstract concepts. Nevertheless, I had been struggling with the same problem earlier while trying to operationalise the concepts, that is, to turn them into practical language. Now I turned back to the same theme areas for help in order to organise the empirical material. In the following, I will shortly explain the ways in which the theme areas were applied to analyse the interviews.

After going through the raw material for several times, I reorganised each interview into the theme areas that were based on the theoretical framework and were also used in the questionnaire. The next step was to summarise each interview individually and to look for the most important

information and comments regarding each theme. After each interview was first “compressed” like this, it became possible to start comparing and summarising all responses together and to look for similarities and differences between them. This procedure led to forming a summary of all interview material under each theme and thus, enabled to form a general idea of the results. In the same process I also separated those quotes that best described and crystallised the contents of each subject. It was only after this that I could start clarifying the theme areas and results that were indicating either identification or cohesiveness. Related to this, the contents of each theme area were systematically reflected and compared against the theoretical framework.

This structure and way of handling information proved to be a very helpful method for categorising and identifying the essential results. The only problem that occurred while using the themes was their overlapping with both concepts. The indicators that were mainly meant for describing identification could also be used for interpreting cohesiveness and other way around. Therefore, I did not make clear-cut separations with each theme area to dedicate them for describing only one of the concepts. Following from this, some themes are related to both identification and cohesiveness, whereas on others only one variable might be assessed, depending on the emphasis.

The following part of the report is constructed in such a way that the results are presented by starting from general information and moving towards more specific conclusions towards the end. The company’s name and related facts are presented as they are in reality, but the names of the interviewees and personnel, in case they appear in the text, are altered or presented with codes. First, in Chapter 5., I will shortly introduce the company and its surroundings. Thereafter I will describe the work group more in detail concerning its tasks, structural properties and position within the organisation. Chapter 6. contains the remaining theme areas and thereby describes the current situation within the group. In this chapter the descriptions are strongly based on the interviewees’ comments and perceptions, as I wanted to portray the group as authentically as possible. Already in this section some indicators of identification and cohesiveness are more closely analysed. Eventually, Chapter 7. takes a closer look at the three major concepts, identification, cohesiveness and cultural diversity, and draws the most essential findings together. The final chapter is dedicated for conclusions and considerations of the overall research and its concepts.

5. DESCRIBING THE EMPIRICAL TARGET

5.1. The Company - Ricoh Europe B.V.

5.1.1. Company Facts and History

In the 1936 the company was established under the name of Riken Kankoshi Co. Ltd. and started its business with marketing sensitised paper for photographic equipment. As late as 1963 the company was shifted under the name Ricoh Company Ltd. Now Ricoh Company Ltd. of Japan is a leading supplier of office automation equipment, such as digital and analogue copiers, facsimile machines, printers, as well as top quality optical equipment such as cameras. Based in Tokyo, Japan, the company is represented through 128 marketing and manufacturing facilities and research centres in Japan and 205 subsidiaries overseas. By year 2000, the Ricoh Group was employing approximately 67,300 people world wide, with a turnover of 11,1 Euro billion. (Rico Company Ltd. Annual Report 2000 and 2001.)

In 1971 Ricoh Company Ltd. expanded its activities by establishing Ricoh Europe B.V. in Amstelveen, The Netherlands. Ricoh Europe B.V. functions as the European headquarters being responsible for the overseas research and development, production, and marketing, as well as sales and service of Ricoh products in Europe, Middle East and Africa, in over 70 countries. Ricoh Europe's network comprises of 5 European manufacturing sites, and 17 sales subsidiaries, which all together account for approximately 20% of the company's global revenues. At the moment (year 2001) Ricoh Europe headquarters employs approximately 200 people.⁸

In order to manage and support its various divisions, subsidiaries and dealers, Ricoh Europe B.V. has put effort in structuring its organisation. As a result, the organisation chart can be described as a vast, but clear, tree diagram with three major branches. The first branch represents the Sales Group, which is in control of every possible activity in the area of sales. The second branch, European Marketing Group supports all the marketing activities within its territory. The third branch is responsible for the execution of all possible administration. The empirical target of this study, Order Management department, is located in the Sales branch of the organisation chart and is, to put it

⁸ This estimate only includes Ricoh Europe's Amstelveen office.

simply, responsible for taking care of Ricoh Europe's extensive and diversified customer network in terms of order processing and customer relations.

5.1.2. Location and Social Context

In order to understand the composition of the work group and the current situation it is working in, some words need to be dedicated to the physical surroundings of the company. As previously mentioned, Ricoh Europe B.V. is located in a city called Amstelveen. Amstelveen is an autonomous city itself, but because of its location, it is many times considered to be kind of a suburb area for Amsterdam. Therefore, Amstelveen is often recognised as a typical commuter municipality having a large number of outward-bound commuters. But as much as there are people daily commuting out of Amstelveen, there are people commuting into Amstelveen for work. According to the year 2000 figures, 7,552 companies were located in Amstelveen area employing 33,973 people altogether. Many of these companies are part of big international corporations, and usually offer jobs in the industrial and trade sector. During the past few years, the work opportunities in the Amsterdam area have been starkly growing along with the booming national economy. (Het Amsterdamse Bureau voor Onderzoek en Statistiek 2001, Gemeente Amstelveen 2001.)

In year 2000 there were 77,638 inhabitants living in Amstelveen, from which the number of inhabitants of non-Dutch origin amounted to approximately 21,000. The number of expatriates living in Amstelveen is particularly high and Japanese are by far the largest ethnic group, followed by a number of West-European nationalities. Other big ethnic groups, such as Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccans, are less represented among the Amstelveen inhabitants, whereas they are well represented nationally, as is also the case in Amsterdam. The area of Amsterdam is, in that sense, very multicultural as only third of "Amsterdammers" have exclusively Dutch nationality. In year 2000 it was counted that there are 173 different nationalities represented in the Amsterdam area alone. Another interesting feature of the population in this area is that it has not turned grey, whereas in the rest of Holland this is the case. Therefore the age group of 25-39 is relatively high and there are a lot of single households. It is very typical to move to Amsterdam or Amstelveen for working or studies and later on, once establishing a family, to move out of the big cities. Therefore a large number of Ricoh Europe's employees are daily commuting to Amstelveen from above all Amsterdam and its surrounding suburbs and villages, but also from other bigger cities located

further. (Het Amsterdamse Bureau voor Onderzoek an Statistiek 2001, Gemeente Amstelveen 2001.)

5.2. The Work Group - Order Management Department

5.2.1. Group's Tasks and Position within the Organisation

Order Management Department is part of the Sales branch of the organisation and more precisely belongs to the Supply Chain Management Division. This division further comprises of four different departments including Order Management, Logistics, PSI Planning Department and Staff Office. (See Chart 1. below) The first mentioned three departments work in close conjunction with each other in order to take care of the order processing starting from managing the customer contacts and warehouse status to the final shipment of products. In other words, the whole order management process can be described as a “chain reaction”, meaning that each phase of the process reflects to the next procedure. Therefore, if problems occur in some stage of the process within one department, it will most likely have immediate impact on the operations in the “following” department. Shortly described, the PSI Department is responsible for managing the stock situation, for example by means of maintaining the balance between sales and booking in of new products. The order management and logistic processes are very closely related to each other and therefore demand close co-operation between these departments. After the customers' orders are processed in the Order Management Department and entered in the database, the actual delivery of the goods is organised by the Logistics Department accordingly.

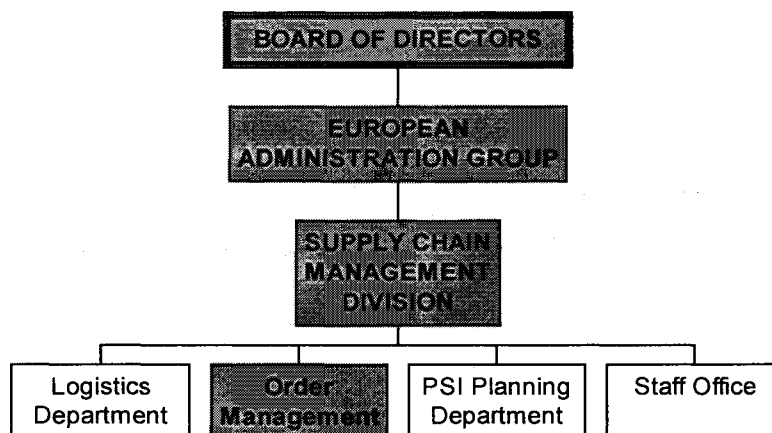


Chart 1. Organisation Chart of the Supply Chain Management Division.

There are four different positions within Order Management department, which are, in one way or the other, related to the order processing, customer contacts and administration. First of all, the group has one supervisor, who is supervising and managing all Order Management activities in line with the company policy in order to optimise the group’s performance. Secondly, there is one Sales Support Analyst, who’s function is to analyse and control the incoming orders in order to minimise the impact of stock shortages and overstocks as well as to initiate structural counter measures within the Supply Chain Management division. Thirdly, there are currently two Sales Support Co-ordinator positions, which were created to provide support within the internal Order Management teams in order to establish efficient and effective management of orders placed by distributors, subsidiaries and OEM partners of Ricoh Europe.⁹ Finally, there are several Sales Support Assistant positions, currently occupied by 10 people, for administering and controlling the order-flow for Ricoh Europe’s customers (Region-1, Region-2, OEM & International Sales) as efficiently as possible in order to achieve optimal customer satisfaction and good quality of the service delivered. (Extract from: Ricoh Europe B.V. Official Job Description Matrix.) In a graphic form, the Order Management work group looks like this:

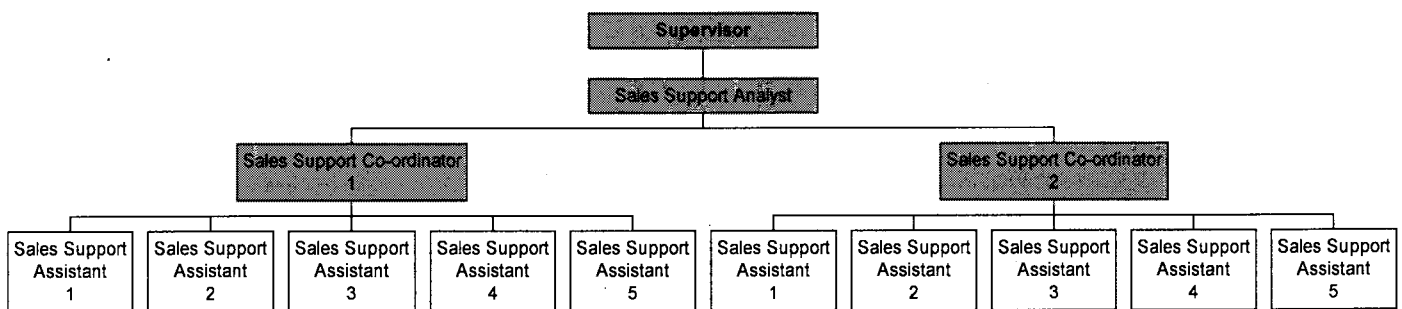


Chart 2. Structure of the Order Management Department.

In order to understand the daily activities the majority of Order Management employees engage themselves in, I will shortly describe Sales Support Assistant’s principal accountabilities. Each assistant is responsible for certain customers, with which they aim to establish good relationships. The amount of customer accounts per person varies from approximately three to eight

⁹ Distributors, subsidiaries and OEM partners are later referred to as “customers”.

depending on the size of the accounts. Therefore one of the major daily activities is to maintain day-to-day contact with the customers and to communicate effectively both internally and externally about the issues related to the order flow. Secondly, assistants are responsible for order processing activities and co-ordination of shipments together with the related administration and arrangements. And finally, the assistant needs to ensure that the pricing of processed invoices are in line with the arrangements made with each customer.

In practice, the order processing usually starts from a customer's order. Again, depending on the size of the account and the agreements made with the customer, the orders come in varying from daily and weekly orders to once a month or occasional shipments. In most cases, the orders are received via fax and then entered in the JD Edwards database, which is specifically developed for managing the complete order flow. In fact, this database forms the cornerstone of the whole work process and is one of the first things the group members need to get used to, as described by one of the interviewees:

I – 2: ¹⁰ *...once you're new, you're very slow... it took me so many hours to do my first order and now I can do it within one hour! You have to learn to know where to be in the system, and to know all the product codes and all the abbreviations, and if you don't know, you know where to find it... So you kind of develop your own relationship with the computer...either it's your friend or then it's your enemy...and in the beginning it's definitely your enemy...*

So, managing the orders with the database takes roughly estimated half of the daily work time. The other half, the more social part of the job, consists of maintaining the customer contacts, problem solving and internally assuring that the shipments go on time and that all necessary products are included. When something goes wrong in the process, or when unexpected things need to be taken care of, a part of the job also includes problem solving and quick responsiveness on the developments of the order process. Therefore, phone contacts are very important as well as using the e-mail as an external and internal information channel. Some work group members have noticed

¹⁰ I = interviewee + code number, ER = the interviewer.

that personal contacts within the company are often very important and powerful means of getting things done as well:

I – 7: I am on a daily contact with the Logistics... Problem – problem solved. It's also very good when we are working on the same level (= floor (ER)), so when we share the same room it's easy... sometimes I just stand up from my desk and prefer a direct contact. My input is always trying to talk to the person directly. I am often talking with George or Carl if I have a problem, because it helps to solve... and if you sit on their desk, they know it's urgent! Sometimes you have to be a bit pushy...

Concerning the customer relations, the Sales Support Assistants work rather independently from each other and can, to a certain extent, make decisions concerning the structuring of their daily work. Although most tasks can be performed independently, on the other hand, working in isolation is not possible: various persons need to be consulted in order to make sure that the chain from a customer's order to the eventual shipping and invoicing will be seamlessly performed.

5.2.2. The Composition of the Group

The work group itself is a colourful combination of 14 people with different characters and cultural backgrounds.¹¹ Currently, 9 different nationalities are represented in the work group as follows: English, Lithuanian, Russian, Iranian, Portuguese, Canadian, Ethiopian, Turkish, and 5 members with Dutch nationality. In some sense it can be stated that the ethnic distribution of the members is in balance, since all other nationalities counted together are by far more dominantly represented in comparison to Dutch. Roughly calculated only 1/3 of the members are Dutch and therefore, do not specifically form a dominant group within the whole work group, whereas this could easily be the case given that Holland is the host country of the company. Also, in the narrowest way of expression, 1/3 of the cultural backgrounds cannot be assessed as “strictly European”, which also brings special features to the member interaction. Interestingly enough, there are no Japanese represented in Order Management, which in turn, is the case throughout the rest of the company. Most likely this is due to the fact that most Japanese employees at Ricoh Europe occupy management level positions and have an expatriate contract.

¹¹ Only 11 of them were interviewed.

The work group can be considered as “international” also in terms of the personal attitudes or orientation of the members; most of them have had previous experiences in international encounters (due to work or studies) or have been living abroad. The length of the stay in The Netherlands among the non-Dutch members varies from 1.5 years to 14 years. The length of stay, naturally, reflects above all to the degree of adaptation to the local culture as well as shows in mastering the local language.

The gender distribution within the group is in balance as well: counted from the interviewed members there are 6 female and 5 male members. Even though the supervisor of the group is a woman, which also might occasionally give an impression of “female domination” within the group. The majority of the group members are “in their thirties” or under. The age distribution varies between 21-44, proving that Order Management has young staff, especially when compared to the age distribution within other departments in the rest of the organisation. On average, the group members have been working at Ricoh Europe less than two years, duration of the employment varying between 6 months and 4 years.

The relatively short average duration of employment can be explained by the fact that during the recent years, the work group has suffered from a high member turnover. Rather than relating the reasons of high turnover directly to that particular department, it must be noticed that during the past few years, turnover has also been high within Ricoh Europe in general. Reasons for this might be many, but the strongest factors seem to be related to the developments in the national labour market. Economic growth being strong, there are plenty of open vacancies, which makes it easier for people to change the work place. Another reason can be that having a very international body of employees, migration between countries is relatively high. One interpretation can also be that Order Management specifically is many times regarded as a good starting position for a career, which then shows as high turnover and young age of the staff. Often the education of the group members does not correspond with the work assignments directly. In fact, Order Management members have very different educational backgrounds varying from commercial schools and courses to the University. Most typically, the members do have some kind of commercial education or experiences in doing business in practice.

5.3. Organisation Culture and the Work Environment

5.3.1. Japanese vs. Dutch Work Ethics

Ricoh Europe headquarters has its own building in Amstelveen, which was built shortly after the company was established in The Netherlands. From outside it does not distinguish itself much from the other office blocks that are surrounding it. It is a massive sand-coloured brick building with 4 floors, having a big red company logo on the roof. Perhaps looking calm and boring from outside, from inside the building is very much alive: people walking on the stairs, talking with each other in various languages or being busy with some big copier in the hallway...

All four floors are divided in smaller sections that usually form the workspace for each organisational division. This means, that employees belonging to a certain division occupy together one room, smaller or bigger, depending on the size of the division or department. In that sense, the “open office”- model reflects Japanese way of organising, since hardly anyone has an own office. Due to the continuous growth of the company, the building is obviously getting too small for all the 200 (and plus) employees. Therefore, working at Ricoh today means not only having a lot of desks in one room, but also having a very limited workspace. Both probably features, for which the Japanese colleagues have already been used to in their home country. Another characteristic of the work environment is that you can see various kinds of big office equipment, such as high-volume copiers, printers and fax machines, occupying the hallways and almost all left over space.

In this building all kinds of people with different origins are working together as part of the “Ricoh family” under the company philosophy of “The spirit of three loves: Love your neighbour, love your country and love your work”. At least, this is how the fellow Japanese members like to put it in words... But what is Ricoh Europe in fact? Is it a Japanese company located in Europe or a European company having Japanese origins? This is a very difficult question to give a clear answer to and most of the times you get three different types of answers. One type highlights that the company policies are dominantly Japanese. Others emphasise that because of being located in Holland and having very international staff the company is more international or Dutch. And some people will make a compromise by assessing Ricoh Europe as being a mixture of both cultures. These three trends were also visible, when the interviewees were asked how they would describe the organisation culture at Ricoh Europe.

I – 6: *I think still it's much more Dutch way of working... it's very hard working culture...pushing yourself very hard, and demands a lot of concentration from everybody, communicating a lot... But I think people who were not used to that still have to adapt... most people have to adapt to it... And it's also because there are a lot of Japanese working here as well... you have to adapt to that as well... That's also new to Dutch people... Within the company there is own sort of way of working... and people who have stayed the longest have learned to adapt to it...*

To draw some conclusion, it seems that the way in which the organisation culture is perceived each time depends on the point of view you are looking at it. People, who do not have so much contact with Japanese people themselves, as is the case in Order Management, tend to assess the work ethics as more European or Dutch, as described above. Maybe the organisation culture is really a blend of both: following the local work legislation without forgetting Japanese work ethics, as the following interviewee implies...

I – 3: *I don't feel that this is really a Japanese company, it's run by Japanese managers, but we (in Order Management (ER)) don't have to deal with it that much. It is more and more becoming a European company, because they also have to follow the European and Dutch laws.*

In fact, for the most Ricoh employees it is a matter of getting used to a different organisation culture in any case, whether it is then Dutch or Japanese. During the interviews it also became clear that once you are a new employee you do not pay so much attention to the actual organisation culture while you are more focused on your new work assignments. It is actually after some time that a better sense of the organisation develops and it becomes easier to judge what characteristics are possibly caused by which factor.

I – 4: *Yeah, it's a little bit different...but I don't think that in the beginning you would see it right away...because you are busy with learning everything and in our department there are no Japanese working so... and I don't have to deal with Japanese people within this company so much...*

When the interviewees were asked about differences between local, purely Dutch companies and Ricoh Europe, the answers were easier to give. Two features, the differences in the ways of working and communicating, were mentioned most frequently.

I – 4: *I think in a Dutch company it's really different... because I think Dutch people just keep working hard from nine to five and they laugh and they go home... But here you see all the Japanese people working really hard, and not so much laughing...that's a really big difference...*

I – 9: *In an international company you see more different kinds of people than within a national (= Dutch (ER)) company and that makes a whole difference... I mean it's the way of dressing up, the way of talking... the communication makes that difference...*

In any case, all different ways of working and talking seem to blend together, creating a rather nice and interesting atmosphere to work in, as the following employee sees it:

I – 10: *I liked the atmosphere in comparison to other companies, other big companies... I liked the international atmosphere... kind of relaxed atmosphere and at the end that's what I chose for...*

5.3.2. Work Environment in Order Management Department

In the second floor of the building, you can find the Order Management Department. Do not be shocked while entering the room...because you will see a lot of people working in a big “open space”, talking on the phone, explaining things to each other, shouting and socialising... The Order Management group shares this room with the Logistics and PSI departments. So, with more than 40 people working in the same room, at least a high noise level is guaranteed... In the following, I let one of the group members describe the atmosphere:

I – 4: *...if you walk through the company, you see all these people working really hard... and if you come to our department, people are even throwing things at each other and always laughing, making noise and the radio is on... And then I think I couldn't then (after working in Order Management (ER)) work in such a stiff environment... It's much more relaxed here!*

Order Management is located in the right side of the room, where the desks are organised in four different groups, every group having approximately four desks. It is really true that there is no place where to hide, it is just a matter of getting used to this kind of environment, as described below:

I – 2: *In the beginning I was sitting in the middle and everybody could see what I was doing and at first I had a feeling that I don't want to have everybody looking at me... You have that feeling although everybody wouldn't even be looking at you... but you get used to it after a while...*

It is not only the work assignments that require people to have good social skills, but it is also the working environment that demands for it. But in most cases, people do adapt to it fairly quickly and, actually, would not like to change it for anything else...

I – 11: *I couldn't work in a little cubicle on my own... I really would hate it... But you also got to be that kind of person that can enjoy working in a group environment and also working in a quite noisy environment, because at the end of the day, we're not even in an office with 14 people, we're in the office with 40 people... you know, the noise and the arguments and the "hubabab", not necessarily in our team, but you see it going all around you... but now you tend to have this kind of filter that you can switch off...*

Amazingly enough, after a while you do not get so distracted any more by what is going around you and can better concentrate on your work:

I – 9: *Yeah, I like it. And when you're doing your work, you don't mind the noise... you don't hear it anymore... I mean, it's just like living close to Schiphol airport...once you get used to it, you don't hear the aeroplanes anymore!*

So, above all in this department the atmosphere is very international, informal and relaxed, and people in general seem to enjoy the daily social contacts they are having within the department as well as outside of it.

5.3.3. Working in Order Management – Interviewees' Perceptions

The reasons why people generally chose for working in Order Management Department were in most cases related to the international work environment and assignments that it offers. Many times the official language of the company, English, influenced the choice very strongly as well, not only for the non-Dutch employees, but also for the Dutch people, who were interested in working in another language or with an international mix of people.

Besides getting used to the physical environment, a new member entering Order Management has a lot to learn in a short period of time. And for the majority, the work assignments are something that they did not have previous experiences in, so the whole work process has to be learned from A to B. Usually new members receive a training, which takes, depending on the person's previous experiences, approximately from one week to a month. To a certain extent the training is also a question of personal preferences: some people prefer having a more guided start, whereas others like to find things out themselves. The problems that most members mentioned of having in the beginning were related to the actual work, such as receiving a huge amount of information concerning the whole order process as well as learning to use the database.

I – 3: The only thing was that there were so many new things that came to me in the very beginning, the first few months I had a bit difficulty to “suck up” all the information... I, for instance, had to get acquainted with using the computer and all these... working with JD Edwards database programme... It's also a lot of information that comes with it. And then the international context and communicating, but now I'm really enjoying it...

In addition, for some members starting to work in a foreign language was new and something they had to get more confident with:

I – 4: The English language was a problem in the beginning. I thought I cannot speak it so good...so in the beginning I was very nervous and I thought I cannot speak English all day... So that was the hardest for me... But now I'm just trying and if you don't understand, or don't know a word, you just try to explain...

In most cases after few weeks the situation gets better, people get confident with in their language skills and the work itself starts to make better sense. Many respondents concluded that after the very beginning, after learning to use the database system, the job itself is actually not so difficult. Here is one example:

I – 7: I guess I was a bit more nervous... due to the fact that I never worked for an international company before... I never worked in English... But then, it's a relatively easy job, so it's more using your communicational skills, which I think I have... So that was not so difficult, it's more the little things about the system (database (ER)), but in a few weeks, once you work with it for couple of hours, it's already in your head...

5.4. Structural Properties of the Group

5.4.1. Changes within Order Management

As mentioned earlier, the work group had undergone quite a few changes between my first “participative observation period” and the second time I returned to Ricoh. The reason why I bring up the changes here is, that later on, this change period provides a useful reference point for estimating the development of cohesion within the group in terms of “before and after” situation as well as gives a deeper understanding of the current circumstances. The changing period was also many times brought up during the interviews, and as such it seems to be an important turning point for the department. The members that have stayed in Order Management longer were able to estimate the reasons and consequences of the change, but approximately half of the members were so new that they had not experienced the change.

The change was initiated by an organisational restructuring and the establishment of Supply Chain Management Division. Officially the Supply Chain came into force during the year 1999, but for one year the change was more “in writing” than carried out in practice. Because of the renovation in the Ricoh building at that time, the actual organisational restructuring took place in year 2000, when the whole division moved upstairs, to the second floor. Once you look at the changing period now, it seems that nearly everything that could be changed was also changed, and the impacts of the restructuring were reflecting to each department internally as well as between the departments. At the organisational level the most important change was the implementation of the JD Edwards database programme, which in practice forced the Logistics, the PSI and Order Management departments to co-operate more closely with each other. Therefore, it was a time to build new relationships, not only internally within one department, but also between those three departments and to define borders and responsibilities for each one of them.

Before the change, the Order Management consisted of three rather separate groups, that were basically doing the same job but with different types of customers and under separate supervision. With the reorganising, the plan was to merge all these three different groups together under one supervisor and to remix all customers among the Order Management members. First of all, for the group members this meant that they had to start working together as one big group instead of three small ones. Without a doubt, to successfully combine three separate groups into one functional

work group is not an easy task; this is how the new group leader approached the situation: *“What I wanted was just basically four groups of tables with different mix of individuals, because the Order Management came from three different groups in the beginning of the last year. I wanted to integrate...deliberately integrate the three departments... Basically mixed gender, mixed nationality, and also mixed customer groups, so that you really had a mix of everything and everyone together.”*

In practice, the four table-groups and mixing of individuals meant that the desks were organised in a totally new way and each member was sitting next to someone they did not necessary know beforehand. As can be seen from the following comments, this time was chaotic and confusing when people tried to settle for the new way of organising.

I – 11: *It was hard because you're with new people, you're not sure... you've got a different person supervising, everything is a bit unstable... I felt like everyone was trying to figure out what was going on here...you know, what's gonna happen... It was sometimes a little bit uncomfortable... You used to walk in on the morning...it's a change you know... Whether you can accept changes is one thing, but whether you like changes... Everyone likes the familiarity to a degree of what they've done and the people they interacted with on a daily basis. And then moving to a new environment with new people and getting used to where you are within that group and, you know, what culture is in that group and everything...*

I – 2: *It was quite overwhelming once you look at it now... “What's happening now and where am I going to sit?” Everybody was quite anxious and worrying where they would be sitting...*

Most respondents agree that the atmosphere in the group during this time was not completely unbearable, but that you could also see that people were not really interacting with each other as a complete group.

I – 11: *In the beginning you found like one person getting coffee just for the people they were used to... it was just not warm... it was a cold atmosphere, let's say...there wasn't the laughter, there wasn't the socialising, there wasn't, you know, the interaction between people. So like if you saw that once a person had a problem with another customer and if it wasn't from the previous group of people who were doing that, then you were very resistant... it was very them and us...*

As implied in the previous comment, the new procedures that came along with the mixing of the customer groups were the second thing the group members needed to get used to.¹² The interviewees also described how difficult it was at first to start asking advice from a person they were not used to turn to. Some group members appreciated from the very beginning the fact that they got to know some new ways of working and could expand their knowledge, but opposite responses were also visible.

I – 5: *Well, my opinion is that Lisa's group, those persons had problems with integrating with our group... There were few people that have already left now, they were not willing to learn about our customers and did not want to swap the customers with us.*

In fact, because of all these changes, all members had to re-evaluate their relationship with the group and re-identify with the group, with the new leader and with the new work assignments. When basically all major “reference points” for identification changed, it can be estimated that in this type of situation re-identification can be very hard. Also increase in the group size might have formed another challenge for identification, as the empirical evidence from previous studies implies that it is more difficult to identify with larger groups. As could be expected, this resulted in some members leaving the company, most likely because of not being satisfied with the changes.

For half of the people, also the supervisor changed, which of course, also meant adapting to different ways of working. The new supervisor came from one of the previously existed groups and now became the head of the whole big group. In general, attitudes towards the new leader were not very negative from the beginning, but naturally, it took some efforts before the new leader was able to pull the group together.

I – 10: *I think in the very beginning, I heard some remarks (regarding the new supervisor (ER))... I think it's also quite normal when you get a new boss... you always try to...you look to the negative sides... But I didn't have that because she was actually the first boss for me... I liked her from the beginning... But I think that people became fond of her very quickly... Eventually she kind of became the “mother figure” for the group...*

¹² The difference between the two types of customers is in the ways of working, involving slightly different procedures.

After all, most respondents concluded that the change went fairly quickly and actually, easier than first thought. In couple of months the situation was stabilised and everybody had found their place again in the group. Now, one year after, the group members clearly agree that the change was for better. Everything seems to be more or less under control now: there is more clarity in the work process, things have become easier to handle, and the database is functioning properly. Also in the organisational level the Order Management group seems to have gained a better position. Being previously weak and submissive to other departments, the group has now become more stronger and flexible, having more influence on decisions. Last year's efforts have definitely started to pay off, as the group leader now can conclude: *"Now we've got the group, and on the whole we got a nice atmosphere there and people are, I think, quite happy and social..."*

So this was the starting point for analysing the group processes in Order Management. In the following chapters I will clarify more in detail how the groups' activities are currently structured, and in Chapter 6. the group cohesiveness and identification processes are considered against their consequences.

5.4.2. Leadership –Structure and Style

The group's structural properties, such as role and communication structures, may have great influence on the degree the members want to identify with that group. The way in which things are arranged in practice might have implications for the development of cohesion within the group as well. Every group needs a leader, but the leadership itself can take many forms, varying from formal and autocratic to informal and democratic. However, in most cases, it is the leader who is the head of the group, being not only responsible for the performing of tasks, but also the one who determines the group atmosphere for a large part. The leader's significance in a group depends, above all, on his/her leading style and the degree of autonomy the members have in the group.

In Order Management group the role of the leader is rather significant and powerful in its own way. The empirical material gave a strong general impression that the group leader is a very important person in the group and that all group members really like her as a person and as a leader. Although using different words for describing her style, all responses were surprisingly much along the same lines. The following comments clarify the leadership style in a nutshell:

I – 7: It's very close and direct... if you need anything from her...she is very enthusiastic and very dynamic...and works a lot. Although sometimes she is very busy, she always has some time for you, private or business matter...so in that sense it's very good. And also the fact that she also gives you a lot of freedom to do your work, so it's kind of guidance or a "maternal hand" on top of your head... If you run in problems or you need her help, you just go to her and she will help you...

I – 10: I like her way... I have a lot of respect... I think she is somewhere between a friend and a colleague... I like it, because it's not like having a boss really... very friendly and informal... and I appreciate it.

Indeed, all respondents agreed that the leadership style is very informal and relaxed without real hierarchical structures. As also visible in the comments above, the most frequently mentioned attributes attached to the leading approach were friendliness, closeness, taking personal interest and giving the members personal freedom. Despite of the tough start after the organisational restructuring, it seems that the "new" leader has certainly found her place within the group and won the respect and trust of its members. Based on the members' responses, trust towards the leader can be assessed as being on a high level. Several comments were emphasising how you can count on her in solving problems, giving support or in defending the department against other departments' unreasonable wishes. Some interviewee's described her as intelligent, practical and as someone who knows what is going on within the group as well as in the organisation. Here is one example:

I – 5: She's not a person that would stand above the group and would only like working on some projects... She wants to still keep her finger on the work we do and she also wants to keep her customers... yeah, she's not above the group...rather one of the group...

From this comment, you can also spot the democratic approach for leading. Apparently, the leader has managed to earn authority and the member's respect by showing personal interest and giving enough freedom, but also enough rules the members need to comply to. In order to apply relaxed and democratic leadership successfully, trust and respect must be a two-way street: being given freedom, the members should also grow their own sense of responsibility towards the group and the assignments. Starting from the initial training of new personnel, it is being highlighted that everybody should be responsible for their customers and for the outcome of the complete order process. To be able to divide the responsibilities within the group, a clear role structure is necessary so that everyone has their own dedicated customers they hold themselves responsible for.

I – 2: *She's your colleague, but she's also your friend, she shows personal interest and personal care, but she can also show that she's the boss. And she doesn't have to show it in a bossy kind of way, so everybody just has respect for her... It's just because the kind of person she is...very unique... I look around the company and see other bosses, and I wouldn't like to work for those after working with Lisa.*

A rather high degree of loyalty was also visible from many responses. In the case of internal transfer or leaving the company, the member's would not like to leave Lisa in trouble with an excessive workload. Another point that came up several times was that people would not like to work in a very hierarchical group structure after the good experiences in this group. As a conclusion, it can be stated that people are very happy with the leadership structure and style exactly as it is now. However, one interviewee brought up a bit different view on the current leadership style by observing some possible negative developments if the leadership gets too relaxed and personal:

I – 3: *She is very good, extremely good in dealing with persons and covering these against other departments with difficult issues...that's an extremely good quality, but she is a bit less good in directing people... in what they should do and what they shouldn't do... She is telling everything in a very straightforward manner, but sometimes she should take the lead sooner... But then again, she wants to have a loose atmosphere within the department – also to balance with the boring sides of the job... I can also see that point, but sometimes I can also see that people might take advantage of some kind of situations...and sometimes it can also have a negative side, because it can also split up the group...*

ER: *What do you mean exactly?*

I – 3: *For instance, usually the same people are taking advantage of specific situations and other people are starting to notice that as well...*

ER: *So you mean that sometimes some people wouldn't work so efficiently anymore?*

I – 3: *Yeah, or sometimes some people are annoyed by the others, because they might think that they (other members (ER)) would have too good relationships with Lisa, for instance, and they think that the others would take advantage of their good relationships...*

ER: *So that they could climb higher somehow?*

I – 3: *Yeah... I am aware of some kind of situations in that light seen...*

To draw a conclusion of this perception, it seems that although a relaxed leadership style is very ideal and contributes to high member satisfaction, it is very important to keep the balance between professional and personal relationships. I will return to this theme more closely in Chapter 6.1.2., while considering the social relationships within the group.

5.4.3. Decision-making and Information Flow

As all members have responsibility over their own customers, there are rarely situations where the group should reach consensus over an issue as a group. Therefore, most internal issues are decided by the group leader. Nevertheless, the majority of group members pointed out that their opinion is being asked and when possible, an opportunity is being offered to influence the decisions before their implementation. On the contrary, at the organisational level the situation seems different. Many respondents feel that a lot of decisions are made in the management level and then only implemented in their department without discussing it first. Although most group members are aware of the fact that their group leader is in between the management and the group and sometimes needs to take action without much influence on the outcome. Thus, the possibilities for influencing and participating in decision-making internally in the group are perceived as good, but at the organisational level most members feel that the department is not having much saying. In general, trust in the group leader's capabilities in making the right decisions is on a high level and much of the information goes via her:

I – 5: Her (the group leader (ER)) way of communicating is very strong...she is always communicating and tells if things are changing or things you should know...she's forwarding some mails and she lets us know everything...it does not happen that we wouldn't receive information from her...

But the communication is also working from “down to top” as approaching the leader is perceived to be easy:

I – 6: When you have a certain informality it makes the chance of communication much more lighter and easier...whereas in a very hierarchical relationship, you feel that you're just wasting your manager's time...

Generally speaking the members are satisfied with Lisa's way of communicating and solving problems. Her communication style was often described as straightforward, open and as happening "right at the spot", meaning immediate reaction on issues. In fact, the group members are quite dependable on her decisions of when and what kind of information will be distributed. In any case, some of the respondents emphasised that the amount of information coming in on a daily basis is so vast that it is good that somebody distributes it further to right persons, if necessary. Because of the role structure within the group some members do have access to more information, as in the case of the Sales Support Analyst and the team co-ordinators. The information is not meant as confidential in the sense that on a request whomever is interested can receive that extra information. As one interviewee stated it is only that "*you have to learn how to get information and how to use it*", and therefore it is not necessary to distribute everything to everybody.

Most of the information sharing within the group happens by means of an e-mail. Secondly, all product changes and long-term issues are placed on a "bulletin board" in the company's internal database. Sometimes the group members also forward e-mails to each other to make sure that others know as well what is going on:

I – 7: ...also to give an example of how close we are, if someone knows that I didn't get the e-mail, they always forward me all the messages, for my information...so the communication works like that!

Another very important means for getting information are of course, the social contacts within the group: overhearing each other's conversations, getting feedback, and "stopping by the coffee machine".

I – 11: ...it's the feedback you get from being in the group, from being able to turn around and to ask somebody a question...and then you have the experience and then usually it's like some sort of informal discussion and you get a lot of, without even realising, you get a lot of experience from people, just by being in the group... You hear people's phone calls and you watch people talking with one another, you learn awfully lot by just being there...

Also the lunchtime and social events outside the work hours were mentioned as good opportunities for discussions. A clear majority agrees that the information flow is well arranged within the Order Management department and that most of the time the members get accurate information on time.

In contrast, it was pointed out several times that there would be a lot to improve with the information flow within the whole division as well as between other departments within the organisation.

Order Management does not have meetings on a regular basis, but in the case of new projects or bigger changes a departmental meeting might be occasionally arranged. Concerning the meetings, the opinions within the group are clearly divided in half: the other half sees meetings as not being constructive, whereas the other half would like to have more meetings in the future. The people who are not so keen on having meetings regularly, pointed out that mostly the meetings tend to focus on minor issues causing a lot of complaining, finger pointing, and being useless altogether, as one respondent stated: *“if we have to meet only because we have a meeting, then it’s nothing and you’re just sleeping the time away...”* This half of people also sees that its better to solve the problems when they are at hand and that communication via e-mail works very well for distributing information. The other half, wishing to have more meetings, would like to have this opportunity to discuss and share information and to have a bit more personal approach in dealing with current issues. Especially with the coming new projects, it was seen useful to let everybody know what is going to happen, even though all members would not be directly concerned.

Whether to have meetings or not, seems to be a “matter of taste” to a certain extent. As the information flow is assessed as being good in general, there is no urgent need for having meetings. Another difficulty of organising the departmental meetings is that then all group members would be in a meeting for an hour and no one would be present to talk with the customers. Yet some of the group members suggested that it would be good to arrange meetings with the internal teams instead of inviting the whole department.

5.4.4. Internal Teams and Communication Networks

Related to the organisational restructuring (in 2000), also a new role structure was created within the Order Management group. The group was divided in three internal teams and each team was nominated a team leader by establishing a new team leader position under the job title of Sales Support Co-ordinator. The reasons for creating this new structure were, first of all, related to establishing better sharing of the workload within the group and to define the roles and responsibilities more clearly. Secondly, it was seen appropriate to create a new possibility for

internal promotion, a chance to reward the group members that had stayed the longest and/or had significantly contributed to the group's activities. In practice this new structure meant reorganising the internal communication structure. It was meant that for more difficult questions, mostly concerning the stock status, the group members ought to first turn to one of the Sales Support Co-ordinators and secondly to the Sales Support Analyst, who then, if necessary, should discuss with the group supervisor.

The new team leaders were given some new responsibilities in order to distinguish them from the Sales Support Assistants. In practice the Sales Support Co-ordinators are more involved in monitoring and allocating the stock among the customers and in checking correct pricing. Furthermore, they have more access within the JD Edwards database programme, for releasing so-called "back orders" for their team members, for example. Consequently, the team leaders receive more in-depth information and are expected to communicate more with the group supervisor, serving as kind of a link between the group members and the management. However, in the middle of all restructuring of the department, the team leader system experienced a rough start and did not get properly established. Most problems were caused by the member turnover, when two of the originally nominated team leaders left shortly after and it was not possible to replace them right away, partially because of not having enough manpower. Therefore, the situation was laying open for about one year, with only one of the team leaders continuing in his position, without having a clear team structure within the group. This is how one member describes the intentions and the outcome of the new system:

I – 6: It's not really clear... I think the concept of team leader has been translated into somebody being a key-user that has more abilities within the group to do certain functions...like releasing back orders... But still it's not a structure in such a way that...maybe the first idea was that if there is a problem, you would first approach the team leader, and the team leader couldn't figure it out, they could turn to Lisa or Tom. That was the idea originally...but I think that the whole group is informal enough that you don't need to have that kind of structure to solve problems... For example, if I have a problem that I can't solve, I try to first see who within the group would have more experience about the particular product or process...

As a consequence, once the teams were not really working as first expected, the group members were left with a great amount of disbelief towards the new system. Most group members interpreted the team leader position as just a "promotion in order to make people stay in the group" and without

having any practical relevance. And now, the team leader position has turned into a more specialised level in between than a directive scene. Also the difference between the team leaders and the group members has stayed rather small, as the new structure did not seem to change anything in the relationships between the people:

I – 4: I don't see it really... it's just that they can release the back orders for you and that kind of stuff, but for the rest... and of course since Mike works here for a long time already, he knows a lot of things... So if I have a question, it's always nice to have him sitting close and I can ask all questions...he just knows a lot of things... But for the rest, I don't really see a lot of difference between the group leaders and the rest of the group.

I – 8: Mike is the leader of the group, but we don't have that kind of feeling with each other that he would be the leader of the group in the sense that "everybody has to do this or that"... We are all working together... I mean they get something...the managers are replying more to the leader of the group, but us, we are looking to each other just as colleagues and we make jokes and so on...

Another issue slowing down the establishment of the team system is the current communication structure, which seems to be very hard to change. As the information flow is very much relying on the group supervisor in general, the members tend to continue on going straight to the group supervisor with their questions and problems. Here are some examples:

I – 4: ... otherwise I always go to Lisa, she knows everything so... It's always handy to have her...but then she is also a lot in meetings...and then it's hard sometimes to find a good answer, because some things just need to be approved by Lisa...and if she's not there, then there is nobody to approve it...

I – 2: It does not work as it was planned to be really... What you see happening now is that if you have a question, you just step directly to Lisa and even if you're a group leader you skip Tom and just go to Lisa... It's easier for me to ask her than go to my team leader and ask... I don't even know who the team leaders are in that sense...it's not even sure that they know the answers to the questions or more than you do...it might be that kind of stuff that you cannot even ask them...

If the group supervisor is absent, the “second hand” of hers, the Sales Support Analyst, seems to be the secondly preferred choice. For the rest, the contacts between the group members and to whom they turn to with less difficult questions seem to be determined as follows:

- persons that used to be busy with the same customer before and have experience on that
- persons who are sitting next to each other
- persons that gave the initial training and/or were helping in the very beginning
- people that are friends with each other.

After all, it must be noted that people talk with everybody in the group and can rely on each other’s help, whomever seems to be available at that moment. Based on the group members’ primary choices for asking work-related questions, the communication structure looks like this:

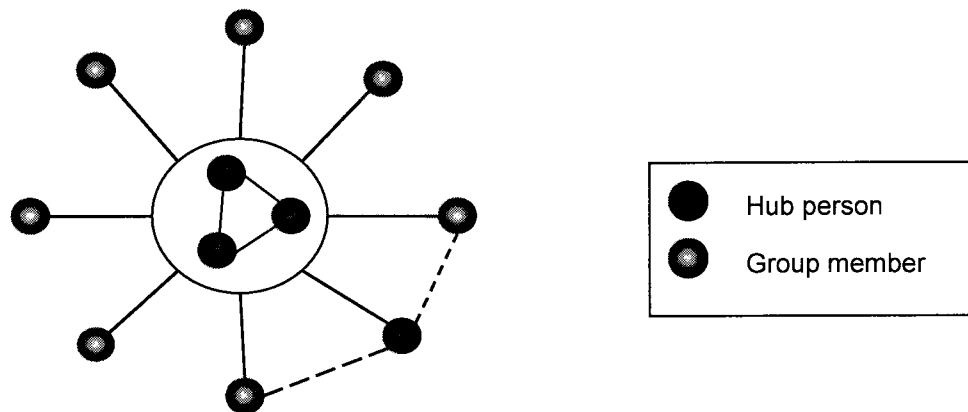


Figure 3. “Star”- communication model.

Currently, the communication network looks like a typical “star-model” having three “hub-persons” in the centre of the star and all group members being linked to one or more of them, depending on their firstly preferred choices.¹³ The “hub-persons” were determined on the basis of the most communication links directed to each of these persons, although there might be, and probably is, a

¹³ The “star-model of communication in this group is only relevant with regards to work-related issues, for socialising and other issues, there would be connections between all group members, resulting to a “completely connected” network model. (See for example: Tajfel, H. & Fraser, C. 1978)

difference in the quantity of links directed towards these three persons. One of the team leaders is placed outside the centre due to the fact that he was just nominated during the time of the interviews, and therefore, has not yet established his place within the structure. However, it can be assumed that he will be “placed in the centre”, once the group members learn to make use of this new opportunity.

The advantage of this model is that all group members have equal opportunities to receive information. The negative side is that more pressure is focused on the central persons as they try to allocate information to all group members. Also the workload among the central persons cannot be divided equally. Another disadvantage is that in this structure it is difficult to divide the group in smaller units, if for example, special projects would so demand. The internal team system was considered to be an answer to the accumulating workload concerning a few persons in the group. If the teams, would be in action as planned, the communication structure would ideally look like this:

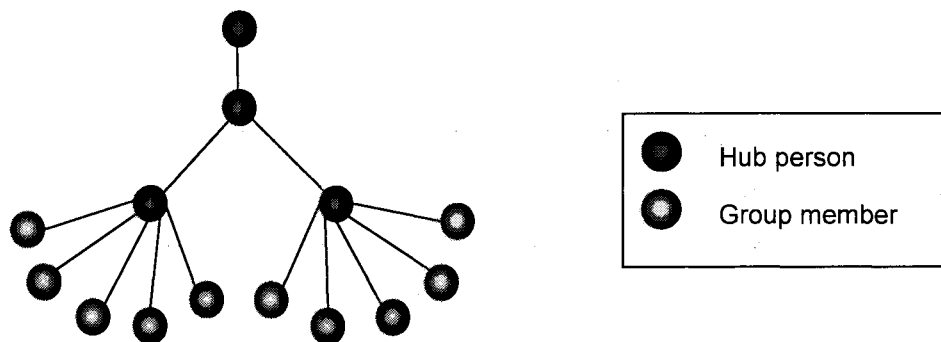


Figure 4. De-centralised communication model.

The advantage of the more hierarchical model is that the communication structure and definition of responsibilities is clear resulting to a more equal division of the workload. Dividing the group to smaller units also becomes easier. The disadvantage of this model is that more focus needs to be paid to the overall information flow, so that all the “peripheral” members will receive the information, and that both of the branches will get the same information.

Although the level of member satisfaction can often be higher in groups with a de-centralised network, centralised communication networks have sometimes proved to improve performance as

well, depending on the nature of the assignments. Therefore, it cannot clearly be said which model would work better in practice. Nevertheless, it can be speculated that the “star-model” will prevail in this group, because implementation of the “de-centralised model” would take too much efforts and would demand some kind of “artificial operations” in order to “force” people to the new structure. First of all, the difference between the team leaders and normal members seems too small:

I – 2: *The difference between the team people and “normal” people is too small...They (team leaders (ER)) should know much much more...because often they don't know... The team leaders can release back orders and stuff like that, but you can't step to them if it's a question of stock allocation, they should know more about this for example... The team leader should really know a little bit more and be more interested in the stock situations and so on... If you have more responsibilities and special capabilities as a group leader then it's different...*

And secondly, the dependency and trust on the group supervisor's advices is very strong in contrast to the team leaders:

I – 3: *... if you want to have that process sooner (that people would turn to group leaders instead (ER))...then Lisa should try to build a bit more “fence” between her and the rest, so that people would only turn to her with most difficult issues.*

Another argument that speaks for keeping the current “star-model” is that the group has a very informal structure where hierarchies are not visible and everybody communicates with everybody. Hence, the “star-model” gives the freedom of asking whomever people prefer without forcing to cooperate only with indicated people. By increasing the possibilities to ask advice, that is, by increasing the number of “hub persons” could be an alternative for spreading the workload more equally. Moreover, it can be estimated that with the current contacts and structure, separation into two different teams would not happen without objection from the members' part, as the following quote implies:

ER: *And do you think that the group will be divided into two halves somehow, once you now have the second team leader?*

I – 3: *Yeah, but not into real two groups I think...the individuals would not allow that I guess...and the job as well, because you still need to take care of the accounts personally...*

ER: *So then it's more like a structure in principal rather than in practice?*

I – 3: *I think so yeah. And also it might be that if some persons are part of one team, they still would be offering help for the persons in the other group...*

ER: *So in your opinion it is important that people would not see any borders and they would still help each other regardless of the team they belong to?*

I – 3: *Yes, that's far more important than having two separate groups.*

6. IDENTIFICATION AND COHESIVENESS AS REPRESENTED IN THE INTERVIEWS

6.1. Member Interaction and Group Atmosphere

6.1.1. Interviewees' Descriptions of the Group Atmosphere

When being asked to describe the group atmosphere, the members were very unanimous. All members clearly assessed the atmosphere as being “good” and some of them evaluated it as “very good”. Expressions, such as “good teamwork, great team spirit, friendliness, relaxed and informal atmosphere”, were most regularly used ways to describe the current atmosphere. Having a good atmosphere in the group was in general evaluated as very important in order to balance with the more “mundane” parts of the job. Humour and jokes are often used to cheer up the fellow group members’ day and many issues, even conflicts, can be solved with humour and positive attitudes. Few members also pointed out the group leader’s important role in creating a nice atmosphere and efforts in “*keeping the group together*”. The group leader herself also highlighted that while recruiting new people special attention needs to be paid in the members’ good social skills, as the job requires daily contacts with several people. This is how one interviewee was happily surprised about the working atmosphere in Order Management:

I – 3: Yeah, there are differences, we are not all same kind of people, but we are dealing good with each other...there are no big issues or problems in the group. The picture I had in mind about having an office job was that in an office there would be three or four desks and two of the persons I don't like at all and one I might like, but not all the time... And so I would be sitting in that office for the rest of my life with these four people that you really have to work with... But in our department this is absolutely not the case!

Although generally the atmosphere is enjoyable to work in, the coin has its other side: “*in every particular group environment you get the element of 'bitchiness' and the envy*”... Naturally, some conflicts between the group members do occur every now and then:

I – 6: Sometimes there can be personal disputes between certain people... But they don't grow out of proportion much... It's just that some people are like that and the way they deal with each other... Some people are just a little bit more drawn into each other...and some other people

are better in keeping a certain distance...in general you should keep that to make the relationship more comfortable... Some people tend to cross that line more easily and get too involved in things...just different personalities...

Most respondents note that the disagreements usually occur because of different personalities, but interestingly enough, the conflicts are more often between persons representing the same culture rather than having a “cultural clash” of some sort. Maybe this is due to the fact that in a multicultural group people tend to be more careful with each other and to keep a certain distance as was referred to in the previous quote. Besides personalities, another cause of disagreements is, of course, often related to the work issues:

I – 7: Conflicts? Well, they are just some small things... daily things in work...but not really conflicts... In order to work in Order Management, sometimes you can have, if you can say that, a conflict when you want something for your client and some other person wants the same things for his or her client... (= conflict in case of a stock shortage (ER)) But then again, we are just speaking about faxes and copiers...how can that be a big conflict?

In any case, disagreements are regarded as quickly passing issues that do not really involve the whole group. Most issues are solved between the persons themselves without involving other group members or the group leader, and this way seemed to be also preferred by the members.

I – 6: I think most people know that it's not good to take sides or get involved in it. They are just disputes...it might take three or four days when those people don't talk to each other and then it gets back to normal... it does not take that long...

Regardless of the small disputes, most of the respondents concluded: “*You got eleven people, eleven different characters, and they get well along with each other*”. After all, the fact that group members do have different backgrounds as well as different personalities, does not seem to stand in the way of being a cohesive group:

I – 7: Although we have a very international group, a lot of different cultures, but yes, I think we are very close as a group. During the day everybody has their own work of course, but we always have time for a small chat and everybody is always available to help each other...

6.1.2. Social Relationships within the Group

The questions related to social relationships among the group members were directed to find out the degree of social and personal attraction within the group as well as to discover how the group members interact with each other. Under this theme, the interviewees were asked if there are social activities organised in the group and whether they are participating in these activities (social attraction). Secondly, the interviewees were asked if they know some of the group members personally or regard them as personal friends (personal attraction). These dimensions brought up more differences in attitudes and opinions than the more general questions about the group atmosphere.

Approximately once a month, or depending on how busy people are, some social activities are organised outside the working hours to which the group members participate with varying interest. These activities mostly comprise of Friday night drinks, dinners, and volleyball, going to a basketball match or even salsa dancing. Sometimes the activities are organised by the company's employee committee when also members from other departments will participate. A clear majority of the group members are participating in these social activities and they are regarded as great opportunities to get to know the co-workers in a bit more personal way as explained below:

I – 2: Yeah, you really get to know one another...but that's only for certain people in the group of course, because you cannot have everybody as your best friend. But definitely you learn to know people a little bit better than just as a mere colleague, personal stuff... And that can be in the actual work floor or a little get together outside, like drinking a beer in a bar or something... Especially in the bar it's more relaxed and you don't talk about work all the time and while you drink a few beers everybody gets a bit loose and you can just talk about a lot of things...

Of course in a big group there are also people that do not like to or cannot participate in the social activities and tend to get a bit more withdrawn from the group. However, everybody's personal choice is appreciated and in that sense there is no evident social pressure for participating and thus, no direct threat for being completely left outside the group's activities when working hours are concerned. In any case these additional social activities are very important in "uniting people" as the next interviewee describes:

I – 7: *I like these social activities...you get to know even the people you don't have much contact with on a daily basis, because the next day it's a big laugh and then everybody is connected by this experience...it's nice to try to break the ice a bit...*

Naturally, the duration of employment is an important factor in determining a person's participation to the group's activities or the closeness of relationships towards other members. This also depends a lot from the personality: some people make quickly friends and immediately take part in all activities, whereas for others "finding a place" in a group might take a bit more time. The following interviewee tells how she eventually became more active in the group:

I – 4: *First I was a bit scared because I had to speak English, so many times I thought "better to shut up" ...but you just have to get used to it... and you have to get to know the people... In the beginning I was very shy...but after a month you get to know the people and then you're not going to sit your mouth shut all the time... And now I know the people really good and we go out with each other and do nice things together. That's when you really get to know the people, when you're not at work...you see people in a totally different environment...*

Seven of the respondents regard one or more of the group members as their personal friends or acknowledge knowing some of them in a more personal way. Only two of the interviewees mentioned that they want to keep their colleagues strictly as colleagues. Although in general people appreciated having close relationships to each other, several interviewees also pointed out some negative sides in having personalised relationships within the group. It was mentioned that sometimes it is difficult to maintain a certain "professional distance" from each other and despite of the friendship to perform as colleagues. Some group members as well as the group leader noted that occasionally it is difficult to distinguish between a strict boss-employee situation and friendly socialising. Additionally, in some cases it was not regarded as positive or comfortable, if the personal relationships would be noticed at an organisational level as this could lead to unnecessary remarks or to a certain loss of privacy:

I – 7: *Yeah, I have friendship with some colleagues, but not really within the working hours...it's not really efficient... I don't always feel that it's positive towards the other colleagues or towards the company... Sometimes it can also be negative, kind of group friendships and this and that... if people can see that... I try at least not to show within the company that I have this personal friendship with this person... But sometimes I get to hear these lines that "oh, you get well along*

with this person” ... I don't like that kind of remarks... I have a good relationship with everybody and I think that's good...and I try to have a good relationship with everyone in the company... I try not to make any kind of enemies in my working environment - it's not worth it...

As a conclusion, it can be stated that the majority of the group members is socially very active, and that the relationships between people are more often than not directed towards friendship:

I – 2: We're getting along really nice and nobody hates each other and so on...and there's no backstabbing... It's more like a group of friends working in that department than a group of colleagues...and that's why we can go out with each other, to a bar, and still have fun... You see in a lot of other departments that people think: "I don't want to go out with you guys, I see you every week" and they prefer going with their friends instead...

6.2. Performance and Co-operation

The co-operation and performance theme was used as an indication of identification and sense of responsibility the members have towards the group and its assignments. According to the theory, high level of identification should be negatively related to social loafing and should therefore improve trust, co-operation and performance within the group. On the whole, the respondents assessed the group's co-operation as good: people work well together and willingly help each other out. The majority acknowledges the importance of co-operation within the group, as sometimes sharing the customers becomes necessary. Especially in the case of absence, the service for customers has to continue and somebody in the group needs to take the work and responsibilities over. It is also in the nature of the work that busy times vary according to the time of the month as well as according to the type of customers. In some period everybody might be very busy and then on other times there might be a lot of differences in the individual workload. Therefore, it seems to be a part of the group culture that people will “check around” and “circulate work” when the workload is unequally distributed:

I – 4: ...and when you see that someone is very busy there is always someone offering help and asking “can I give a hand”, so there is always someone who can help you... That's just something you do in our department, people are always willing to help you...

It is very important to share information and to keep “your finger” on other people’s customers to a certain extent, because when the time comes, the group members have to be able to handle other customers as well:

I – 2: I think it’s nice to have things together and mixed. If you look at Order Management, people are taking Region-1 and -2 customers, so you get general knowledge of the whole process, so that’s a good thing and everybody will know how to deal with each customer. If somebody is ill, it does not matter who takes it (the customer (ER)), everybody would know how to handle it...

Even though the work assignments are rather similar for each Sales Support Assistant, there are a lot of differences in the ways of organising the daily work. According to the interviews, the biggest differences are to be found in the ways of setting priorities and communicating with customers or in the pace of working, as the following comment implies:

I – 2: Everybody makes their own schedule or does not make a schedule...and there you already have one difference... And some people just really manage to take the whole day for doing one task and at the same time other people can do it in one hour... The way of spreading their workload and everything is very different...and also the way people look up information from the system that’s also different...there are people doing things easy way and also people doing it the hardest way...

The most important factor determining the pace of working and the amount of knowledge one has is the duration of employment. Naturally, new members are much slower as they first have to get used to the database and get scrutinised to a certain extent. In this sense creating routines is experienced as a positive development, because each member’s rhythm of working reflects to the overall performance and efficiency of the group. Having all members doing their maximum also enables a more equal sharing of the workload. Despite of the differences in speed, the interviews gave an impression of having high work morale in the group. Everyone seems to have a strong sense of responsibility for their assignments and obtaining and maintaining high customer satisfaction seems to be a commonly shared goal. As long as everyone does the best they can, social loafing is reduced to a minimum and a good level of performance can be guaranteed:

I – 6: *Personally I don't think that there is "slacking" a lot...other people might perceive it differently, but for myself I think not... There are different ways...some people work slower some people more efficiently...but I don't think people slack a lot and let others do the work...*

As the customers are individually assigned to each member, everyone is obligated to do their part and deliver good quality of service. To that respect, people must also be able to work individually. More than half of the interviewees stressed that it is essential to also have personal freedom and independency in their work and considered the creation of own working rhythm as very important:

I – 2: *It gives you the sense that you're the boss in a way as well, like this is your account and you have your stuff and your way of working, it's all yours and nobody is interfering with you, they just let you be... It's really good I think - nobody should really interfere with your work and come and check upon you... You have a really good sense of responsibilities and you're also given a lot of responsibilities...*

It is true that as long as things are running the way they should people are given their own freedom to decide how to structure their work. Certain independency is also a good motivator to do one's best and enables rewarding people individually. To combine a suitable degree of co-operation with independency is all about finding a balance between these two:

I – 6: *I think you have to find a balance between those two...it's always important to be able to work as independent as possible, but everybody should also be able to find a balance and realise if more co-operation would be necessary... But I don't think that you should make co-operation so that people will become dependent on another person...you always have to be able to work by yourself... In that sense individual work and co-operation, they run very close to each other... But when you're dependent on one another, then it's very difficult to reward...you feel as an employee that is not getting fully recognised...and it's hard to make decisions...*

It can be concluded that people generally appreciate the way things currently are organised and also are able to balance between certain degree of teamwork and individuality. However, few respondents mentioned that a more explicit backup system for taking care of the customers in the case of absence should be established with regards to the internal teams for example. The advantage of a backup system within each team would be that then the team leaders would have an overall view of the workload and a high level of customer service can be assured. Currently the group

members are responsible themselves for dividing their customers to others during holidays or illness. A clear majority prefers to give their work to persons who are already familiar with the customers from the past. And of course, everybody wants to make sure that the quality of work is staying good despite of the absence:

I – 11: I have to make sure that my customers are covered and of course I want to make sure that the best people are doing my customers, that when I come back, then I know that my customers are in good organisation...

Trust towards the persons who already know the procedures seems to be significantly higher in comparison to the persons chosen at random. However, this does not necessarily mean that people would actively mistrust each other's skills; the question is more of the degree of trust. And of course it is easier to hand work over to someone you do not have to explain everything from the beginning and it is also regarded as better for the customers if someone familiar is substituting. It seems that trust in other members' skills varies a lot individually: some people do not care that much, whereas others always prefer double-checking the work that is being done. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that as the members share the same goal of giving high customer service, they are willing to help each other out, and in most cases, they also trust each other's work. Most members agree that generally you can rely on what was promised and bigger disappointments can be avoided. After all, trust is a two-way street and always also a question of your own performance:

I – 7: There are differences in the ways in which people keep contact with the client: you have your own way and other person another way, but the result is very good. I trust the person, of course, who is doing my work. And I hope they are trusting me!

6.3. Relationships to Other Departments

Distinctiveness from other groups was assessed with questions related to discovering the relationships between all three departments within Supply Chain Management Division¹⁴ (Order Management, Logistics, and PSI Planning Department). In other words, this theme area was mainly targeted to better distinguish the Order Management members' identification towards their own

¹⁴ Due to the limitations of this study, the results are only based on the Order Management members' opinions, as it was not possible to include the other departments to the interviews.

group. Based on the interviews, there seems to be an apparent distinction between these three departments and their members clearly identify with their own work groups and departments. However, some differences in the degree of identification and cohesiveness between the groups can be perceived.

To recapitulate: the degree of co-operation and information sharing were assessed to be on a high level within the Order Management department and most members agree that difficulties lie more in the ways of interacting with other departments. When the interviewees were asked to assess their relationships towards PSI and Logistics departments specifically, half of the respondents saw a lot of difficulties in the interaction and the other half did not seem to have marked anything drastic or real problems. One explanation for this seems to be that those members that have been working for Order Management for a longer time have observed more difficulties in the course of the years as they also had more perspective on circumstances prevailing in the past.

I – 11: *Unfortunately, it was very very bad relationship between all the three groups PSI, Order Management and Logistics, and it was very them and us, and then integration of JD Edwards made everyone work together again.*

ER: *So it was basically software that brought people together?*

I – 11: *Software, yeah... Because you have three groups that presumably are one time working like this and then eventually after time they all started to diverge a little bit and form their own procedures and own ways of doing things. And that's one of the things why Supply Chain was set up was trying to get people to do their things uniformed. Because JD Edwards forced people to start again, then it's a good chance to get everyone doing the same thing in a same way, which is to share the knowledge basically...*

As described earlier, establishing the Supply Chain was supposed to bring a new start also for co-operation between all three departments. Now it seems that things have slowly started to improve as the procedures within each department start to resemble each other, allowing easier co-operation. However, approximately half of the members can still observe rather drastic separation between the groups:

I – 6: *The change (to Supply Chain (ER)) was not so dramatic... Especially between the departments, although people were meant to work as a Supply Chain, people in PSI feel certain attachment to the PSI process, Order Management sees themselves as a separate group and*

Logistics see themselves as separate... Sometimes we suffer from a very antagonistic mentality; it's us against them in many cases... And especially when mistakes happen, then it's a lot of finger pointing, your department...our department...

It is normal that groups tend to create positive distinctiveness towards each other. Each group wants to become individually recognised giving an opportunity for their members to feel proud of their own work and achievements as a group. In this sense high distinctiveness can be interpreted as an indication of high identification, and as such, it can be viewed as a positive and motivating phenomenon. However, aspirations to create too much of distinctiveness can lead to high competitiveness between the groups and, in the worst case, to hostility towards an out-group. Then high emphasis on one's own group can indeed stand in the way of establishing functional co-operation between the groups.

I – 2: And PSI... they are really like fighting all against the rest...

ER: So you mean they are more like grouped together that way?

I – 2: Yeah, really group together.

ER: More than any other group?

I – 2: Well, my experience is mostly from our floor, from the sales, PSI and Logistics and if you add Order Management, then I would say that PSI is like a group that you cannot come in to. It's like this secret society going on...and they don't give the whole information. They might come to you and ask you to do things they could do themselves... There have been couple or more conflicts, which we just let die, let it be and then it just settles by itself... They are a bit arrogant and grouped together and think that they are all that...they're PSI and they think they are on a higher level, they make fun and stuff like that, they bitch around people and boss around people, but they only do it as a group. When they are separate, then it's ok. They just fire each other up you know...one person in the group starts with something and then they just click together... But as I said it settles itself always really quick, but what's left is a lot of irritation... You talk about it in the group (Order Management (ER)) and you laugh about it and then it's over...

This comment points out very clearly the causes and consequences of strong “groupiness”. As the interviewee observed, as a group the persons are very powerful together and share a strong social identity, but when acting as an individual, the behaviour can be totally different. It is visible in the comment as well, how Order Management responds to the conflict situations also as a group, perhaps then feeling stronger together to handle the problems and to quickly get over with it. In

addition, this example evidently points out the negative sides that can be caused by strong group identification and “extensive” level of cohesiveness. The remaining question is: to what extent identification and cohesiveness, in fact, are desirable in an organisational environment?

6.4. Meaning and Maintenance of the Group Membership

Questions under the “maintenance of the group membership” –theme were directed to discover the behavioural consequences of identification, such as motives to remain in the group and meanings attached to the membership. According to the theory, strong identification can contribute to feelings of job satisfaction and motivation, and should be negatively related to member turnover. Generally speaking job satisfaction seems to be on a rather high level in Order Management and is not directly related to member turnover. The reasons for staying in the group and things giving satisfaction varied individually among the interviewees, but certain items were mentioned repeatedly. It is not necessarily the salary slip or contents of the job that makes people enjoy, in contrast, the most strongly expressed reason for job satisfaction was the social side of the job – referring to the colleagues in the group itself, contacts within the organisation, or customer contacts. Here are some examples:

I – 11: Let’s say that work is not just work... It should be nice atmosphere, pleasurable...so that you can enjoy yourself... The best times I’ve had is not based on the contents of the job always, of course it’s important too, but it is the social side of things...

I – 7: The best part is really the people... Because I don’t find my work very creative... If you look to your job description in Order Management and if you want to do it in a very limited way...just inputting orders into the system, check the invoices and some credit notes...that’s very limited... I find myself happier in my work when I have other things, like urgent order and then I have to go here and there and solve some problems... That gives me more...

I – 4: What do I enjoy the most? Lunch! Or the Friday afternoon... But the best part of the work...umm...I still think it’s the colleagues that I have...so it’s the social aspects on it.

Other frequently mentioned important aspects include independency, freedom and flexibility:

I – 5: You've got your own freedom, and that there is not much pressure from above...and you can make your own decisions, and the people are very friendly... I think that's about it actually!

In addition to these, approximately half of the group members also pointed out the importance of the international, relaxed atmosphere that prevails in the group. As a conclusion, it can be stated that the majority of the group members consider their colleagues as very important factor in creating a nice work atmosphere.

Identification to the group is also manifested in the willingness to leave the group, in terms of within-organisational mobility or leaving the company. When asked whether the group members would like to work internally in another work group, the answers were quite clearly split in half: 5 members said they could imagine working in another department, whereas 4 members stated clearly that it would be impossible for them to change the work group. In any case, a lot of doubts and insecurity were expressed in relation to the ideas about changing. People want to be sure that the change is for better and therefore, they are many times not so easily convinced if some other department could bring them something better than the members currently already have:

I – 6: I think that personally I would have a lot of trouble to get used to something else... I think that we have the most relaxed organisation structure... It would be very difficult for me to get in line with some stricter regime... That I think would be the most difficult...

I – 5: That's what I am a little bit afraid of...if I apply for another job...that it's gonna be less informal...

Nevertheless, the yearly turnover within Order Management department reaches a high level every now and then. The main reasons for a high turnover seem to consequent from the young age of the members and their aspirations of getting further in their career. Many times Order Management is regarded as a nice starting position from where it is easier to apply to another position. Some of the women members also were aware of the “glass-ceiling” effect within Japanese companies, so that in order to get to a higher position within a company as a woman, it would be perhaps better to work for a non-Japanese company.

Of course turnover always affects the work group's functioning. Less manpower available in the group leads to a bigger workload per each member and most drastically, to dissatisfied customers. Therefore, it is very important to establish and maintain a balance and stability in the group. Having some "core group members" has proved to be very important, because members with more knowledge need to be available in order to train the newcomers. In the course of the years the group members have learned to accept high turnover as "part of the work", although losing a good colleague is always a loss for the work group and might, in some cases, also feel like a loss of a friend. This is how one of the longer served employees describes the effects of turnover:

I – 6: In many respects it can be very frustrating...obviously then you have to train the people and that's an investment you're making also personally, because you have to find time from your own work day... And a person who leaves after three or six months...it's very frustrating, because then you have to train another person... And sometimes you loose people who managed to learn the work quickly and were good members for the team and then they might be replaced by somebody who is not so good... Sometimes it happens, but fortunately, in general we've been able to attract good people...quick learners... And in other cases we've been able to manage...and sometimes people realise themselves if it's not going well, they'll leave themselves... I think in the beginning it was very frustrating because of that...you always had to train people and get used to new people... But I think now I'm much more used to it and it has become more of a routine. You also learn to train people more efficiently, so I don't see it as such a problem any more... It makes it kind of interesting as well, because after some time it's nice to get to know new people. In general we've had so much turnover at Ricoh and also in our department that you just get used to that...

Because of the constant changes and new members coming in, more attention needs to be paid on establishing the ways of co-operation and creating a nice atmosphere within the group, as they cannot be taken as self-evident. In fact, it is doubtful if cohesiveness and good atmosphere will prevail in any group without creating suitable circumstances for them.

6.5. The Influences of Cultural Diversity

6.5.1. Similarities and Differences in the Group

As maintained by the self-categorisation theory, actual or perceived similarity among the group members is considered to function as a basis for initial categorisation processes and as a factor that facilitates identification. Consequently, it is believed that similarity can enhance group cohesiveness. Since similarity is recognised as one of the fundamental mechanisms underlying the identification process, topics relating to cultural differences were also thoroughly discussed during the interviews. All interviewees seemed to have a lot to say about these issues, as dealing with many different people and cultures is a big part of their daily work. Under this theme, similarities and differences were assessed both at a group level as well as at an organisational level. The group members were asked to specify if they perceive differences between each other and if yes, what kind, and how do these differences affect their daily interaction. The differences in organisational level were discussed along with questions about the Japanese organisation culture, where the most drastic cultural differences could also be found. (See Chapter 6.5.2.)

All Order Management members seem to relate to different cultures in a very natural way. Most members have previous experiences of living abroad and/or have locally international friends. When the group members were asked to describe the cultural differences that are somehow visible in the group, the most frequently mentioned were people's gestures, temperament and ways of communicating and approaching things. All members agreed, rather unanimously, that despite of having several nationalities represented in the group, the differences are very small and marginal. In a practical level, the differences mostly show in different ways of working:

I – 8: Yeah, culture influences working in Order Management, because there are people from different countries... From my point of view...I respect any culture and other ways of thinking...but if you want to work with each other, and share work with each other, the way of working is different and sometimes there is a possibility that you take some offence...

I – 1: Yes, I don't think that there is so big difference, but at the same time it's very good to know, what different persons coming from various cultures are expecting...as feedback. That thing is good to know and be aware of, but I don't consider this as some sort of fence between people.

As is visible in these comments, people seem to have some kind of awareness of the differences. Even though most of the respondents concluded that because of being familiar with each other, you do not have to be “extremely careful” when dealing with one another. Regardless the fact that differences manifest in the ways of working, they do not appear to restrain effective co-operation or forming good relationships between the members. The group members regard cultural differences rather as some positive “extra” that bring “colour” to the workday. People are very interested to learn about different cultures and new things and therefore, the topics for conversations on coffee and lunch breaks certainly do not only go around the rainy Dutch weather!

I – 10: Sure it's a different atmosphere, but I would say it's positive, not negative... I think it's fun! In a way it's special when you can talk to different people from different countries...

Because the differences between people are perceived as small, several interviewees actually mentioned that in reality it is really difficult to distinguish between the effects of culture and personality. And in most cases, people concluded that after all the personality counts much more than any cultural background:

I – 4: I don't really think that it's so difficult to work with all these different nationalities...because they are all people...and I don't think it really makes a difference from where you came from...that people are not so different from each other... Yeah, because you come from Russia, Canada or Holland for example...it only matters what kind of person you are...

I – 1: It does not matter what kind of culture it is, it matters what kind of person he or she is... Generally speaking people are very much the same...they can be happy or they can be unhappy, but this is what is going on...and that's more important... The culture is second thing and you can always learn it, the best is just to be unreserved...

The assumption that positive evaluation of group membership tends to increase perceived similarity appears to hold true concerning this work group. Despite of acknowledging differences between the people, all group members are along the same lines while perceiving themselves of being more similar to each other than different. In fact, proximity can result in actual similarity when the group members start behaving in more similar ways, as implied in the following comment:

I – 10: *I think after a while...I don't know... It's like we say about being boyfriends and girlfriends...let's say couples... You start looking alike after a while...you start behaving in a same way... I think if you work with certain people for a longer time, you know...you become one... It's really something like that...*

It must be noted that while assessing the influences of diversity in a group, the type of diversity must be specified. Namely, it is more important to perceive similarity on dimensions that are significant for the existence and activities of the group, than on less relevant dimensions. Apparently in this group, the factors that unify people are lying somewhere else than in shared life experiences or cultural backgrounds. The feeling of “being on the same boat” regarding the work assignments, sharing the responsibilities and the mutual interest in customer contacts and in delivering good service can weigh as more significant points for perceiving similarity. Also the fact of having rather young people in the group with narrow age distribution further unifies people's current interests and goals in life. Furthermore, in this group the gender seems to be a far more important determinant for internal groupings than language or nationality per se. The “girls” seem to form quite a tight group together and talk about things as a group in comparison to the “boys”, who seem to discuss about things in smaller groups. I let the following quote elaborate the situation:

I – 4: *True, once you think about it, it could easily happen (division into nationality groups (ER)), but it doesn't. The group is really mixed. So, it's not like all the Dutch people are going together... For example, when we have lunch, it's all the girls that are going...we are all going to sit together.*

ER: *So, would you say that the girls are more connected with each other then?*

I – 4: *Yeah, I think that's true in a way...the girls talk more to each other than the guys do... I really think that's more of a girl kind of thing to sit with each other and talk... It's not the guys that want to talk about everything...*

As a conclusion it can be said that cultural diversity does not seem to cause any particular problems or obstacles for the group's functioning and the members prefer the group as being a mix of different nationalities as well as of both genders. According to the work assignments, keeping Order Management as multinational has also its justification. Due to the international customer contacts it is feasible to have people with a variety of language skills. Having a native speaker as a contact person for various countries most likely also results in better understanding of the needs and desires of those particular customers. In addition, the look of the whole company is very international and,

on the whole, most departments are a mixture of different nationalities. Having other nationalities than only Dutch and Japanese creates a nice balance between these two as well as better represents the ethnic distribution in the area of Amstelveen and Amsterdam.

6.5.2. Language, Communication and Nationality Groupings

Generally the group members have good language skills and you can hear various languages being spoken in the group on each workday. Naturally mastering English, the official language of the company, at a certain level is required before entering the work group. Most members are fluent in two or even three languages: English, Dutch and their native language. Despite of the good language skills, most members do not have English as their mother tongue and therefore, some misunderstanding can occasionally happen as the way of speaking the language and the chosen words might differ individually. Many times you first have to get used to the way your new co-workers speak in order to get their full meaning. In any case, all members agree that real misunderstandings happen rarely and in most instances they are nothing that could not easily be sorted out:

I – 3: Sometimes it happens...some miscommunication...but you can always talk it over again and try to sort it out...but it is because of the international model of the company... The party you are talking to is also in the same situation that you are and you have to be very clear sometimes with your message and sometimes you have to state it very right, or double the output of the information to the other party to make sure that it comes in a proper way and a right way to the other side...

I – 7: Yeah, sometimes you need some more words, some more explanations...with some more gestures you can more easily explain...but at the end everything is solved and done...

Few members stated having more problems in communicating with their customers than internally in the work group or organisation. Understandably phone contacts can be more difficult and not in all companies the contact persons' language skills meet as high level as is required from the members in Order Management. Some members also reported having some problems themselves in getting used to speaking English on a daily basis, but after being shy and silent for the first few

months they became more confident with using the language. This is how one of these members describes the beginning:

I – 3: First when you start up with the job, you are not aware of that situation... You feel like you're disadvantaged to the other side, but later on when you start dealing with all the issues and the job and you know that the other party has the same problem as well and still you have the mutual interest in trying to get the problems solved...and then you can start the communication in a good way and try to get the message clear...

Currently the group appears to have a very open communication culture, where things are sorted out and talked about in a straightforward manner and this, in turn, reduces the chance of misunderstandings and offence to be taken.

I – 2: Sometimes you watch your language and watch what you're saying...but seeing the relationship what we have upstairs (in Order Management (ER)) now, you can practically say whatever you want...You know how to say things and as long as it's said in a right way, you can practically say anything, regardless of someone's origin...

Instead of having communication problems internally in the group, some of the members reported having experienced more difficult problems with the Japanese co-workers. It seems that Japanese colleagues form an important reference group for Order Management members in terms of observing more difficulties in other departments instead of in their own group. This holds true despite of the fact that most members do not have frequent contact or real experiences in working with the Japanese employees. Another interesting observation is that Japanese employees are considered to form national groupings and “cliques” more easily than any other nationality represented. This is so even in contrast to the other dominating nationality, Dutch people, which are regarded to mix easier with the rest of the “international” people. Below are few examples that represent well, how the majority of the group members see the issue:

I – 3: Well, you can see sometimes that there are some groups (within the whole organisation (ER))... Everybody talks with everybody, except the Japanese people...they are a bit left out in that, I don't know why... I can only think of a barrier between the Japanese people and the rest of the company. I think that there is a little barrier somewhere, but for the rest, I don't think so.

I – 2: *You see it in Ricoh that Japanese will tend to go to other Japanese and you see that the non-Japanese will connect with almost anybody.*

I – 4: *I think that the Japanese are really friendly, but I think in this company when the Japanese are only with each other they are different...like at six o'clock when everybody else went already home then all Japanese just stay and they are working really different together than when everybody else is around...I think so...and I think that the Japanese guys really stick with other Japanese guys...*

In any case these all are rather remote observations about the Japanese fellow-workers as the Order Management members do not have to “*deal with them*” so often. Internally in Order Management there are not really any nationality groupings or other cliques, except the fact that the girls tend to stick a bit more with each other. On the whole, despite of their origins and backgrounds, people find it very easy to blend in at Ricoh and to start quickly feeling “at home”:

I – 6: *I think it's just interesting (the cultural differences (ER))...especially for the Dutch part...it somehow sort of “disharmonises” it a bit, then they also are aware of other nationalities... You can build nice, I think more comfortable relationships with them as well... Because what I noticed when I worked in a Dutch company...it was a very Dutch oriented group and they were very comfortable themselves, but in that sense I found myself much more alienated in the atmosphere, whereas here I can be more myself...*

Especially some members with non-Dutch origins noticed that they have not only blended in at Ricoh in the course of the years, but also have become more “*dutchified*”:

I – 11: *Dutch people are a lot more expressive or whatever...and that was the problem I had when I first came here...like “how can you say this, you're not allowed to be talking about this kind of thing” you know...ok, that's something because of being here for several years now...It kind of amazes me, I realise doing the same things as well...guess I'm a lot more open about subjects, whereas when I would be back in my home country I would be frowned upon...*

In all and all, majority of the group members seem to be comfortable about where they are at the moment and have found their place in Order Management group as well as within the whole organisation. When the interviewees were asked whether they would like to work for an

international company also in the future, the answers were very unanimous: despite of their origins, the members would definitely like to continue working in an international atmosphere. More doubts were expressed regarding the question if the members would like to work for another Japanese company in the future. Many people were not convinced if the atmosphere would be as relaxed and nice as it is at Ricoh.

7. SUMMARISING THE ESSENTIAL FINDINGS

7.1. Social Identification within the Group

To recapitulate, the first research question related to identification was aimed at finding out how strongly do the group members identify with their work group. For this purpose social identification was defined as the cognitive connection between an individual and the group: perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group. In order to be able to assess whether an individual identifies with the group and how, the group members' behaviour and affect were treated as the consequences of identification and by these phenomena being "visible", it was possible to discuss the related issues in the interviews. Although the theme areas were not clearly distinguished to measure either identification or cohesiveness, the following dimensions can be distinguished as most relevant for assessing identification: perceived or assumed similarities between the members, the group's relationships to other organisational departments and desires to maintain the group membership. In this chapter, I will summarise the most important findings regarding identification by taking a closer look specifically on these dimensions.

Originally the hypothesis that could be drawn from the theory and my previous observations was based on the assumption that identification in this particular group would be on a rather low level. This was based on the fact that the group members had very heterogeneous origins and therefore, it could be speculated that common and unifying characteristics between the members would be difficult to find, resulting in low identification towards the group. I will approach this hypothesis from the viewpoint of similarities and differences between the group members, given that similarity is the most fundamental antecedent of categorisation process and thereby also a basis for initial identification.

As already described in the previous empirical section, despite of the various cultural backgrounds, differences between the group members are considered to be rather small and marginal and as not having much practical relevance on the group's interaction. Various responses demonstrated that fellow group members were perceived as more similar than different. As a conclusion, it can be stated that in this group *perceived* similarity seems to be on a high level, even though it is more unlikely that the members would have many *actual* similarities. Nevertheless, what is more important regarding identification process is indeed the perception than the reality. Causes for

heightened perceptions of similarity can be many, but the most important ones relating to this group can be estimated to include: proximity, positive evaluations of cultural heterogeneity within the organisation and the work group, and actual similarity on more relevant dimensions.

Heightened perceived similarity does not, however, directly imply loss of national identity. It must be noted that a person's identity is assumed to be built on two dimensions, social and personal, which come into play depending on the situation and context. Therefore, in some occasions one's personal and more culture-bound identity can be stronger than the social, and vice versa. Most likely, the group membership influences more strongly the social side of the identity, which is more prone to quick changes and hence, the perceived similarities would show more on the social identity dimension. Based on these ideas, it can be concluded that the preliminary hypothesis about cultural diversity's negative impact on identification does not seem to hold true in this group.

Another important way to estimate social identification is to take a closer look at the relationships the group has towards its surrounding departments. In this case the questions were specifically targeted to finding out the relationships towards PSI and Logistics departments, which revealed clear distinctiveness between these groups. The members of each group acknowledge belonging to their own group and respond to others accordingly. This can be interpreted not only as a sign of a rather high identification level, but also as a high level of cohesiveness, as Order Management often approaches conflicts between the departments as a group.

When looking at the dimension "maintenance of the group membership", more controversies could be found. Namely, in a straightforward manner, high turnover within a group could be interpreted as low identification and low cohesiveness. However, as explained in the empirical section, my conclusion is that in this particular group high turnover does not directly imply low identification. This impression is based on the facts that the overall job satisfaction seems to be on a high level in the group and willingness to leave the company or change the work group among the current members is rather low. In addition, high turnover might result from the fact that Order Management is considered to be a good starting position for a career and because of the good situation in the local labour market it seems easier to change work place. Thus, when turnover is interpreted this way, it is not in contradiction with the statements of high identification.

In this study, findings related to performance, co-operation and trust are in accordance with the theory, claiming that high level on these variables can be interpreted as an indication of high

identification. Also negative results on social loafing- dimension verify this impression. Furthermore, a closer look on the leadership- dimension also indicates high identification. As Hogg (1988, 114) expresses it, “the leader can be considered as the prototype or most stereotypical member of the group, the individual who is the best exemplar of all the group’s characteristics and thus best represents the group, or is the group.” Inferred from this, the acceptance of the leader as a prototype of the group explains the high reliance on the leader and thereby can also be considered as a factor that facilitates identification in this particular group.

Based on all before mentioned dimensions, it can be concluded that identification in this group seems to be on a rather high level. The reason why I use expression “rather high” is to indicate the strength of overall identification to be clearly above average, but still not on a maximum level. This “margin”, between high and extremely high, is necessary in order to consider the possible individual differences in the strength of identification as well as the effects of high yearly turnover. Therefore, instead of claiming that each individual would identify as strongly, it is more plausible to give a more moderate estimate on the overall level of identification. After all, it must be noted that the aim of this study was not to measure identification with some clear-cut figures and therefore, the conclusion is always based on the “best estimate” that still includes a great amount of interpretation.

In comparison to the extent of identification, the issue that can be dealt with more certainty is the way in which identification is assumed to happen in this group. The interpretation is that identification towards the group will happen quite easily. First of all, this is due to the fact that identification is rather inevitable conceptual process that is driven more by perceptual circumstances than by motivational goals. Following from this, identification is more likely to happen subconsciously and without systematic weighing of other options. It is doubtful if a person even recognises being busy with questions “who am I?” or “do I want to identify with these people?”, while becoming part of a category.¹⁵ In comparison to the process of cohesion forming, an individual is more likely to be consciously involved in determining whether he/she likes the fellow group members or not.

¹⁵ Naturally, this type of weighing of different options is likely to occur before accepting the job.

Secondly, according to the self-categorisation theory, the more accessible the category is, the less input is required to invoke the relevant categorisation. In this case, having the group already defined by the organisation, identification is then only a question of whether one will identify with that group or not. Therefore, my understanding of initial identification can be described as a kind of “yes or no - perspective”. If identification does occur it will most likely result in maintenance and cherishing of the group membership, showing as altruism towards other members, trust, cohesiveness etc. In case identification does not occur, distinctiveness among the group members is likely to grow, or tendencies to identify with other groups and to change work place completely will intensify. In this group, example of this situation can be found from the time period when the group members needed to re-identify themselves with the new composition of Order Management, which was realised along with the organisational restructuring. Those members who obviously were not able to re-identify in the new settings left the group, allowing the remaining members to re-identify and rebuild group cohesiveness.

7.2. Group Cohesiveness

Concerning cohesiveness, the aim of this study was to assess to what extent the work group is cohesive by discovering the ways in which cohesiveness manifests in the group. Group cohesiveness was thought to represent *qualitative* and *meaningful* interpretations of group membership as opposed to identification, which was understood as a more perceptual and a more cognitive mechanism. In this sense the affective and interactive side of group behaviour comes closer: how does one experience group membership and what does it offer in terms of social relationships? As was the case with the identification concept, cohesiveness was also operationalised with the aid of various theme areas. One of the most important themes was designed for discovering the social relationships within the group. In addition to this, other significant dimensions relating to cohesiveness were: communication structure, internal team system, and group atmosphere.

In line with my observation and the preliminary hypothesis on identification, I expected cohesiveness to be on a rather low level. This assumption was mainly based on the impression of the group with no distinguished group spirit, weak leadership and less personal relationships between the members, resulting in weak cohesiveness. Additionally, this interpretation was based on the laws of the presupposed causal connection between identification and cohesiveness.

Therefore, if identification was estimated as being rather low, accordingly cohesiveness was assessed as low. In the following I will demonstrate against the empirical evidence how my initial conceptions of cohesiveness turned out to be untrue.

The theme "social relationships within the group" was approached with the aid of two concepts: social and personal attraction. Social attraction was mainly assessed in terms of general interest towards fellow group members and participation to the group's social activities. Personal attraction was understood as personal friendships between the group members and showing as several interpersonal contacts also outside the working hours. Although these two concepts are clearly distinguished from each other in theory, they seem to be closely linked in practice. The social identity theory suggests that social attraction between individuals would not merely vary quantitatively, but also qualitatively depending on the nature of the relationship between individuals. Therefore, resulting from common category membership and group behaviour (belief similarity, social support, likableness etc.), social attraction tends to shift towards personal attraction as the relationships develop and become more idiosyncratic. (Hogg 1988, 109.) Hence, referring to this linkage, I did not exclude personal relationships while analysing the degree of cohesiveness, although the social identity theory stresses that it is specifically social attraction that is important in assessing cohesiveness as a group level phenomenon.

Keeping these quantitative and qualitative variations in mind while analysing the results, I first reviewed both, social and personal, dimensions separately concerning each interviewee. On the social attraction- dimension, 8 members were evaluated as being socially very active and 3 members rather in-active.¹⁶ Based on this, following scale can be presented to visualise the overall degree of cohesiveness on the social attraction -dimension:

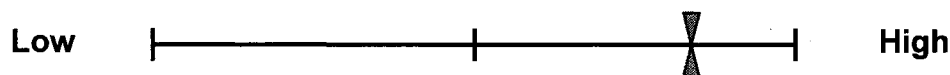


Figure 5. Group cohesiveness assessed with regards to the *social attraction* -dimension.

¹⁶ Footnote: Evaluation of "activeness" is here mainly based on the social activities group has outside the working hours.

On the personal attraction -dimension, 7 members acknowledge having personal relationships with one or more group members, while 2 members reported that they wish to keep their colleagues “strictly” as mere colleagues. The remaining two members did not have personal friends in the group, but did not express objection to this possibility.

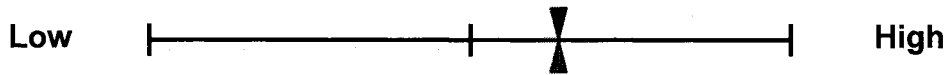


Figure 6. Group cohesiveness assessed with regards to the *personal attraction* –dimension.

As can be seen in these axes, cohesiveness within the group seems to be on a high level on both dimensions – not extremely high, but certainly above the average. Naturally, the duration of employment is one of the most significant factors that determine the nature of social relationships as well as the degree of individual social activeness. As Hogg (1988, 108, 109) reminds, affective reactions in first encounters, official encounters and the early stages of relationships are more likely to be at the level of social attraction, because similarity will be perceived more in terms of general similarities shared with a number of other people rather than in terms of very personal constructs.

As described in the theoretical framework, interpersonal attitudes within these two attraction dimensions can range from highly positive attitudes to highly negative ones. The fact that there are rarely disputes within the group and little schisms between some persons only occur occasionally also indicates high cohesiveness. The group atmosphere was generally evaluated as very good and relaxed with a lot of humour, jokes and high group spirit. Undoubtedly the new leader has also greatly contributed in creating a nice working atmosphere and has, from her part, facilitated the forming of cohesiveness. Additionally, open and direct communication between the members as well as the “fully- connected” communication model speaks for high cohesiveness and good co-operation. There are no visible hierarchies between the members and everybody seems to appreciate the informality to a degree that they would not like to change it for anything else. As became clear with the establishment of the new team system, the group members are not so willing to be divided into two separate teams. At least “*the individuals would not allow that*” without any objection, as one interviewee concluded.

When the current situation is compared to the situation before the organisational restructuring and merging of Order Management into one group, the difference in the degree of cohesiveness becomes clear. And now, despite of the rough start, the group has gone far since those times. Most members re-identified with the new group and forming of cohesiveness became possible. Now the group is one unity with clear structure and without distinction to “them and us”. Thus, it can be concluded that the members’ opinions are in line with my observations: the situation has drastically improved from what it was a few years ago.

Interestingly enough, it seems that cohesiveness has developed well in this group, although the group size became much bigger when the three Order Management departments were merged together. Namely, previous studies show that as the group gets larger, the group is more prone to become internally divided into subgroups and friendship cliques, which although internally cohesive, tend to lower the overall cohesiveness (Hogg 1987, 99). Also, with large amount of people within one group, personal relationships between all group members will become increasingly difficult. However, in this particular group, increasing group size does not seem to have caused these types of problems. Some potential explanations for this can be distinguished. First of all, the group structure might be one factor preventing the emerging of subgroups: the group is very mixed in terms of nationalities and both genders are equally represented. Secondly, the age distribution is quite narrow, which prevents people of certain age to form cliques or dominance over others. And thirdly, the informal relaxed leadership style can be considered as one factor “pulling the group together”.

However, it must be noted that the evaluations of cohesiveness, although based on visible group behaviour and attitudes, are always relative to a certain degree. The conclusions are always dependable on the context in which the situation has been assessed and therefore, in my perception cohesiveness remains to be a very group specific concept. As explained above, comparison to the previous situation in Order Management revealed great differences in the degree of cohesiveness, whereas comparing the group to another work group could lead to a different interpretation. For example, if Order Management would have been compared within the same organisation to purely Japanese work groups or to PSI department for example, estimates on cohesiveness could have been lower than claimed here. It also must be noted that group cohesiveness seems very susceptible for changes. As demonstrated here, changes in leadership, group size, procedures or high member turnover are all factors that easily reflect to cohesiveness and suggest reconsidering the situation.

7.3. The Influences of Identification and Cohesiveness on a Group

As previously explained, identification and cohesiveness are considered to have various positive effects on the group's functioning. To mention a few, identification is linked to increased commitment to the group, altruism and cohesion as well as decreased withdrawal behaviour (such as absence, turnover and social loafing) among the group members. Positive consequences of cohesiveness, in turn, are thought to reflect as improvements on co-operation, performance, intra-group communication, job satisfaction and group spirit. Throughout this study these positive effects have become obvious and most of them could also be observed in the target group. The reason why I once more bring up the influences here is related to the fact that the influences of very *high* identification and cohesiveness cannot always be straightforwardly interpreted as being only positive. In fact, extremely high identification or cohesion can also be a cause of various negative consequences.

Concerning identification, negative impacts show above all as high distinctiveness into groups, which in its extreme form may lead to out-group hostility and intense competitiveness. Extremely high cohesiveness can also cause external problems leading to a group that is basically impossible to enter from outside – a kind of “*secret society*” as described by one of the interviewees. Internally, very high cohesiveness on the personal attraction -dimension can consequent to personal friendship cliques within the group that, although cohesive from inside, tend to lower the overall cohesiveness of the whole group. In its most severe form, these types of subgroups can easily lead to internal polarisation of the group, where the risk of having peripheral members and unequal treatment of persons would grow. Therefore, while assessing cohesiveness, the social side of attraction should be emphasised instead of the personal attraction. Social attraction -dimension is more important already for the reason that some people might like other members as their fellow group members or as colleagues, but not as their potential personal friends, without this directly implying less cohesiveness.

In any case, these two dimensions are very practical as they bring more depth to the analysis and bypass the danger of reducing the entire phenomenon of cohesiveness under vague and one-dimensional conception of interpersonal attraction. In addition, while considering cohesiveness on both dimensions, qualitative and quantitative evaluations become possible as expressed in the previous chapter. Following from this, you do not only have to wrestle with the problem of determining whether a group is cohesive or not, but you also have to consider questions of how and

to what extent is the group cohesive. When both dimensions are systematically assessed and compared with each other, the result is not merely based on a “feeling” of cohesiveness.¹⁷ However, in my opinion, leaving some room for interpretation is not so terrible, because after all, what is important in cohesiveness as a phenomenon is not a prompt figure that indicates its degree, but the actual impacts it has on the group.

Now once I have dealt with the problem how to assess cohesiveness, one problem remains: to what extent should a group be cohesive in order to benefit from the positive influences of cohesiveness, but yet to prevent the negative ones? Unfortunately, I doubt if any theorist was so far (or ever will be) able to give unambiguous answers to this question. Neither can I. However, my conclusion of cohesiveness is that in practice a level that can be placed on either one side of the “average” should be more than enough. In the graph below, I visualised the scope of cohesiveness that, in my understanding, is suitable for the positive consequences to occur (shown as the coloured area).

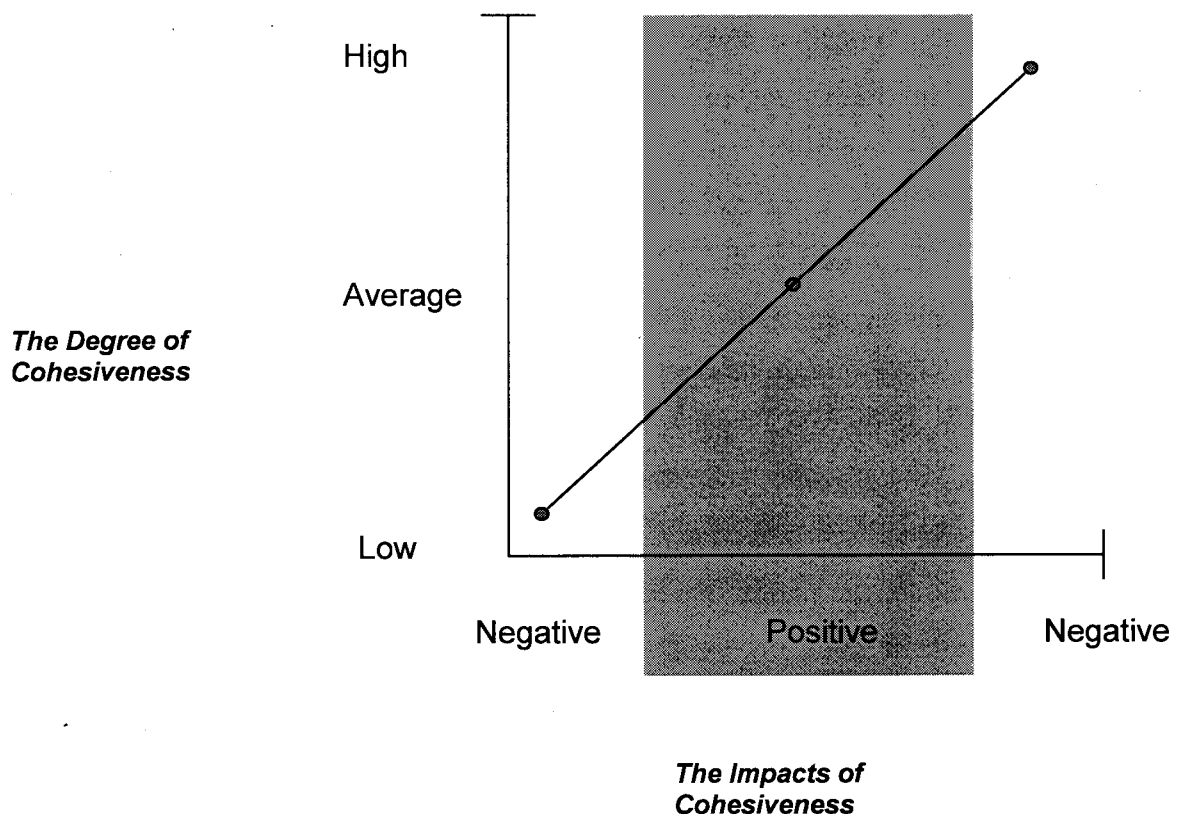


Figure 7. The scope of positive impacts of cohesiveness.

¹⁷ Assessing cohesiveness merely based on a *feeling* was obviously a fact that many social psychologists were, and still are keen on correcting.

Additionally, it depends on the group in question, its context and ways of interaction, to what extent is cohesiveness suitable or worth pursuing for. It is likely that in military units or sport teams cohesiveness plays a far more important role than in organisational work groups.¹⁸

Concerning this particular group, not many negative impacts can be distinguished and hence, it can be concluded that cohesiveness is on a rather functional level. For example, the classical consequence of high cohesiveness, the groupthink -effect, could not be considered, because the group is not usually involved in decision-making as a whole group or would need to seek consensus on a high level in their daily operations. Nevertheless, one issue that can be interpreted as potential problem resulting from high cohesiveness is related to the personal relationships among the members, and more specifically, to the boss-employee relationships. As became evident from few comments, some group members mentioned how it is sometimes difficult to “keep the professional distance” or to actively distinguish between friendly socialising and a strict boss-employee relationship. Few members also expressed their worries concerning the development of some subgroups and if some members’ close relationships towards the leader would start splitting up the group.

7.4. Cultural Diversity in Relation to Social Identification and Group Cohesiveness

Cultural diversity was considered from two perspectives: with regards to the influences it has on the group’s daily activities and regarding the impacts cultural differences would have on the identification process and forming of cohesiveness. The first mentioned perspective has been already dealt for the most part in the empirical section and in relation to identification process, being then assessed in terms of similarities. Here I will consider more specifically, whether high cultural diversity is in negative relation to identification and cohesiveness as formulated in the preliminary hypothesis.

Based on the empirical results and as expressed in the previous chapters, identification and cohesiveness seem to be on a rather high level in this particular group. The results also indicate that the group members do not regard cultural diversity as a factor that would hold the group back from establishing good co-operation and social relationships. Instead, the group members were perceived

¹⁸ In a work group you probably do not get literally shot in your back, if there is lack of co-operation.

to be more similar than different from each other. Derived from this, it can be summarised that the empirical material did not provide proof for the hypothesis: cultural diversity's interference with the identification process or creation of cohesiveness appears to be minimal in this work group.

Although the results indicate that cultural diversity does not function as an obstacle for identification or cohesiveness, this does not mean that cultural differences or personality characteristics would not exist in the group. As described earlier, most group members highlighted that *"we are not all same kind of people, but we are dealing good with each other"*. In the group cultural differences are rather treated as personality attributes that bring positive influence, *"colour"*, to the work routines. People seem to be aware of the differences to a certain degree, but the better they learn to know each other, the easier is the interaction. (This being a fact that is probably true in any type of group.) Hence, cultural diversity can be expected to have marginal impacts when other differences or similarities are more dominant. (Such as gender, age, interests, etc.) Furthermore, when the entire organisation is mixed with various nationalities, it is easier to feel *"similar"* with all the other dissimilar ones, as everyone is on the *"same boat"*. When dissimilarity is valued positively, it also can be a source of attraction as previous studies imply. Consequently, identification to a group can be expected to be easier when it is not a question of identifying oneself with a group of one or two nationalities. (Given that the new member is not representing either one of the target group's nationalities.)

It can also be speculated that cultural diversity's impact on identification would be less strong in comparison to its impact on cohesiveness. This is due to the fact that members are being assigned to groups by the organisation and therefore, identification functions more as a mechanism of acknowledgement. (Described earlier as the *"yes or no – perception"*.) Whereas cohesiveness has more to do with evaluating whether one likes to be involved with the group members and to what extent. Cultural diversity is not necessarily an obstacle for cohesiveness, as has been shown in this group, but the creation of cohesiveness might take longer when the similarities leading to attraction are not so visible.¹⁹ The social identity theory maintains that the creation of cohesiveness should be primarily assessed in terms of social attraction that mostly is based on more generic and stereotypic assumptions of similarities than on actual personality characteristics. Therefore, being socialised to the group's norms, one begins to resemble more other group members (depersonalisation) and

¹⁹ It must be noted that this idea is only based on assumptions, because the average times leading to the development of cohesiveness are not known.

thereby becomes also socially more attractive. This process specifically tends to diminish the perceived differences between individuals, even though the actual similarities may remain. Most likely cohesiveness forms along these lines in each group, but the time it takes may vary according to the type and purpose of the group.

One more above-mentioned issue needs further consideration. Namely, the argument above implies that cultural diversity would have different impact on identification than on cohesiveness. In fact, this refers to the possibility that cultural diversity would have different intensity on different parts of the causal process where identification and cohesiveness forms. (Visual presentation of causal process is displayed in chapter 3.3.) This raises further questions about the nature of the causal relationship between identification and cohesiveness as well as about their relation to the determinant factors involved in the process. I will focus on the issue of causality more in detail in the following chapter.

7.5. Causal Connection between the Concepts

The last theme for consideration relates to the possible causal relationship between identification and cohesiveness. As mentioned earlier, the attempt of this study was not to provide real evidence on the causality, but to form an idea of the connection between the concepts. This connection is worthwhile considering because although defined as clearly separate concepts, identification and cohesiveness seem to be very closely linked to each other. First of all, while using various determinants to measure either one of these concepts, it could be noticed that many empirical facts could be interpreted from both viewpoints. Secondly, the processes in which identification and cohesiveness form are closely linked together, one presupposing the other. In this chapter I will elaborate the latter circumstances.

The classical way of understanding the relation between identification and cohesiveness is to presume that the concepts have a causal connection with each other, in which cohesiveness may form as a result of the identification process. Group belongingness and identification would therefore always require initial categorisation. This way, cohesiveness is treated as one of the consequences resulting from identification. Consequently, the strength of identification would influence the nature of cohesiveness. In other words, if identification is low, it is likely that cohesiveness is low or does not exist, whereas high identification most likely stimulates the creation

of high cohesiveness. On the other hand, the idea of causality also suggests that cohesiveness would determine identification in a way by reflecting “backwards” in the process (circular causal process). Then cohesiveness can be thought as a factor that further strengthens identification and belongingness to a category.

Presented in this light, the causal system seems very logical. However, there is another question that needs to be taken into account: is it possible that cohesiveness would exist before identification? The social identity theory does not explicitly exclude this possibility, but also does not clearly demonstrate the potential circumstances in which this would occur. Within this research, one possible example of such a situation can be found from the organisational restructuring when the three Order Management groups were merged together. In this situation it seemed that cohesion did exist before identification in a way – the smaller groups were internally cohesive before the members re-identified themselves with the new group as a complete entity.

In the light of this empirical example, it can be concluded that the causal relationship between identification and cohesiveness holds true and that usually the direction of the process is through categorisation and identification to cohesiveness rather than the other way around. The determinants that influence the forming of each of these phenomena might have impact on many aspects of group belongingness, but the quality and strength of the impact may vary, as demonstrated with the cultural diversity example.

8. CONCLUSIONS

As concluding words I would like to share few ideas about doing research on identification and cohesiveness. First of all, I must admit that these concepts were not the easiest “bite to chew”. As interesting phenomena as they are, their practical operationalisation still was, and probably always will be, a big challenge. However, the choice of using multiple determinants and consequences as leads to identification and cohesiveness turned out to be rather successful. Instead of leaving me struggling with the classical problems of determining “whether a group is cohesive or not”, these various themes supported each other giving clear indication of the degree of cohesiveness and identification.

In the past many theorists have perceived the use of several variables confusing and complicated. It might be true that in some cases one variable indicates otherwise than another one, but in this case all factors were pointing to a same direction. (Maybe I was lucky?) So, in this respect my experiences of using many variables instead of only few were above all positive. Yet it is true that the intensity may vary: some theme areas strongly pointed out cohesiveness whereas others were less clear about it. Another justification for using many items is that in empirical research settings it is better to have more information than too less, as nothing can be after all indicated with clear-cut figures. On the other hand, as you approach a real-life situation in its entire complexity, it is very hard to determine which variables to include and which not. Understandably, some indicators turned out to be more important than others, but foreseeing this possibility, the chosen semi-structured interview method provided enough flexibility for adjustments along the course of the interviews. As a consequence, the interview method and the chosen theme areas were able to lead me to issues that were essential for assessing identification and cohesiveness in the group.

In general, the results were along the same lines with the theory and in that respect there were not so many surprises. The only unexpected result was that the degree of identification and cohesiveness turned out to be on a higher level than first estimated based on the initial observation. In that sense it was good to combine observation with the thorough interviews since both contributed in giving as complete picture of the situation as possible. The initial observation served also as good support for designing the questionnaire and providing a little bit of history perspective on the group’s activities. Nevertheless, the interviews were the actual source of information that either confirmed or disconfirmed the presuppositions.

Most of the results of this research cannot be straightforwardly generalised, as they are very group specific. However, one discovery that is most relevant in a general level is the fact that the results raise a question whether cultural diversity is directly in a negative connection to forming of identification and cohesiveness, as various theories propose. As concluded earlier, this empirical example did not support this connection. Derived from this, it would be reasonable to try to establish a better understanding of the conditions where cultural factors are more influential and where not, rather than directly claiming that multicultural groups will mostly run in trouble when it comes to cohesiveness.

More importantly, this research furnishes new ideas for further development and future research. The subject itself is very vast and full of possible applications, making this presentation only a scratch on its surface. In my opinion, this subject would especially call for longitudinal research in which the same group would be observed and interviewed for a longer period of time. This would provide valuable information of the ways in which identification and cohesiveness develop and change over time and what are the key factors influencing them. Another interesting way would be doing comparative studies among different types of groups.²⁰ This would be a good application especially when discovering the fundamental questions involved in the influences of cultural diversity. An additional focus for future research that was also pointed out by some theorists (e.g. Deaux 1996) is to establish a better understanding over the causal processes as well as mapping out the consequences and determinants in a more systematic way. After the experiences of doing this research, I can only agree.

In any case, identification and cohesiveness form an interesting pair of concepts, which is balancing between psychological and sociological approach. Therefore, it is not a surprise that social psychology has so well adopted these concepts. Yet it depends on the point of view and the target of research, which direction you take. Unfortunately the empirical way has more often been forgotten. My standpoint in this issue is clear: you cannot do without it, but you cannot solely rely on it. As the experimentally oriented research settings seem to rule nowadays, Turner (1994, 536) reminds as well: "Group behaviour does not represent a one-way street from the psychological to social. Identifications are cognitive structures, but they are also social products. Purely cognitive analyses of social perception and behaviour, currently in fashion, are only part of the story." Thus, instead of

²⁰ Already with this empirical target this a tempting option, but within the scope of this research it was considered as a "too ambitious attempt".

forcing the whole complexity of group phenomena under procedures and measurements, I would also recommend taking a look at the real-life situations every now and then, and considering factors relating to affective associations and interdependency between the people.

Based on the experiences gained from this research, identification really appears to be a concept that is easier to measure quantitatively and fits better in experimental laboratory circumstances. Although being more clearly defined as a concept, identification was surprisingly hard to assess in practice based upon the group members' impressions and perceptions. In contrast, cohesiveness turned out to be easier to get a hold on and to estimate with the empirical material. Following from this, my view is that in a real-life situation you can actually gain much richer information over cohesiveness, as it allows you to consider the phenomenon from various viewpoints.

Even though the social identity theory is obviously best applied in experimental research settings, it also gave a good basis for empirical research. This is due to the fact that unlike many other theories on cohesiveness, the social identification model makes it possible to approach group level phenomena from the individual point of view. Meaning that by studying individuals, their perceptions and attitudes, it is possible to summarise the effects on a group level. Thus, breaking cohesiveness for example into social and personal attraction -dimensions makes the whole entity easier to control.

Most likely the best way to address identification and cohesiveness would be by combining both of these methods: first experimentally measuring identification, then conducting empirical research on cohesiveness. And what comes to the research on work groups, interdisciplinary research would probably bring the most fruitful results. Only one question remains: what would we achieve by doing all these different types of studies? Well, one possible answer is that there appears to be a demand for bringing cohesiveness into a practically applicable level. Many guides written about leading international teams for example emphasise the role of cohesiveness without really explaining what it is all about, how can you reach it and why should you. As a consequence, cohesiveness appears many times in the literature as some mysterious phenomenon that either exists or not, and when it does exist, it would have a kind of strange force that turns everything good somehow...

So, what is apparently needed with cohesiveness is simply de-mystification. This research was my attempt towards better understanding. Undoubtedly this has been the goal since the 40's when the research begun, but it seems that various researchers have been "lifting the curtain" from various sides without still revealing the essence of cohesiveness. Maybe now it is time to once more combine all efforts and pull that curtain.

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Appendix 1.

QUESTIONNAIRE for Order Management Spring 2001

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1) Name**
- 2) Nationality**
- 3) Age**
- 4) Stay in the Netherlands** (only non Dutch members)
 - How long stayed? How long is planning to stay?
- 5) Experiences of living abroad previously** (all)
- 6) Education**
- 7) Position at Ricoh Europe B.V.**
 - Roles & responsibilities?
- 8) Starting at Ricoh Europe B.V.**
 - Duration of employment?
 - Previous work experiences?
- 9) Starting at Order Management**
 - First impressions, problems?
 - Introduction / training? (> What kind? How long?)
- 10) Organisation culture**
 - Impressions of Japanese organisation / Dutch working culture?
 - How is Ricoh Europe perceived?

1. STRUCTURAL PROPERTIES OF THE GROUP

- 1) Changes within the Order Management**
 - Organisational restructuring: establishment of Supply Management Chain
 - Merging three Order Management groups together > opinions and perceptions of the change period (evaluation of the situation, attitudes relating to change)
 - Impacts of the change (Increasing group size, changes in communication / group atmosphere?)
- 2) Teams**
 - Impacts of new team arrangement? (How does work in practice? Improvement or not?)
 - Attitudes towards the arrangement?
 - Team leaders, division into smaller teams
- 3) Leadership and power**
 - Change of the supervisor > Impacts on working / group atmosphere? How was new leader welcomed? Any problems? Change for better or worse?
 - Describing the new leader (approach, leading style)
 - Attitudes towards leading style
 - Group structure and power differences among members (hierarchies?)
- 4) Autonomy and decision-making**
 - Interdependency among the group members concerning the assignments

- Scope of decision-making (How independent?)
- Asking advice from a colleague (What kind of matters? Asking from whom?)
- Decision-making on the general matters in Order Management (Who decides? Possibilities to influence the decisions? Any group decisions / need to seek consensus?)

5) Meetings

- Meetings in Order Management (What kind of meetings? When? What issues?)

6) Language & communication

- Native language?
- Other language skills? (Dutch?)
- Problems in using languages? Misunderstandings? (What kind? How often? With whom?)
- Participation in conversations within the group (Equal participation or some persons left outside?)

7) Communication networks and information flow

- Describing the information flow > enough and accurate information, on-time?
- Source of information for: A) work related issues, B) social events? (other group members, group leader, e-mail etc.)
- Topics for discussions in the group (Only work or also social?)
- Key persons (ones possessing a lot of information)
- Sharing of information (Equal or being left outside?)

2. GROUP ATMOSPHERE & MAINTENANCE OF THE MEMBERSHIP

1) Group atmosphere

- Describing the atmosphere in Order Management (Good / bad? Serious, business-like and efficient or warm, relaxed and friendly?)
- Comparing the group atmosphere to previous years? (Before the changes to Supply Chain / merging of Order Management groups)
- Group specific humour or jokes?
- How do the group members get along with each other in general? (Any schisms between persons?)
- The occurrence of gossiping, envying, or talking behind people's backs? (What kind? How often? Impacts on the group?)
- Disagreements? (How often? What issues? How solved?)

2) Meaning of the membership (motives & satisfaction)

- How do the members of Order Management fit together? (Good / bad? Any radical differences between people? (Cultural differences, personality characteristics))
- Perceptions of fitting into the group? (Fits well / does not fit?)
- Appreciation towards this particular group (How important it is to be part of that particular group?)
- Most enjoyable part of being in the group?
- Most important sources of job satisfaction? (The salary, colleagues, or interesting work assignments, something else?)

3) Turnover

- Tendencies to change work group (Why? Changing to what?)

- Relating to high member turnover? (Influences on working? Being positive/ negative about frequent changing of members?)
- Most motivating reason for staying in Order Management currently? (The salary, other group members, interesting work assignments, being part of this company, or something else?)
- Future plans? (How long planning to stay?)

4) Cohesiveness / Social relationships

- Importance of the current colleagues? (Enjoyable working together / not enjoyable?)
- Considering work group members as personal friends? > Knowing colleagues personally? (Who? How many?)
- Most contacts with whom? (Way of spending lunch breaks?)
- Spending time with colleagues outside the working hours? (How often? What kind of activities? Should there be more shared activities? What kind?)

5) Relationships to other groups

- Co-operation and relationship with the Logistics and PSI departments? (> After the change to Supply Chain – relation better or worse now?)
- Competition between these different departments?
- The importance of being part of Order Management in comparison to other groups (Pride / group identity?)

3. MEMBER INTERACTION AND CO-OPERATION

1) Performance and co-operation

- Nature of co-operation within the group? (Good / bad? Helping each other? Any particular problems?)
- Estimating the performance of the group? (Already efficient or a lot to improve?)
- Participation in the group's activities and putting effort in working? (Equal participation / social loafing?)
- Which is more important: increasing teamwork and co-operation or independency?

2) Trust

- Trusting the group members? (Equal trust or radical differences?)
- Sharing work in the case of absence or work overload? (With whom usually?)
- Primary choice for asking advice on A) work problems B) personal matters?

4. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- Differences between people? (A lot or less? What kind?)
- Differences' impact on work? (Is there impact? In what ways occurs?)
- Attitudes towards cultural differences? (Disturbing / interesting?)
- Perceiving oneself as more similar to others than different?
- Similarity on interests and values?
- Potential changes in (national) identity after working at Ricoh Europe / living in The Netherlands?
- Opinion about working in an international work environment? (Also something for the future?)
- Opinion about working for a Japanese company? (Also something for the future?)