

**THE USE OF COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION
STRATEGIES IN A WORK GROUP**
A Case Study of Four Meetings

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>This case study was conducted in cooperation with a small Finnish company in 2012 that operated on international markets and employed a culturally diverse staff. The aim of the study was to form a deeper understanding of how members of a culturally diverse work group employ accommodative strategies and their effects on group membership. More specifically the study aimed at gaining a better understanding of how and when convergence and divergence manifest.</p> <p>The data was collected through nonparticipatory observation at the work group's natural environment. The gathered data consisted of four videotaped meetings that transcribed provided 89 pages of text. Qualitative content analysis was the chosen study method.</p> <p>Based on the findings it appears that the work group applied both accommodative strategies, convergence and divergence, simultaneously. The data indicates that there is a strong connection between the use of accommodative strategies and group membership. The data also indicates that if cultural generalizations are made they usually belittle the other, and that failures in technologically-mediated communication can result in the use of accommodative strategies. Specifically, remote workers can quickly become considered as out-group members, and collocated workers as in-group members, if the tool used to communicate with malfunctions.</p> <p>As a conclusion more studies focusing on the effects of accommodation strategies are needed. Work groups should pay more attention on issues benefiting its cohesiveness, gaining a deeper understanding for cultural differences, and developing procedures that minimize the effect of potential technological breakdowns on communication.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin vuonna 2012 yhteistyössä suomalaisen yrityksen kanssa, joka toimii kansainvälisillä markkinoilla ja työllistää kulttuurillisesti diversiteetin henkilöstön. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli ymmärtää kuinka kulttuurillisesti diversiteetin työryhmän jäsenet soveltavat viestinnän mukauttamisen strategioita ja niiden vaikutusta ryhmäjäsennyteen. Tutkimus pyrkii myös syventämään ymmärrystä miten ja milloin konvergensi ja divergensi ilmenevät.</p> <p>Aineisto kerättiin havainnoimalla työryhmää sen luonnollisessa ympäristössä. Kerätty aineisto koostuu neljästä videokuvatusta palaverista, jotka muodostavat litteroituna yhteensä 89 sivua tekstiä. Tutkimusmetodiksi valittiin laadullinen sisällönanalyysi.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksien perusteella näyttää siltä, että työryhmä sovelsi yhtäaikaaisesti molempia mukauttamisen strategioita, konvergenssia sekä divergenssiä. Tulokset myös osoittavat, että viestinnän mukauttamisen strategioiden ilmenemisen ja ryhmäjäsennyden välillä on vahva yhteys. Lisäksi tulokset osoittavat, että mahdollisten kulttuurillisten yleistysten luonne on toista osapuolta vähättelevä ja teknologiavälitteisen viestinnän häiriöt voivat johtaa viestinnän mukauttamisen strategioiden ilmenemiseen. Erityisesti etätyöntekijät voidaan nähdä jäävän helposti ulkoryhmään ja läsnäolevien työntekijöiden muodostavan sisäryhmän jos viestintään käytetyssä työkalussa ilmenee toimintahäiriöitä.</p> <p>Johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että viestinnän mukauttamisen strategioiden ilmenemistä tulisi tutkia lisää. Työryhmien tulisi kiinnittää enemmän huomiota ryhmäkoheesiota ylläpitäviin asioihin, kulttuurillisten eroavaisuuksien syvempään ymmärtämiseen sekä toimintamallien kehittämiseen, jotka minimoisivat mahdollisten teknologisten häiriöiden aiheuttamat vaikutukset viestintään.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing need to gain a better understanding of communication in the workplace. Communication is however often taken for granted though its complexity exceeds most cultural phenomena (Williamson 2007, 331). In recent years and in the wake of migration patterns and technological advancements issues of culture, diversity, and internationalization have garnered wide attention and are restructuring work life. Information technologies and the increased pressure for efficiency and competition are shaping work and putting pressure on managers that lead teams of both collocated and remote members (Kelliher & Richardson 2012, 5). These changes are affecting the cultural make of organizations who depend on effective small group communication (Harris & Sherblom 2011, xiii–17).

All work groups are different and as there is no one best way of doing things (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997, 13), versatile and contextual solutions are required. Cultural differences cannot be isolated to the external environment but exist within the organization, whether the workers themselves are aware of it or not (Adler & Gundersen 2008, 63). Intercultural communication is no longer the responsibility of the few but a prerequisite for all workers, both home and abroad (Varner & Beamer 2011, 5). Organizations are starting to understand that all their operations and messages are inherently intercultural by nature (Cheney et al. 2004, 396). Research on small group communication is however scarce and has mostly been conducted in a laboratory setting (Poole & Hollingshead 2005, 21–50). Furthermore, much of the studies on intercultural communication have focused on producing a list of culture-specific traits and a contextual and situated approach is needed (Lahti 2015, 54). The rise of TMC also requires a more detailed understanding of effective communication (Klitmøller & Lauring 2013).

This case study was conducted in cooperation with a Finnish company in order to gain a better understanding of how issues of communication accommodation and group membership are communicated in this culturally diverse work group. These issues were considered within the theoretical context of communication accommodation theory (CAT) as it is a broad yet pragmatic communication theory that allows to take into consideration various aspects of communication (Soliz & Giles 2012, 3–4), as opposed to other, more confined theories. The work group was observed in its own natural environment.

1.1 Background and Aim of the Study

As work-life is becoming increasingly demanding new practices for enhancing working in groups need to be developed. In particular, understanding the role of communication and its effect on human behavior in work groups is exceedingly important. Thereby, the main objective and aim of the study was to form a deeper understanding of how members of a culturally diverse work group employ accommodative strategies and its effect on group membership. More specifically the study aimed at gaining a better understanding of how and when convergence and divergence manifest, and also if these strategies have an effect on the level of group membership. As most of the research on small group communication has taken place outside of work, in a laboratory setting (Poole & Hollingshead 2005, 21–50) it was deemed important to approach the matter from a naturalistic perspective. It was also concluded that research that provides unfiltered data captured in a natural environment could possibly provide unique aspects to these aforementioned issues. CAT, the theoretical premise of this study and its main component, is a widely acknowledged communication theory but thus far has provided limited information on more established relationships. Though extensively applied, CAT research has yet to answer when interpersonal outcomes are the direct result of accommodative behaviors. (Giles 2008 in Baxter & Braithwaite 2008) Well-designed meetings and meeting effectiveness are strongly connected (Baran et al. 2011). As many work groups employ technological communication tools the research also touches on the issue of TMC and its effect on small group communication. Communication as a phenomenon is receiving more interest than ever before. This study attempts to deepen the understanding of accommodative behaviors in work context.

In the following chapters, the reader is presented an overview of speech communication, culture, and intercultural communication, all integral features of this study. Also the study's structure will be outlined and presented shortly.

1.2 Communication and Work Environment

Speech communication

Communication is an integral part of life and the constitution of our societies. It is the “act of creating and sharing meaning” (Trenholm & Jensen 2008, 25) and its importance is heightened in micro-societies such as organizations and work groups that rely on effective communication. Work-related communication can be challenging as the message is typically

composed of facts, data and other non-human-related issues. In other words, the message can contain atypical content in comparison to everyday communication and tends to be purpose-driven. Though workers try to communicate pure information to one another, there is always a human element involved in the process as both the receiver as well as the sender has a unique way of understanding the world. (Parker 2009, 1–3.) Furthermore, the socio-economical context of a work group, which often contain issues such as members' roles, hierarchy, and norms, may require an individual to produce and receive messages correctly, perhaps more so than in out-of-the-office social relationships. In the following paragraphs issues regarding collocation, remote work, and TMC are shortly discussed as they relate to the findings presented later in this study.

Collocation, working in close proximity to others, has traditionally been seen as a more efficient way to get things done as opposed to remote work. Nan, Johnston and Olson (2008) however argue that the assumption of collocation exceeding remote work in its efficiency might not always be correct and that it too can have disadvantages. Their laboratory-based experiment indicated that collocated members did not perform better than the remote members though they had access to faster communication channels and the advantages of in-group resources. The experiment further indicated that collocated members favored other collocated, or in-group members, over remote members and would on occasion ignore important information exchange with remote workers. In-group favoritism can thereby be seen as leading to sharing resources with only other in-group members and the loss of possible resources from remote workers. (Nan, Johnston & Olson 2008, 77) Burgoon et al. (2002) note that in-group favoritism occurs especially in situations where the tool used by the members to communicate with malfunctions and communication between parties comes to a temporary halt. Establishing rules that entail procedures for TMC challenges might help in ensuring that resources are shared equally.

In the last decades TMC has seen a noticeable increase and simultaneously teleworking and virtual teams have become commonplace (Quan-Haase, Cothrel & Wellman 2005.) According to Harris and Sherblom (2011) TMC, or communication through an electronic device, contain three dimensions that characterize it that are synchronicity, media richness, and social presence. Synchronicity hereby refers to the timeliness and instantaneous aspect of message delivery. Media richness refers to the amount of available verbal and nonverbal cues. Social presence refers to the perceived amount of participation; in other words, is the interlocutor focused on the interaction at hand or perhaps simultaneously multi-tasking.

(Harris & Sherblom 2011.) TMC research has however often assumed that in order for a TMC event to be effective it requires high levels of all three characteristics and an inadequate amount of any of these characteristics can hinder communication. Walther (1995) offers another viewpoint and proposes that instead of viewing TMC as limiting, and opting out characteristics of one's own communication, people will simply adjust and replace those elements they have a hard time expressing and find a different approach. TMC may even lead to relationships that exceed traditional face-to-face interactions. This, and the increased commonness of remote work, has highlighted the need to gain a better understanding of TMC as it appears that the three characteristics are not necessarily the most effective way to study communication in a technologically-mediated environment. (Walther 1995.) Using electronic communication tools can at times be problematic. Delays or malfunctions in TMC effectively separate those working remote from their collocated peers, hinder the flow of communication (Burgoon et al. 2002), and can cause relational strain. Furthermore, TMC delays appear to strengthen the level of memberships between collocated peers and conversely weaken them between those working remote and those working collocated.

Perhaps paradoxically, there is however also indication that TMC delays may in fact benefit those working remote (Burgeon et al. 2002; Nan, Johnston & Olson 2008). It appears that TMC delays can force the remote worker to focus on the most important aspects of work, the primary tasks, whilst neglecting other, secondary tasks that collocated members might spend too much time on. Put differently, TMC requires remote workers to communicate more efficiently and maintain a strong task-oriented approach to work, which can be difficult to accomplish. The evolution of technology adds a variety of possibilities for making the most of working remote (Gergmoprez & Zigurs 2009, 23). Thus, having the possibility to choose from a number of communication tools increases the ability to succeed in small group communication. It is however imperative to gain a better understanding of how communication evolves in technologically-mediated environments, and how and where communication breakdowns occur in order to choose the right tools. Given the recent developments in the array of communication tools, the challenge will not be in finding a suitable tool, but in choosing the right one. Having the right tool is important but even more important is applying a strategic perspective on meeting management. In the following paragraph the essential elements of successful meetings are discussed.

Principles of successful meetings

The study by Baran et al (2011) indicates that well-designed meetings and adequate, fairly distributed information to and between group members, have a positive influence on both supervisor-employee relationship and meeting effectiveness. They also propose that regarding the meeting as a process, or designing it as incorporating a processual foundation, could assist in creating meeting procedures that take into consideration the needs of individual participants and information distribution. This in turn would improve personal relationships and members' perceptions of the company. (Baran et al 2011.) In addition to distinguishing the meeting process as a key element in effective work meetings, Baran et al (2011) view that equal treatment and engagement of group members, and adequate explanations regarding made decisions are the other important areas. In fact, all work meetings, perhaps with the exception of creative meetings, should be built on these three facets as they provide a stern, yet an inclusive, base to build successful meetings on. However, it is rare to find companies that approach meetings in such a strategic fashion, though much time is invested in attending them. In addition to forming a general meeting strategy, a secondary strategy for TMC should be agreed upon. Han and Beyerlein (2016) go even further as they propose that companies need to look beyond the everyday practicalities of meeting management and incorporate a holistic approach to TMC that is built into the company culture and employee relationships. Though this can be difficult to do, an easy way to start would be to have every worker or work group produce a so-called code of conduct that would outline detailed descriptions of expected and approved behavior. This could help work groups in making the most out of their meetings as well as remote work. It is necessary for companies to realize that not only is accessing meetings remotely becoming increasingly easier with smart phones but that it leads to a situation where TMC and its management becomes a critical success factor.

Han & Beyerlein (2016) propose that an inclusive approach is needed and underline the importance of utilizing cultural diversity and participant involvement in solving difficult scenarios. Baran et al (2011) encourage supervisors to employ practical procedures in engaging participants such as communicating candidly, asking for comments, and modifying their communications to match specific needs. However, this is not enough. Participants should be empowered and encouraged to take active roles within and outside the group, whenever possible. The classical top-to-bottom supervising strategy is finding competition in the increasing need to maximize individuals' input. This also means that the way small groups are researched needs to evolve. More emphasis needs to be put on group-driven rather than

research-imposed approaches and as Keyton (2016) notes, new methods used for capturing audio and video are needed. Groups evolve, so too much the way they are researched.

In the following paragraph a short overview of culture is presented.

Culture in communication

The idea of communication between members of different groups is arguably as old as the human civilization but it was not until Edward T. Hall (1959) that the term *intercultural communication* was ultimately coined and adopted by scholars worldwide. The pioneering work on intercultural communication by Hall and his predecessors came to mark the beginning of a new field of scientific enquiry into human communication that in the following decades and in the wake of major global socio-economic changes, became a highly discussed phenomenon and attracted the attention of both scholars and laymen alike. The turning of the century saw intercultural communication becoming a global phenomenon not limited to the few, but experienced by many as the possibilities to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds increased manifold. The following paragraphs present an overview of culture which is arguably an integral feature of intercultural communication.

Culture as a concept and its effect on human interaction is often elusive and hard to grasp. According to Castelán Cargile (2005, 99) culture is at the same time possibly the most useful and the most useless term that people employ in their communication. The meaning of the word culture is highly depended upon the context in which it is used, and what it is used to refer to. It is commonly used by people to interpret life, and the lens through which they view it (Wierzbicka 2005). It is highly likely that the commonplace use of the word culture adds to its elusivity, even when confined to the context of communication. Castelán Cargile (2005, 102) notes that culture is often thought of as the software of the mind, something that has been programmed into people. Though humans are born without any preconceived conceptions of the world, the idea of predetermined and downloadable guidelines to the many facets of human behavior passed on to us by other members of our immediate society is but a simplified notion of a much broader issue. As human beings we form our own unique realities as we grow, constantly renegotiating and replacing the old information with the new. Adler and Gundersen (2008, 19) view that people distinguish other people as representatives of different cultural groups if they perceive a notable difference in their ways of life. Often the inability to comprehend the behavior of others is explained in terms of cultural deviance.

After all, it is not uncommon to hear one explain the actions of another to result from culture and cultural differences (Castelán Cargile 2005, 99).

Regardless of its all-encompassing nature or perhaps because of it, studies have produced a plethora of definitions describing culture (Schneider & Barsoux 1997, 19). From broad and all-encompassing definitions such as “culture is communication” by Hall (1973, 97) to general guidelines as “what is observed must be deciphered” by Schneider and Barsoux (1997, 20) to context-specific “culture is varieties of common knowledge” by Holden (2002, 98), the definitions of culture are abundant. According to Hirokawa et al. (2003, 215) this is because studies have emphasized different aspects of culture and consequently produced four main categories of definition: knowledge and beliefs, behaviors, artefacts, attitudes and values. Though definitions vary, most of them share common nominators such as that culture is learned, shared and passed on (Hirokawa et al. 2003, 215–216). This is evident in Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner’s (1997, 13) definition of culture as a “collectively shared system of meanings”. Piller (2011, 15) shares a similar stance as culture being something people have or belong to, or that it is something socially constructed. Sarangi (Sarangi 1995 in Verschueren, Östman & Blommaert 1995) proposes that cultural studies should consider the relational and processual aspects an individual might have with his or her environment, and consequently dispel the notion of culture as a complex entity. These aforementioned definitions offer interesting insights to culture as they attempt to structurize and clarify the phenomenon. However, culture as a phenomenon is so contextual and situational even for a group of definitions to capture, that studies should focus on describing the phenomenon, rather than merely define it.

Fortunately it seems that others are arriving at this conclusion as well. In recent years new insights on culture have surfaced that approach the phenomenon as a whole, rather than as separate units, and incorporate a strong contextual aspect. Abdallah-Preteille (2006, 475) views that people draw from the cultural information they have when needed but otherwise tend to focus more on the actual communication event, its participants, and the situation. Varner and Beamer (2011, 15–16) refer to situational cultural adaptation that finds the communicators creating a contemporary culture where the context is more important than the communicators’ cultural backgrounds. These new approaches to culture no longer regard it as a one-dimensional, one-way entity, but as a dynamic and boundless whole that is both context-based and individual-based (van Meijl 2008; Samovar et al. 2010; Saint-Jacques 2012). This will further the understanding of the linkage between culture and communication,

and benefit the study of communication as a phenomenon. As interaction between members of different cultural groups has increased in the past decades and consequently the need to understand cultural characteristics and differences (Samovar et al. 2010, 4) it is imperative a deeper understanding of the linkage between these two phenomena is achieved.

Intercultural communication

In recent years the recognizability of intercultural communication, and our understanding of its multifaceted nature and role in human interaction has grown (Samovar et al. 2010, 4). A heightened awareness of the existence of the phenomenon and its applicability is necessary, as the world will continue to witness political and economic changes that effect migration patterns, influence the cultural make of work groups, and increase interdependencies in all levels. A culturally sophisticated mindset is required to keep pace with these changes, and to understand the nature and applicability of intercultural communication. (Thomas & Inkson 2009, preface.)

Today, intercultural communication is ubiquitous and commonplace (Piller 2011, 8) largely due to technological advancements and ever-increasing interconnectedness of our societies and businesses. Rather than being an occasional occurrence, intercultural communication has become a necessity for many organizations as their staff, clientele, and marketplace have become culturally diverse. Organizations find themselves in situations where the end-user of their products and services might not fit in their usual demographics, or the intended target group does not react as would be expected. These culturally diverse operating environments provide both opportunities and challenges for many organizations as they attempt to understand and foster the inherently intercultural aspects of their operations. (Cheney et al. 2004, 394–396.)

The foci of intercultural communication is on communication events between people from different cultural backgrounds, the individual characteristics of such events, and communication outcomes and psychological processes (Varner & Beamer 2011, 30). Kim and Gudykunst (1988, 19) view that the study of intercultural communication is challenging as it appears to have both universal and individual characteristics. As the scope of the phenomenon is wide, scholars have defined, described, and approached intercultural communication from various directions over the years. As a result, many of the characterizations place emphasis on different aspects of the phenomenon. Sarbaugh's (Sarbaugh 1988 in Kim & Gudykunst 1988)

description for instance represents the more inclusive and straightforward aspect of the phenomenon as he proposes that all communication events are intercultural by nature. Varner and Beamer (2011, 28) on the other hand define intercultural communication simply as interaction between “people from two or more cultures”. Kim & Gudykunst (1988, 12) view intercultural communication as “direct face-to-face communication encounters between or among individuals with differing cultural backgrounds”. Though limited in its scope of what is regarded as a communication encounter, this definition can be seen as containing both the micro and macro level of intercultural communication. It incorporates both the individual and group-related cultural features that are, assumably, distinguishable and unique. According to Griffin (2012, 398–401) these group features can have a major effect on our communication. He views that as we simultaneously belong to a number of social groups our group identities are present, though perhaps inactive, in our everyday dealings with other people. In other words, communication is intercultural if our social identities are activated. (Griffin 2012, 398–401.)

The aforementioned definitions and descriptions highlight many important aspects of intercultural communication. They are however simplified and condensed descriptions that represent only particular segments of intercultural communication whilst excluding the rest. Part of the challenge of understanding the phenomenon might lie in its connection with culture. According to Saint-Jacques intercultural communication and culture are strongly connected (2012, 45). Varner and Beamer (2011, 26) view that this interconnectedness determines what is communicated and how, and that it is through communication that people learn and share culture. Reciprocally it is through the influence of culture that people acquire their communication skills (Porter & Samovar 2003, 213). It is worth noting that intercultural communication is traditionally seen as problem-oriented (Dougherty et al. 2010, 164) meaning that communication between people from different cultural backgrounds is more challenging than communication between people from similar backgrounds. If communication and culture are as strongly interconnected as would appear, and communication between people from different cultural backgrounds tend to be problematic, what then is required for communication to be successful? Knowledge of culture and a heightened awareness of cultural context according to Saint-Jacques (2012, 45). There is a connection between culture and intercultural communication but the degree and effect of that connection remains yet unclear. The study of intercultural communication needs to move beyond mere descriptions that focus on certain elements and are thus exclusive by nature, and focus on the actual communication event instead.

Abdallah-Preteille's (2006, 480) holistic approach to intercultural communication represent the more inclusive and comprehensive descriptions on the definition spectrum, and captures the essence and scope of intercultural communication most accurately. Her approach to intercultural communication emphasizes viewing communication events from a situational and context-based approach, rather than assuming all intercultural communication encounters are inherently similar by nature (Abdallah-Preteille 2006, 480). This line of thought takes into consideration the individual characteristics of a particular communication event and the contextual environment in which it occurs. Furthermore, it acknowledges the role of culture in intercultural communication as well as proposes the consequences situational and contextual elements can have on interaction. (Abdallah-Preteille 2006, 480.) This contemporary view approaches intercultural communication as a whole and addresses many, rather than few, dimensions of the phenomenon. In accordance with this view, Malgorzata Lahti (2015, 54) notes that real-life interactions are complex and producing step-by-step guides to predicting behavior can be misleading. She notes that scholars should acknowledge the need of "culture and cultural memberships as fluid, situated and socially constructed" (Lahti 2015, 54). These approaches represent the most promising direction for the future of intercultural communication studies. All communication events should be viewed from a situational and context-based standpoint that incorporate a cultural dimension but are not limited by it.

In the following chapter the structure of the study is presented. This is to provide the reader a clear structure as to how the study progresses, and what can be expected.

1.3 Structure of the Study

The structure of this study, and the remaining chapters, consist of the following three main elements. A short description of each main element is also provided.

1. Theoretical premise of the study
2. Data collection process
3. Findings and future applications

In the study's theoretical premise the reader is provided an overview of CAT that is integral for this study. The theory's history and developmental stages are presented as well as its two main accommodative strategies that provide the basis for the study's research questions.

The data collection process explains how the data was gathered. In it, the reader is presented with a table that entails a detailed account of discovered categories.

In the Findings section of the study, six extracts from the data are presented with each containing a short analysis. The study ends with a short discussion noting its limitations, and suggestions for future applications.

In the following chapter the reader is provided a thorough overview of CAT, its two main accommodative strategies, and its features.

2 COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY

The theoretical framework of the study was based on the group's composition, the context in which the interaction took place, and earlier research on the topic. As the observed group consisted of participants who originated from different countries and convened to discuss task-related work issues, a communication theory was chosen for the analysis and interpretation of the data. In the following chapter small group communication is shortly discussed.

2.1 Small Group Communication

Effective and meaningful group communication, and group communication skills are essential to efficient group performance. As the observed group consisted of eight people, it meets the requirements of what is considered a small group. Therefore, for the framework of this study, small group communication needs to be addressed. Small groups are unique, as there are never two completely identical groups, as there are no two completely identical individuals. The more a group is aware of its personality and the tasks set to it, the better it will perform. The ability to analyze what is happening in the group and why, is positively associated with increased feeling of satisfaction. Satisfaction at work leads to better performances which in turn tends to result in positive regard. (Keyton 1999, 4–6.)

A small group is defined as a group that is small enough for each member in the group to be able to remember one another, communicate with each other, and distinguish in-group members from out-group members (Brilhart & Galanes 1995, 7; Hirokawa et al. 2003, 1). Additionally, small group members can also describe and define what tasks and roles each member have in the group (Brilhart & Galanes, 1995, 7). According to Hirokawa et al. (2003, 1) for a group to be considered a small group, it should consist of the following five basic elements:

1. Number of members
2. Common purpose
3. Interdependence
4. Perceptual boundary
5. Interaction between members

Hirokawa et al. (2003, 1) view that a small group can consist of minimum of three and maximum of 12 to 15 members for it to be considered a small group. They also note that most often a small group is considered as a group consisting of three to seven members. For a small group to function it needs to have at least one commonly set goal toward which members are willing to work for. Members' level of commitment, personal contributions, and interdependence is essential in achieving a commonly set goal and has a direct influence on the perceived success of the group. Another defining element of a small group is its members' ability to distinguish between in-group members and out-group members. As their fifth defining element, Hirokawa et al. contend that in order for a group to be considered a small group, its members must interact with each other on a regular basis. (Hirokawa et al. 2003, 1–2.)

Small group communication can provide both advantages and challenges for a work group. According to McArthur (2010, 292) group communication can be a complex environment because it contains a multiplying element; the number of potential interactions increases exponentially according to the amount of group members. In other words, a group of two people could produce four interactions and a group of three nine interactions and so on. This exponential estimate by McArthur (2010, 292) is based on the simple premise of each member engaging other members individually and on a group level, thus creating the exponential aspect of communication. Though this mathematical approach to communication is interesting, it does little to benefit the study of communication. However, it does illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon and poses the question of how much more there possibly is for communication scholars to unravel.

Matteson (2010, 37–38) views that small groups that work on a problem-solving task develop shared mental models, or mutual understandings, about the task at hand. Shared mental models evolve particularly around group interaction, interpersonal relationships, and the appointed task. Once these models, or mutual understandings have evolved, they assist the members i.e. to assess new situations, predict the behavior of other members, and make decisions faster. Matteson, who focused on a single work group, further argues that a small group that work on a problem-solving task tend to strongly converge on the group interaction and appointed task models, whereas on the more personal level the convergence was weaker. To counter this possibly hindering effect of weaker interpersonal ties, Matteson (2010, 37–38) proposes that work groups could intentionally bring up their shared mental models at various

points to increase group members' awareness and self-reflection. This could strengthen the personal bonds between members and increase the group's effectiveness.

In the following chapters, the reader is presented with CAT and its main elements.

2.2 The Transformation and Development of CAT

CAT accounts for a wide range of accommodative behaviors and is used widely in the field of social sciences (Soliz & Giles, 2012). It has become one of the most researched, comprehensive and scientifically versatile theories in communication since its inception in the early 1970s. CAT has evolved from Speech Accommodation Theory (SAT) that Giles developed in 1973. SAT was a theory of social psychology and mainly examined accommodation tendencies in interpersonal communication, but by 1987 the main focus had both sharpened and broadened to cover a wide array of communicative behaviors. At this time the evolution of the theory was also evident in the modification of its name, as it was revised from SAT to CAT. This also finalized the transition from a social psychology theory to a communication theory. (Griffin 2012, 394–401.) Evolving from a relatively simple socio-psychological model exploring accent and bilingual shifts in interaction, rooted in the logical-empirical tradition, CAT today explores communication accommodation in a wide array of organizational and other various contexts (Soliz & Giles, 2012).

2.2.1 Feasibility of Communication Accommodation Theory

Since CAT began as a theory in speech communication and developed into a theory encompassing a wide array of communicative behaviors (Soliz & Giles 2012, 3–5), it allowed to examine the acquired data from both speech communication and intercultural communication perspectives. CAT looks at communication on both interpersonal and intergroup level, and explains changes in communication. It also allows to consider the relational, cognitive, and communicative outcomes of accommodative behaviors. Given the aforementioned and CAT's holistic, yet pragmatic framework for accommodation (Soliz & Giles 2012, 3–25) it was concluded that CAT would serve the data and the chosen observational method best. Furthermore, the theory is well-known within social sciences and perceived as trustworthy (Griffin 2012, 404–405; Soliz & Giles 2012, 15). Much of the research on CAT has centered on face-to-face interaction, but the theory has also been applied to a number of other contexts including computer-mediated communication (Riordan et al.

2012, 84–85). This was another validation for choosing CAT, as the observed group applied both face-to-face and computer-mediated interaction techniques in their communication.

As mentioned earlier, CAT also provides the possibility to consider both micro (interpersonal) and macro (intergroup) levels of interaction; the personal and group aspects of it. CAT is contextually diverse, contains interdisciplinary utility, and is applicable to be used with various methodological paradigms. (Soliz & Giles 2012, 3–19.) CAT has been used in diverse cultural contexts and found to be beneficial in intergroup communication situations (Knobloch 2008 in Baxter & Braithwaite 2008). Thereby, given the cultural make of the observed work group, the purposes of the study, and the theory's applicability it was evident that CAT was an optimal choice.

2.2.2 Early Stages of Speech Accommodation Theory

SAT (Giles 1973; Soliz & Giles 2012, 3) was designed to both predict and interpret adjustments made in interaction for creating, maintaining or decreasing social distance. The early formulations of SAT were inspired by Byrne (1971), whose theory on similarity attraction contained the notion that individuals tend to like other individuals who appear similar to them. SAT concluded that, when two people from different social groups engage in conversation, they seek the other's approval by accommodating to their communication style. This process of seeking approval by accommodating the other is considered the historical core of SAT. SAT also drew from various theories but the attribution theory by Heider (1958) and Kelley (1973), and the social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979) in particular were integral for the theory's formulation.

Giles' early research centered on the non-verbal speech behavior of people, placing particular focus on speech rate, pauses and accents (Griffin 2012, 394–401). SAT's aim was to discover the conditions under which shifts in speech style occurred, and the social ramifications of accommodative behavior (Toma 2014, 158). Giles elaborated Byrne's attraction principle and proposed that, an individual's desire to be socially approved by those with different cultural backgrounds might lead to using speech accommodation as a strategic communication tool (Griffin 2012, 394). SAT became applied in various contexts but most of the early research focused on interethnic communication between two bilingual groups in the same country (Griffin 2012, 394-396). Research began unearthing themes and prompting questions that SAT could not wholly explain. To understand the phenomenon better an extensive research

program was launched in 1970s by Giles and his colleagues. (Griffin 2012, 394–396.) They discovered that there was a need to broaden the scope of the theory as there was a wide number of communication issues SAT did not account for (Giles 2008, 12). In 1987 Howard Giles revised the theory and changed its name to CAT. According to Giles himself, SAT evolved to CAT “in response to observing changes in my own and others’ speech styles, together with the consequent effects of these changes”. (Giles 2008, 12.) CAT’s cross-disciplinary utility had become apparent by this point, and so too had its applicability in intercultural communication encounters (Griffin 2012, 394–396). SAT did however leave its mark on the study of communication as it can be credited for opening up the complexity of communication by placing importance on both the cognitive and affective processes of communication (Gallois et al. 2005, 127).

Since its inception, CAT has expanded into an “interdisciplinary model of relational and identity processes in communication interaction” (Coupland & Jaworski 1997, 241–242). CAT has grown to a multifunctional theory that focuses on interpersonal and intergroup features, and views communication in both subjective and objective ways. Though language is a central focus of CAT, the theory also allows for the consideration of discursive structures, nonverbal communication behaviors, and other communicative aspects of identity such as clothing and hairstyle. (Soliz & Giles 2012, 3–4.) The theory has been widely applied in various contexts and in various cultural groups. It has been applied in face-to-face interaction, TMC, and in organizational settings. Intercultural and intergenerational communication in particular have received much interest and played a significant part in CAT’s theoretical development. Issues of identity, language, and context have always been at the core of the theory. (Gallois et al. 2005, 121–130.) CAT can be considered as a general framework for intergroup communication. However, CAT underlines that intergroup encounters are “never exclusively or permanently intercultural”, but that different group memberships may activate during interaction and affect the communication. (Gallois et al. 2005, 136.)

CAT’s growth and expansion into a noted communication theory is in part due to its theoretical engines. Throughout its development process, CAT has drawn from various theories. Some of these theories have influenced CAT since its inception and remain integral still today, while some have been omitted from CAT’s current version. Arguably the most notable of these omitted theories is Byrne’s (1971) similarity attraction theory that played an essential part in the formulation of CAT and its earlier version SAT. The omittance is due to the development of the social identity theory in issues of similarity and distinctiveness

perception in interpersonal and intergroup settings, the very same issues Byrne's (1971) work dealt with. Another omitted theory is the anxiety / uncertainty management theory by Gudykunst (1995) which influenced CAT's earlier versions. CAT's latest version is however solidly built on the social identity theory by Tajfel & Turner (1979) and the attribution theory by Heider (1958) and Kelley (1973) which remain the major theoretical engines for CAT. (Gallois et al. 2005, 123–136.)

CAT consists of two main accommodative strategies, *convergence* and *divergence*. The theory also consists of three other widely acknowledged and commonly applied strategies called *under-accommodation*, *over-accommodation*, and *counter-accommodation* that are all considered divergence strategies. In the following chapter the reader is provided an overview of the main accommodative strategies, convergence and divergence, and a short description of the other three strategies. (Soliz & Giles 2012, 3–8.)

2.2.3 Accommodative Strategies

CAT aims at developing evidence-based and pragmatic communicative practices, for both interpersonal and intergroup encounters. Accommodative behaviors are determined by the communicators' individual characteristics, social identities, the features of the situation, and the context. Accommodative behavior also plays a vital role in our adjustment to our surroundings. (Giles 2008, 121–127.) According to Giles (1987), accommodation consists of two main strategic forms of communication, *convergence* and *divergence*.

Accommodation on its own refers to changing one's communicative behavior to appear similar to others, i.e. by lowering one's voice to match the recipient's style of speech. Although convergence and divergence represent the opposite ends of the accommodation phenomenon, they are both used to convey attitudes toward others and as a result they can serve as an indicator of the level of social distance between individuals. They are often strategically applied, either semi-consciously or intentionally, to gain social rewards or to signal distinctiveness. (Soliz & Giles 2012, 3–20.) CAT focuses on these coordination choices and challenges between communicators, and the communication strategies they choose. (Knobloch 2008 in Baxter & Braithwaite 2008). Giles (Giles 2008 in Baxter and Braithwaite 2008) views that accommodation is a balancing act of give-and-take, as each individual is faced with the challenge of maintaining personal authenticity whilst simultaneously recognizing the demands of social interdependence. Convergence and divergence are not

however mutually exclusive as communication can simultaneously contain elements of both strategies. For instance, if an individual regards both personal and group identities important, he or she will act accordingly and seek both approval and distinctiveness within the same conversation. (Griffin 2012, 399.)

Though CAT was mainly developed in the context of intercultural communication, it is a theory of both intergroup and interpersonal communication (Gallois et al. 2005, 121). The theory is concerned with intercultural encounters where people conceive themselves and the other through their personal identity or group identity. CAT also takes into consideration the effects individualism and collectivism have on accommodation processes (Griffin 2012, 386; Gudykunst 2003, 26). According to (Gallois et al. 2005) communication in individualistic cultures is often person-oriented and people tend to converge toward others more so than in collectivistic cultures. Convergence to and from out-group members is viewed more favorably by members of individualistic cultures than collectivistic cultures (Gallois et al. 2005). According to Giles (Griffin 2012, 386) people who regard themselves as unique individuals will adjust their communication style and content to appear similar to the other. Conversely, people who have a strong group identification tend to speak in a way that accentuate differences between them and out-group members (Griffin 2012, 386). Communication in collectivistic cultures often contain a style of speaking that emphasizes relationships between communicators, something that is less apparent in individualistic cultures. The emphasis put on relationships can lead to using politeness strategies and formal language with outgroup members. Members of collectivistic cultures are more prone to diverge than members of individualistic cultures if they feel that the limits of appropriate social distance are exceeded. (Gudykunst & Lee 2003 in Gudykunst 2003.) Though it is dangerous to apply such broad cultural categorizations to a particular communication event, it is worth noting that they can surface during interaction and have an effect on the communication.

It would however be misleading to think that convergence is only linked to interpersonal communication or that divergence is only linked to intergroup communication. Convergence and divergence are accommodative strategies that can both be either person-based or group-based depending on the motivation, and interpersonal or intergroup needs of the participants. (Gallois et al. 2005, 127.)

Convergence

Convergence is the most studied communication accommodation strategy and is the historical foundation of CAT (Soliz & Giles 2012, 5). It is noteworthy that accommodation and convergence are often viewed as synonymous in the existing literature. Giles defines convergence as a strategy individuals use to adjust their communicative behaviors in such a manner to appear more similar to others and their behavior (Soliz & Giles 2012, 4). This can be achieved in a number of ways, such as changing one's speech rate or body language to match that of the other's.

The underlying motive for converging behavior is the desire to gain approval from others. To achieve a perceived level of similarity with others, individuals apply and adjust a wide array of their linguistic, paralinguistic and nonverbal behavior to match the other. Converging behavior should however come across as a genuine and natural ingredient in communication. Any a conversation can lead to convergence as long as the communicators have an interpersonal mindset whereby they regard themselves and the other as autonomous individuals representing only themselves. (Griffin 2012, 399–400.) Successful convergence is documented to have a variety of positive effects. Following Byrne's (1971) Similarity Attraction Theory and its basic tenets, Giles finds that the more the perceived level of similarity increases, the more an individual is liked and respected by others, and the more social rewards can be expected. Convergence can enhance the effectiveness of communication, which is known to improve the predictability of other's behavior. (Soliz & Giles 2012, 5.) The ability to predict the other's behavior in turn reduces uncertainty, interpersonal anxiety, and increases mutual understanding between communicators (Gudykunst 2005). Successful convergence can lead to being regarded favorably, and perceived as cooperative and efficient (Soliz & Giles 2012, 5).

Convergence can also have undesired and unforeseen effects. Individuals may encounter situations where they feel forced to accommodate due to existing norms or context, and do so unwillingly. (Soliz & Giles 2012, 5.) They may feel that the need to accommodate can limit their ability to express themselves, and consequently as losing or denying a part of themselves. They may also experience that, in the eyes of those dear to them, their converging behavior is seen as deviant and artificial, and as a result hinder their relationships. (Soliz & Giles 2012, 5.) Additionally, convergence to out-group members can offend social in-groups, cause relational tension and create a feeling of inauthenticity for the communicator. If there is

a perceived difference in the social power or status between the communicators, those with lower power or status tend to accommodate those with better social power. This is because of societal constraints or norms. (Griffin 2012, 402.) At its most extreme, convergence can even lead to the loss of personal or group identity (Soliz & Giles 2012, 5). However, according to Giles (Giles 2008 in Baxter & Braithwaite 2008) communicators tend to converge to others if social rewards can be expected.

Divergence

Divergence is a communication strategy of emphasizing differences in speech and nonverbal behavior between communicators. Individuals often communicate in a divergent way to emphasize, either to themselves or to the other, that they belong in a distinct group that the other is not a part of. (Griffin 2012, 398–399.) The underlying motive is in the desire to signal distinctiveness and reinforce group identities (Soliz & Giles 2012, 5–6). If two individuals are engaged in communication, and one or both come to think of themselves or the other as representatives of a group, they will diverge from one another. Also, if two individuals enter a discussion with an intergroup mindset, the conversation is more likely to diverge than converge. This will lead to emphasizing distinctiveness and the reinforcement of group ties. In other words, the need for distinctiveness leads to the reinforcement of group identity, which in turn leads to divergence. (Griffin 2012, 398–399.) Divergence can however be seen as unwanted behavior and it can offend others. Recipients of divergence tend to regard it as undesired and unappealing behavior, as it can be interpreted as exclusive rather than inclusive behavior. Furthermore, recipients might feel they are the subject of divergence because they don't deserve the other's respect or positive regard. (Giles 2008, 121–127.) Interestingly, CAT studies have shown that although recipients often regard divergence as impolite and rude, it is actually more common than convergence. According to Griffin (2012, 397–401) this is because accommodation to the out-group might not be viewed favourably by in-group members and can cause relational concern. Conversely, reinforcing group ties by accommodating to the in-group can result in positive regard by in-group members (Giles 2008 in Baxter & Braithwaite 2008). This basic human need to maintain and reinforce one's group identities is at the very core of divergence (Griffin 2012, 397–401) In short, divergence is the behavior caused by an internal or external motive or need to signal distinctiveness. It can be applied both consciously and unconsciously, to maintain or gain social awards.

Divergence consists of various accommodation strategies of which the following three are widely recognized and appear recurrently in the existing literature. *Under-accommodation* is a strategy whereby individuals refrain from altering their communicative style in spite of the other's behavior. The reason for under-accommodation, or maintenance as it is also often called, lies perhaps in avoiding uncharacteristic behavior and remaining coherent. Insecurity over linguistic and nonverbal skills can also be a contributing factor. Under-accommodation can manifest for example in greetings, where one or both communicators are unsure how they should greet the other. Should the other be greeted by a firm handshake, or perhaps by giving a kiss on the cheek? How should one proceed to engage in small talk if friendly greeting gestures are not reciprocated by the other? Under-accommodation can also be used intentionally to get the other to accommodate. Such a situation could occur between a nurse and a patient where the nurse uses a calming and reassuring tone to ease the anxious patient. In other words, under-accommodation can serve as tool for convergence between communicators. (Griffin 2012, 396–398.)

Over-accommodation can be seen as belittling or patronizing talk that is often the result of oversimplifying and overstating the message and its content. It can lead to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes and restrict interaction between communicators, or even groups of people. (Griffin 2012, 396–398.) In a workplace that takes in trainees, the young trainees might experience treatment they consider undermining and dismissive from older staff members. The older staff members might not intentionally behave in an unsupportive fashion, but the gap between their and the trainees' know-how, real or perceived, puts the two factions far apart. Studies conducted on intergenerational communication have also revealed that over-accommodation can have a deteriorating psychological effect as it can lower the elderly's self-esteem (Hummert et al. 2004 in Nussbaum & Coupland 2004).

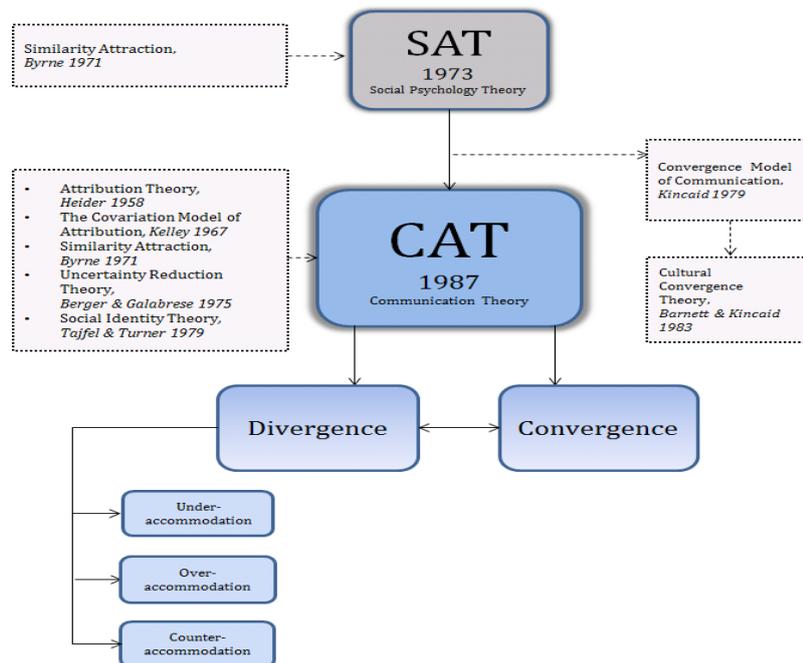
Counter-accommodation is a strategy where differences between communicators are maximized. It is a strategy that evokes the reinforcement of group identities and finds the communicators on the opposite ends of a spectrum. Counter-accommodation can be used to highlight group identity and the distinctiveness of the communicators, but also as a face-saving technique. For example, a programmer might enjoy discussing the technical aspects of company's website but seek a way out of the conversation and draw the attention to his role as a programmer if he feels unskilled discussing the more commercial aspects of the website. (Griffin 2012, 396–398.)

In the following chapter an illustrative overview of the history of CAT is presented and its main features discussed. The illustration showcases the theory's developmental phases and clarifies its transformative process from a speech communication theory to a communication theory. This offers the reader a clearer picture of the linkage between CAT, social psychology, and communication.

2.2.4 Components of Communication Accommodation Theory

Next an illustrative overview of CAT and its theoretical engines are presented. As the illustration depicts, CAT has contributed the creation of at least two other theories, the Convergence Model of Communication (Kincaid 1979) and the Cultural Convergence Theory (Barnett & Kincaid 1983). It should however be noted that since these theories would not provide essential nor additional information deemed relevant for the reader they will not be discussed in this study.

FIGURE 1 Overview of Communication Accommodation Theory



In its development phase CAT drew from various theories as can be seen in Figure 1. This adds to its credibility as particularly its two main theoretical engines, attribution theory by Heider (1958) and Kelley (1973), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) are strongly rooted in social psychology, and provide the premise for the theory's accommodative strategies. CAT consists of unique features that combined make the theory widely applicable

and allow to gain a better understanding of the use of accommodative strategies. They add to the reliability of the theory by providing a holistic, yet pragmatic, framework for studying and evaluating accommodation. There are five features and they underline the strength and feasibility of CAT, and allow to examine the phenomenon from a broader perspective rather than focusing only on the actual act of accommodation. (Gallois et al. 2005, 135–136; Soliz & Giles 2012, 4–5.) Furthermore, these features are essential for the theoretical premise of this study, and underline the situational and contextual element of communication.

1. Communication occurs within a socio-historical context and is influenced by the participants' initial orientation, and the immediate interaction situation. Socio-historical context consists of interpersonal and intergroup history, and cultural norms and values. Initial orientation on the other hand refers to the predisposition a person has to assuming an either interpersonal or intergroup mindset toward the other.
2. Perceptions and attributions are essential for accommodative practices. An individual interprets the other's behavior and assigns meaning to it which subsequently affect the individual's evaluations and future intentions. The challenge however lies in that communicators might not perceive similar levels of accommodation and as a result accommodate the other in an inappropriate fashion.
3. Communicators might choose different accommodation strategies. Asymmetrical accommodation, where one opts for convergence and the other for divergence, has consequences that depend on the goals and perceptions of the participants.
4. Communicators engage in interaction with predetermined expectations as to the ideal level of accommodation, whether they are consciously aware of them or not. Expectations are based on stereotypes about out-group members and the prevailing norms, both social and situational.
5. Accommodation strategies are used to convey attitudes toward others and social groups. Interaction can thus be seen as a subtle and continuous balancing act within interaction as well as between interactions. (Gallois et al. 2005, 135–136; Soliz & Giles 2012, 4–5.)

These aforementioned features underline the importance of taking into account intergroup and interpersonal history, as well as prevailing norms and values. The components of CAT are strongly rooted in the contextual and situational element of communication (Gallois et al. 2005, 135–136). CAT is one of the most practical communication theories that can be applied to a number of work-related issues. Having encountered situations at work where the surfacing of accommodative strategies had both short and long-lasting effects on the social level as well as on the task-level made CAT a contemporary and intriguing focal point of this study. Though the theory is complex, it is however coherent and pragmatic, and when applied correctly, provides interesting results. The following chapter focuses on the study's research questions.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were formulated after a close examination of the data and a thorough consideration for the theoretical foundation of this work. CAT was chosen as the contextual framework of this study for multiple reasons. The theory takes into consideration both the individual and group aspect of communication, is a widely acknowledged communication theory, and recognizes both speech communication and intercultural communication as integral elements of the theory (Gallois et al. 2005, 121–136). Certain aspects of the theory are still understudied, such as temporality of its two main communication strategies, convergence and divergence, and it would appear that the use of these strategies seem to be influenced by whether interlocutors know each other and the nature of the interaction (Riordan et al. 2012, 84–95; de Siqueira & Herring 2009). Temporality as such however was excluded from the research questions and more focus was put on the actual accommodative strategies, and how they manifest as it appears that there is still much to understand about divergence and convergence. Furthermore, as the data showed that a number of issues related to group membership were evident and that TMC disrupted the communication flow, it was essential that these issues were addressed in the research questions. CAT has also been applied to TMC (Riordan et al. 2012, 84–85) which made it highly applicable and relevant for the framing process of this study's research questions.

The research questions therefore relate to the theoretical framework of this study and the contemporary research on these topics. Though the questions were framed according to a number of studies, they contain references to the following studies. The first question relates to Griffin's (2012) work and the proposition that accommodation to the out-group is shunned by other in-group members. Griffin's (2012) view suggests that accommodating to the out-group can be seen as having potentially negative social effects within the in-group. The second question relates to the study by Matteson (2010) who argued that members strongly converge on the group interaction level and less so on a more personal level. In other words, convergence is stronger on the task-level (Matteson 2010). The third research question relates to Burgoon et al. (2002) and their conclusions of possible in-group or out-group experiences that malfunctioning communication tools can cause. Their study indicates that group members exhibit diverging behavior should a communication tool malfunction (Burgoon et al. 2002).

Additionally, the cultural make of the observed group and the nature of the meetings were considered in the question framing process.

1. How do cultural differences manifest in the interaction of this work group?
2. In what kind of situations does divergence and convergence occur?
3. Are there in-group and out-group members in the work group under scrutiny, and if so, how does group membership manifest?

In the following chapter the reader is presented with the study's research method. Also the study's ethical aspects are shortly considered.

4 RESEARCH METHOD

To best serve the principles of research, and in an attempt to ensure that the gathered data would receive as scientifically unbiased review as possible, a data-driven approach was chosen. A theory-guided approach was also considered but deemed unappealing as the purpose was to gather unique and natural data, free of pre-determined and imposed attributes. The chosen approach meant that the study would contain the defining characteristics of a typical case study and consist of a highly contemporary phenomenon, be bound to a specific place and time, and provide unique and authentic data (Creswell 1998, 61; Yin 2003, 13). Next an overview of the study's research method is presented.

4.1 Functional Perspective and Case Study

The reason for choosing qualitative rather than quantitative research was to understand how the observed group interacts, and if and how the issues outlined in the study's aim surface. Another aspect validating the choice of qualitative research method were its applicability in understanding the processes that lead to a given outcome (Creswell 1998, 16–17).

The data was acquired through external observation and the data acquiring method followed the principles of functional perspective, an interdisciplinary perspective on small groups. Though there are nine interdisciplinary perspectives, the functional perspective was deemed the most applicable of them all as it describes and predicts group performances, and explains group processes and outcomes. It also employs an objectivistic view toward groups and view groups as externally placing focus on the researcher's concepts and models. Functional perspective is more grounded than some of the other small group perspectives as it contains a solid theoretical core that combines both theories and research. It is a perspective that is reflective and explanatory by nature. The functional perspective contains four theorems that form its core and are listed below. (Poole & Hollingshead 2005, 4–14.)

1. Groups are goal-oriented, and can simultaneously have one or more goals. The goals may either be individual-oriented, group-oriented or task-oriented.
2. Group performance varies and can be evaluated both in quality and quantity.
3. Interaction processes differ and some can be more useful than others. Interaction processes can be controlled and regulated.

4. Interaction processes have a causal effect on communication. The functional perspective perceives that an individual's input can have an effect on interaction processes and subsequently on the group's performance. In other words, internal and external factors influence group behavior and performance via interaction. (Poole & Hollingshead 2005, 4–14.)

What is particularly noteworthy is that small group research has in the past been heavily conducted from the functional perspective. However, much of the research on small groups has taken place in a laboratory setting and other research methods could benefit the understanding of groups from the functional perspective. (Poole & Hollingshead 2005, 21–50.) Communication is a complex phenomenon. As studies on small groups in their natural environment are scarce, perhaps instead of attempting to dissect it to individualized fragments that are bound to specific contexts, times and places, communication should be approached as it is, an all-encompassing and ever-present entity. Perhaps it is in our need as humans to understand the specificities of communication that ultimately hinder us from progressing.

Case studies in social science provide information that is highly contextual, and are bound to a specific time and space. In other words, they provide information that is unique. (Donmeyer 2000 in Gomm, Hammersley & Porter 2009). Case studies tend to consist of holistic and complex descriptions, and of variables that are not easily distinguishable. However, the primary objective is in understanding the case, superseding themes and hypotheses. As opposed to other approaches, case studies do not strive to reduce information to its very fundamentals, but rather focus on certain aspects of it and attempt to expand them. The data is often gathered, at least in part, through observation. (Stake 2000, in Gomm, Hammersley & Porter 2009.) Case studies can be used to unearth a major theme from a seemingly insignificant strip of information. Furthermore, case studies have an “epistemological advantage over other inquiry methods as a basis for naturalistic generalization” (Stake 2000, in Gomm, Hammersley & Porter 2009.) As mentioned earlier, case studies provide information that consist of unique situations and individuals but there are also other key advantages in conducting a case study according to Donmeyer (2000 in Gomm, Hammersley & Porter 2009). For the uninitiated reader, case studies can provide a more pragmatic and thus easier introduction to a given theme as they contain the researcher's perspective. Furthermore, case studies can expand the range of interpretations when they conducted well, thus benefiting the development of theory and science. (Donmeyer 2000 in Gomm, Hammersley & Porter 2009.) In an attempt to conduct as ethically sound study as possible, certain procedures were

used. The next chapter provides the reader an overview of how issues of ethicality were considered prior to stating the study process.

4.2 Research Ethics

To ensure that the study would meet all required standards and the policies of good scientific conduct, ethical aspects were carefully considered. Prior to the actual observation process, all participants were made aware of the study and how it would be conducted. They were informed that the meeting room would be equipped with video cameras that capture both sound and sight. The participants were explained how and for what purposes their meetings were to be videotaped and that the researchers would be the only ones with access to the material. They were promised full anonymity and that no personal identifiers would be used. The participants were also ensured that they would have the possibility to decline from participating and could withdraw at any point. Furthermore, they were also told that after each meeting they would have the right to prevent the use of their comments in the data analysis. All participants received the Research Subject Agreement document and read it carefully. The two participants stationed abroad were contacted separately via e-mail. The agreement contained information about the study and when signed, would give the individual's consent to videotape him or her and have their comments used in the study. As mentioned in the earlier paragraph, the agreement contained a clause that would enable the individual to withdraw from the study at any point and have his or hers comments neglected. After signing, each participant received a copy of their signed agreement. It is worth noting that none of the participants declined nor withdrew, and everyone allowed their comments to be used in full extent.

In the following chapter the reader is presented with the study's data collection and data description process.

5 DATA ANALYSIS

The study was conducted in cooperation with a small Finnish company between January and March 2012. The reader should note that given the study's discrete nature, any particularities about the company, its industry or any other aspect of their business, can not be disclosed. All personal identifiers have been concealed as well to ensure anonymity.

5.1 The Process of Data Collection

The company had been founded a few years earlier, and operated both on international and domestic markets. The staff consisted of 12 workers who all turned out to be in their late 20s and early 30s. The majority of the employees, as well as the Managing Director himself, had been born and raised in a country other than Finland. The company was an ideal partner as it was relatively small in scale, yet employed a culturally diverse staff, operated on international markets, and was based in Finland.

The company's functions were separated into two departments, the Sales Department that consisted of seven workers, and the Production Department that consisted of four workers, respectively. The Managing Director and nine other employees were based in the company's headquarters in Finland and two were working from the company's offices abroad.

Nationality-wise Finns were the dominant group, and that the staff consisted of nine different nationalities, most of which were European. Majority of the employees had been with the company a little over two years. They knew each other well and interacted with one another on a daily basis. The entire staff of twelve would get together four times a year when the two employees working abroad came to visit. Though two of the employees worked from their offices abroad, the company held various meetings on a regular basis that covered a wide array of topics. The process that led to the choosing of the four meetings that were then videotaped is shortly described next.

Most of the meetings the company held had a varying agenda and were attended by only a small number of workers. This was unpreferable as at the time it was concluded that the study would benefit from having an element of continuity, and a single meeting would not provide adequate information. Meetings with irregular agendas and low number of participants were

also believed to increase the study's complexity as there would have been too many factors to consider. Furthermore, it was concluded that too much variety, such as differing agendas and participants, would most likely have resulted in having to change the research objectives. Therefore, it was decided to focus on the company's Monday meetings. Monday meetings made for an intriguing choice as they took place regularly, had little or no variation to the line-up, and consisted of a recurring agenda. The meetings started at 9 am every Monday morning and were held in the company's conference room. Prior to each meeting every participant received a list of issues that were to be discussed and were given the opportunity to suggest topics they deemed relevant. The meeting agendas dealt mainly with contemporary issues such as sales, computer software and day-to-day tasks. Furthermore, the meetings consisted of two thirds of the entire staff as everyone except four production workers attended them. To ensure that there would be enough data to draw conclusions from, it was concluded that videotaping, as opposed to other observational methods, would be the most effective way for collecting data. A decision was made to videotape four, rather than one or two meetings, in order to limit the effect an irregular or coincidental event might have on a meeting and subsequently on the data analysis. To further ensure the study would not lack for data, a tentative agreement for videotaping additional Monday meetings was made. However, once the fourth and last meeting took place it became clear that no additional videotaping was needed.

The employed research method was observational and natural, meaning that the work group was observed in their own work environment. There was no interaction with the participants nor were the meetings interfered with in any way. This is known as the *nonparticipant observer* approach. (Brilhart & Galanes 1995, 310) The meeting room was equipped with cameras prior to start of each meeting and once the meetings began, the researchers moved to another room where they stayed for the duration of the meeting. All four meetings were videotaped with three cameras that were positioned at different corners of the room. The purpose of using three cameras rather than one or two, was to ensure nothing would go unnoticed, and that the interaction could be viewed from multiple angles. More specifically, having three cameras was to guarantee that most, if not all, verbal and nonverbal communication would be available for analysis. Having multiple cameras was also a way to ensure that the data gathering process would not be gravely hindered if any of the cameras should malfunction. After the fourth and last meeting had ended, each tape was viewed and a preliminary plan for analysis was made. The accumulated length of the four meetings was 3 hours and 16 minutes. The first meeting lasted 62 minutes, the second 38 minutes, the third 35

minutes, and the fourth 61 minutes. When transcribed, these 12 video tapes provided 89 pages of text. Since then the tapes and the transcribed texts were carefully reviewed several times, both separately and together.

The data collection process adhered to the principles of a case study as it was conducted at a specific workplace, the data was collected through participant observation, and the analysis allowed to focus on certain aspects of a phenomenon (Glesne 2011, 22). Next, the data description process is explained.

5.2 Description of the Data

The data analysis began by viewing all tapes together. Both researcher made remarks that were then mutually discussed. This preliminary analysis proved to be a good choice as it revealed certain topics that became an integral part of this study. The researchers then worked separately on given meetings and produced word-by-word transcripts. To ensure that everything was marked correctly, the researchers swapped transcripts and double-checked everything. Differing viewpoints were discussed, and an analytical approach was used to determine whether or not the issue was of importance. Mainly this involved in reflecting the issue with the theme of the study and discussing its potential usability. All major decisions were made together which benefited the cohesiveness of the analysis process and outcomes. However, the process was arduous and both the video as well as the transcribed material had to be revisited a number of times. Having two researchers also allowed for a broader overview as one would bring forth issues the other had not considered. This preliminary analysis laid the foundation for the actual content analysis which is presented next.

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the issues related to the set research questions, the gathered data was analyzed using the principles of QCA. This particular method was chosen for a number of reasons. First and foremost, QCA is a qualitative data analysis method that can be used for creating a systematic overview of the meaning of the data. Furthermore, it is a method that can be applied on data that is in visual, verbal or textual form, requires interpretation and has been collected by the scholars themselves. QCA also allows for higher level of abstraction which was deemed essential as the study focused on issues regarding group membership, accommodative strategies and cultural dimensions. Other aspects that validated its choice and appliance to the study's theoretical premise, CAT, is that it could

assist in explaining the wide range of accommodative behaviours so integral for CAT. (Soliz & Giles, 2012.) As the meetings were videotaped, and therefore contained both audio and visual material that were later transcribed, the method provided the possibility for a thorough analysis. QCA can be seen as expanding the data as it allows to limit the analysis to specific aspects of the data (Schreier 2013, 2–7). This meant that the data could be segmented, dissected and categorized whilst neglecting irrelevant data. QCA allows for a detailed and accurate analysis that together with CAT provided a solid theoretical and contextual frame for the study.

As the analysis progressed, a simple coding frame was formed. The coding frame followed the QCA methods where categories are developed after a careful examination of the entire body of data, and all irrelevant information are excluded after a systematic classification. The coding frame also reflects the concepts in the research questions. However, one should note that the purpose of the coding frame is merely to provide an insight into the data examination process and should not be regarded as a determining factor in the actual study outcomes. Furthermore, though the coding frame contains a numerical dimension it should be noted that the analysis was purely qualitative. The coding frame is presented in the next page.

TABLE 1 Coding Frame

MAIN CATEGORIES	SUB-CATEGORY 1.	SUB-CATEGORY 2.	SUB-CATEGORY 3.	EXTRACTS FROM THE DATA	AMOUNT OF REFERENCES MADE
In-Group References					4
	Convergence				
		Language			2
			Greetings	<i>"Hola chica! How are you?"</i>	
		Performance			2
			Supporting colleague	<i>"I think that the problem is you have to agree that whether you are going to her or she is going to you."</i>	
Out-Group References					32
	Divergence				
		Language			27
			TMC	<i>"Que? Can you hear us? Okey?"</i>	
			Assisting non-Finnish speaking colleagues	<i>"In Finnish it's called varaumat."</i>	
		Performance			5
			Uncompleted tasks	<i>"I think John has rather explicitly told her that she is the one responsible."</i>	
Cultural References					15
	Stereotyping				
		Nationalities			12
			Mimicking	<i>"Traditionell oui oui"</i>	
		Gender			3
			Japanese colleague	<i>"Looking from Japan I guess It's very same, he's like, ahh, they're neighbors, let's go there at the same time."</i>	
TOTAL AMOUNT OF REFERENCES					109

As can be seen from Table 1 the analysis unearthed themes that were then categorized to three main categories and subsequent sub-categories. Next a short description of each category is presented.

In-group references contain all occasions where a group member made a personal level remark. In other words, a group member exhibited behavior toward other members that was of unifying nature. Conversely, out-group references contain all occasions where a group member made a remark that signalled distinctiveness between group members. Both main categories were disseminated to sub-categories containing issues regarding language and performance.

Cultural references contain all cultural remarks that were made during the meetings. As Table 1 illustrates, there were two categories of cultural references, ones that contained issues regarding nationalities and ones that touched on the issue of gender.

It is imperative to note that though Table 1 contain a numerical dimension, the study was purely qualitative. The matter of having a numerical dimension in Table 1 was thoroughly discussed and constant data revisiting was made to ensure that it did not have an effect on the analysis process nor on study's outcomes. In other words, the numerical dimension in Table 1 is added for purely visual purposes and is otherwise insignificant. Silverman and Marvasti (2008, 12) support this method as it can give the reader statistical support and flavour of the data. One should thereby recognize that the extracts and the discussion presented later do not contain any numerical base but are purely of qualitative nature.

Though the outcomes are thoroughly presented and discussed in the following chapters, the table contains one interesting aspect that is shortly discussed here. Throughout the entire data that comprised of four separate meetings, the group did not make a single positive cultural remark about out-group members, only negative ones. As to why they said nothing positive about others, one can only speculate. Perhaps it is in part due to the group's general communication style as they often made sarcastic and humorous remarks about a variety of issues, not just out-group members. Or perhaps the cultural make of the group gave them a sense of freedom to speak openly about out-group members. Whatever the reason, in the span of four videotaped meetings, the group made only negative cultural remarks.

In the following chapters six extracts from the data are presented. It should be noted that to ensure anonymity all personal identifications were concealed, and that the participants were given fictional names. Those who were physically present were John, the company's CEO, Steven the Sales Director, Mark the Product Manager, Nick, Lisa, and Amanda. The two members who attended the meetings via Skype were Tina and Tom.

6 FINDINGS

The data analysis revealed a number of issues that had a direct or indirect effect on the group's communication. It should be noted that all inconclusive and irrelevant topics were excluded from the analysis process. The following six extracts are all exemplary cases representing similar ones in the data. These particular extracts were chosen as they are interesting to read, offer rich data, and are cohesive with one another. The extracts are in a thematic order and an analysis is provided after each one. Extracts I–II focus on issues regarding in-groups and out-groups, Extracts III–IV on TMC and communication processes, and Extracts V–VI on differences in communication styles. These extracts provide insight to the set research questions and specifically on issues regarding group membership and accommodation strategies.

6.1 Extract I - Same Same But Different

Group members would often make cultural remarks and generalizations during the meetings. In the following extract, John made a comment about a Japanese visitor he was expecting that had the group briefly deter from the intended topic. The conversation demonstrates how issues of cultural diversity usually came up, and what kind of reaction they stirred. In regards to the coding frame presented earlier, this extract was coded under cultural references.

1. *John: Actually he has ...*
2. *Lisa: yeah*
3. *John: ... a meeting in Ukraine ...*
4. *Nick: mmhh*
5. *John: and since Ukraine Finland ... same same but different ...*
6. *John giggles, Lisa smiles, Nick smiles, Steven smiles*
7. *John: so he's ...*
8. *Steven: Looking from Japan, I guess it's very same ...*
9. *John smiles: yes*
10. *Lisa laughs: yeah*
11. *Nick smiles, Amanda smiles, Mark smiles*
12. *Steven (gestures): ... he's like aah, they're neighbours ...*
13. *Lisa laughs*
14. *Steven: ... let's go there at the same time. I guess, anywhere they go from Japan they would have to travel*
15. *Nick: mmhh*
16. *Steven: ... if it's not Australia*

John's comment about the Japanese guest visiting both Ukraine and Finland contained a reference that deterred the group from topic (line 5). The reference John made is an expression that appears to have become a staple in casual talk symbolizing the act of taking two things that may not have much in common and grouping them together to make them appear similar. By grouping Finland and Ukraine together, a somewhat unlikely pair, John made a macro-level cultural generalization. Steven, amused by this, further polarized the situation by suggesting that perhaps from a Japanese viewpoint the two countries are indeed closely similar. He then proceeded with a comment (line 12) that took on a more direct approach as he portrayed the Japanese visitor. Steven's behavior and choice of words could be seen as him portraying the Japanese visitor as simple and arrogant. On the other hand, his last comment (lines 14–16) indicated that he sympathized with the visitor as he reminded his colleagues of Japan's remote location.

These remarks by John and Steven are interesting as they contained a clear cultural dimension, and polarized the parties. Making such remarks in a culturally diverse group seems ill-advised as they could be understood as derogatory comments that belittle all out-group members. It is plausible some of the group members feel excluded from the in-group, simply based on their nationality when such comments are made. Another aspect to consider is that two of the members are stationed in their home countries. As Tina and Tom both visit headquarters in Finland twice a year and spend much of their time away from their colleagues, it is possible their group ties and sense of group membership are spun differently than their Finland-based counterparts. As was seen in the extract, out-group members became the subject of belittling talk and negative stereotyping. Given that they are not physically present and their encounters are scarce, there is a clear risk that Tina and Tom are seen as outsiders too.

This extract was one of the many similar discussions the group had over the course of the four meetings. In this particular extract, John and Steven's comments on cultural diversity and the responses they triggered indicated that most, if not all, group members found them amusing. Furthermore, it appeared that the comments seemed to serve as a unifying tool for the group, converging members toward one another. The humour however seemed to derive from negative stereotyping which subsequently increases the risk of distancing members from one another.

Another extract containing issues regarding cultural polarization and group membership is presented next.

6.2 Extract II - Air France Was Having Some Strikes Again

In the following extract the group discussed an Air France strike that left one of their colleagues stranded in his home country. The extract further demonstrates how cultural differences were a source of amusement, and subject to ridicule. Particularly, the discussion revealed how a single event in the airline industry was used to characterise all French citizens, and how the cultural orientations of another culture were seen as incomprehensible and childish. In regards to the coding frame presented earlier, this extract was coded under cultural references.

1. John: ... he will be here back next week Monday normally. Aa, Nick is in France if he managed to fly since Air France was having some strikes again
2. Lisa: aw yeah true
3. Steven: that's why he was in Paris
4. Lisa: yeah, he ...
Steven and Lisa nod their heads
5. Steven: he's there but
6. John: okey... I thought that
7. Steven: cos he was just in-between strikes that...
8. Lisa: mmhh
9. Steven: but the reason for the strike was very, striking
10. Lisa: yeah, that was amazing!
11. John: why was it amazing?
12. Lisa: like they were striking against banning striking or something
13. Steven: that's something ...
Lisa laughs, Amanda laughs
14. Steven: they said that, they should, they should announce two days before making a strike in the future
...
15. Lisa: yeah
16. Steven: ... because it makes a huge mess for the air, you know, airport ...
17. Lisa: Yeah
18. Steven: ... and people travelling around, and because they suggested that, people went immediately on strike.
Lisa, Amanda laugh, Steven smiles
19. Steven mimics French, speaks gibberish and gestures with his arms
20. John buries his head in his hand: this is ...
21. Lisa: awesome
22. Steven: they're like idiots, they were like hey, can we make an agreement, that like you let us know two days before (Steven takes on a French accent) what the fuck, you bastard, we go on strike!
Lisa, Steven, John laugh, Amanda smiles
23. John: and then you're asking a stupid question
24. Steven: yeah, strike!
Lisa laugh, Steven smile, John laugh, Amanda smiles
25. John: anyway ... you see, I, you mentioned how much they lose money in the companies because of those strikes and then of course they went with the strikes to get more money ...
26. Lisa: mmhh

The group was discussing a topic on its agenda when John informed the group that Nick who was not present at the meeting was most likely stranded in France due to an airline strike. The group however moved quickly from discussing the strike's effect on Nick's itinerary to the possible reasons behind it. Steven could be seen as the instigator as he made a comment that appeared to change the tone of the discussion (line 9). The comment contained a clear indication that Steven thought there had been something peculiar about the incident. By emphasizing the assumingly strange nature of the incident, Steven captured Lisa's attention (lines 9–10).

Lisa, apparently knowing the reason for the strike emphasized its seemingly incredulous nature as she raised her voice in excitement. John, unaware of the particularities regarding the strike, asked Lisa for more information. It is plausible that at this point, the whole incident might have been dropped and the group returned to the agenda had Steven remained quiet. However, he made comments (lines 14–18) that seemed to serve multiple purposes. Whilst they were informative and provided a short summary of the incident, they were also arguably polarizing and preparatory by nature. By reminding the listeners of the inconveniences an airline strike can have on the passengers and the industry, rather than including all involved parties, Steven presented a one-sided account of the incident. As his comments were well-received, Steven began speaking gibberish with a seemingly French accent and behaved flamboyantly (line 19). Steven then proceeded with comments that portrayed the French in a negative light as he labelled them as both stupid and illogical (line 22). One interesting aspect of this comment is the way he made the distinction between the opposing parties, the airline and the workers. Steven spoke politely and in his normal voice as he portrayed the airline's representative but as he took on the worker's role, he spoke with an accent and used swear words. His comments polarized the parties, and made it seem that the workers lacked wits and had acted on a whim. One could argue that this juxtaposition of logic and emotion is a classic example of ethnocentrism where two parties are seen as representing the opposite ends of a spectrum (Goldstein 2015).

Though some of Steven's comments contained an element that could be interpreted as belittling and insulting, it appears that his comments were not only approved by others, but that it was the group's positive response to his earlier comments what encouraged Steven to eventually portray a French worker. Perhaps Nick's absence was the reason the group

discussed the topic so candidly. Indeed, the conversation seemed to have a positive, if perhaps momentary, effect on the group as most of the members were clearly amused by it.

The group members would also often find amusement in their communication breakdowns as can be seen in the following two extracts.

6.3 Extract III - Can You Hear Us Well?

The group would often encounter situations where poor internet connection disrupted the group's communication. In the following extract, a simple cough revealed the communication challenges the group had to face in most of their meetings. Particularly noteworthy was the group members' lack of consideration for Tina whose questions went repeatedly unanswered. This extract raises questions these kind of communication challenges could have for the long-term effect on the dynamism of the group, interpersonal relationships, and amount of contributions by all team members. In regards to the coding frame presented earlier, this extract was coded under both in-group and out-group references.

1. John: ... MacIntosh HD and you right click there, and put show files or show info. get info
2. Tina clears her throat
3. Steven clears his throat
4. Tina: I have a ...
5. Tom coughs
6. John: bless you
7. Lisa: bless you
8. Steven: bless you man
9. Tom: sorry, sorry
10. Tina: what?
11. Everybody else start laughing
12. John smiles: nothing
13. Steven: this Skype-thing doesn't always work as well as one would hope for
14. Nick: yeah, there's problem with the
15. John: Tom?
16. Tina: huh?
17. John: Tom, Tom!
18. Tom: yeah
19. John: can you hear us well?
20. Tom: aa, aa, where now, just last fifteen seconds something and
21. Steven laughs
22. John: would it be any value to get these microphones in the center maybe we can connect them to the computers, something like this
23. John points at the recorder

The group was going over its agenda when a simple cough hindered the group from performing optimally. The following analysis centers on the two geographically dispersed

group members Tina and Tom as the poor connection appeared to have a greater impact on them than on the others.

In the beginning Tina's talk was cut short when Tom coughed (lines 4–5), and the sudden flow of comments appeared to puzzle her and she appeared oblivious to what the others were talking about. Her enquiry into the matter was met with laughter, probably because she asked it a time when all laughter had ceased, and she appeared clueless as to what had happened (lines 10–11). Tina received a one-worded response from John that provided her but little information (line 12). She made another inquiry (line 16), but no one responded. After this, she remained quiet. Tina never got to know what had happened. At first she was cut off and when she asked what had happened, her colleagues laughed but did not provide her with an explanation. After a while, she one final attempt but this time did not receive an answer at all. Tom shared similar challenges as Tina as he reported not having heard parts of the discussion (line 20). The strain that is caused by the poor connection is evident, as it hinders the group from optimal performance, derails the conversation, and disrupts the flow of information. For Tom and Tina, the poor connection has arguably more negative consequences than those in Finland. After all, they depend on the connection to be able to interact with their colleagues, are alone in their home countries, and can do but little in case of a connection breakdown. As was seen in this particular extract, this lead to them being excluded from the conversation and lacking information on what had happened.

It is possible that these connection problems have both immediate and far-reaching consequences. They can cause divergence as some members are abruptly left out of the conversation and thereby receive less information. As the extract seems to indicate, the other team members might forget to treat Tina and Tom as equal members of the group. As a result, the amount of contributions made by them, and perhaps by others as well, might decrease and the group miss out on important information. In other words, the far-reaching consequences could be that continuous connection breakdowns can lead to the minimization of dialogue between group members. However it should be noted that it can also produce convergence as the group members share a mutual and amusing experience. What is evident however, is that the flow of communication was disrupted, and the meeting's agenda was derailed for a time.

These communication challenges and issues of group membership and language are also apparent in the following extract.

6.4 Extract IV - Pull Some of the Hair Like Back

In the following extract the group deterred briefly from the intended topic as Tom stated that he was experiencing connection problems. The group experienced connection problems in each of the meetings and would resort to humour when it happened. However, it was not the actual connection problem nor the challenges of TMC that were the target of the group's humour, but most often the two members abroad. The extract depicts one such situation. In regards to the coding frame presented earlier, this extract was coded under both in-group and out-group references.

1. Mark: *So we have just one announcement, Lisa will be in Germany ...*
2. Tom: *I don't really hear good right now man*
3. Nick: *No?*
4. Steven: *Pull some of the hair like back*
5. Steven *gestures pulling his hair back*
6. Mark *laughs*
7. Tom: *I use ...*
8. Steven: *Pull some of the hair back again*
9. Steven *gestures pulling his hair back*
10. Lisa *smiles*
11. Mark *laughs, Steven laughs*
12. Mark: *same cause*
13. Tom: *now.*
14. Steven: *qué? can you hear us? okey?*
15. Steven *laughs*
16. Nick: *is it better?*
17. Tina: *qué?*
18. Steven, Nick, and Lisa *laugh*

Whenever the group experienced connection problems, Tina and Tom would quickly become the center of the conversation. The other group members would make fun of them, and joke about them being at the root of the problem. As can be seen from the extract, soon after Tom stated that he was having trouble hearing, Steven made a pun. Steven commented on (line 4) Tom's physical appearance, and suggested that the fault lies in Tom's long hair, rather than the connection. As Tom did not seem to react to Steven's comment, he repeated it and received support from Lisa and Mark who found his comment amusing. Soon after, Steven made a comment (line 14) that contained a question in both Italian and Spanish. Tina, who had been quiet during the conversation, responded by using the very same one-worded question she had heard Steven ask. Tina's question had her colleagues laughing out loud.

There were elements in the conversation that can have positive effects on the group's sense of unity. Nick was being empathetic to Tom's problem whilst Steven got some members laughing. Steven's comments to Tom contained a personal dimension that could be seen as an

indicator of a strong interpersonal relationship between the two, or as an attempt to strengthen that bond. Furthermore, his use of foreign language could be seen as a means to reach both of his colleagues abroad. Although these comments seem to have a positive, reinforcing element to them, it would be rash to neglect the possibly detrimental side of such ambiguous comments. Steven's approach is risky as his comments could be understood as rebuking or criticizing the other, and his use of Tom and Tina's mother tongue is questionable as it could be seen as belittling and stereotyping behavior. Furthermore, Steven's comments received positive response from Lisa and Mark. It is possible this type of behavior could have an undesired effect on the group's interpersonal relationships, and consequently weaken the group's performance. On the other hand, it could also increase unity between group members as they share an experience together. Perhaps there is truth in both, and in actuality the extract shows a group that experienced differing levels of divergence and convergence simultaneously.

The following two extracts demonstrate how differences in communication styles slowed the group in solving task-related issues.

6.5 Extract V - So It's Fixed Up Or?

The following extract contains a short discussion between three members about a problem they were having with a file hosting service. Particularly noteworthy is the dialogue between John and Amanda as it would appear that the communication challenges they encountered were due to differences in their communication styles. Neither John nor Amanda are Finnish and they come from different cultural backgrounds. Neither speak English as their mother tongue. The extract raises the notion if the participants' differing cultural backgrounds contributed to their communication challenges, and ultimately hindered the group from performing optimally. In regards to the coding frame presented earlier, this extract was coded under both in-group and out-group references.

1. *John: no that doesn't sound slow, it's not just properly connected. Where, what is the folder you put in on?*
2. *Lisa: Marketing, um, new sticker or something*
3. *John to Amanda: okey, we have to check, have you unlink your computer and link it again?*
4. *Amanda looks at John and nods*
5. *John: you have done with yours, and you have done with Lisa's?*
6. *Amanda looks at John and nods*
7. *John: Have you done it, who's missing still?*
8. *Amanda: um ... Nick, Steven and Mark*

9. *John: and me*
10. *Amanda: ah*
11. *John: haven't done my computer yet. Can you do that as soon as possible because ...*
12. *Amanda looks at John and nods*
13. *John: ... maybe that is created some problems if you haven't done that. So everybody in the, in the circuit has to be already unlinked and linked again to this new account. Have you done yours?*
14. *Amanda: yes*
15. *John: and Lisa?*
16. *Amanda looks at John and nods*
17. *John: those two should work then*
18. *Lisa: well maybe we can try again we can make another test, maybe I was first thinking maybe I didn't save it but then I went back to Amanda's computer and it was in there so ...*
19. *Amanda frowns*
20. *John: Amanda's computers also has some additional folders that I don't see*
21. *Lisa: mmhh*
22. *John: For example you have repetitive folder of, I don't remember which one ...*
23. *Lisa: mmhh*
24. *John: ... because once I was using your computer (points at Amanda) I also noticed that why you have two folders?*
25. *Lisa nods*
26. *John: And then I went to check on my computer and I didn't see ...*
27. *Lisa: mmhh*
28. *John: ... it so that's why I want you to unlink and start from zero and link it again so start from zero because I guess there's something wrong with your computer, because as you tried to save once a file ...*
29. *Lisa: mmhh, mmhh*
30. *John: ... on Amanda's computer and didn't see it*
31. *Lisa: mmhh*
32. *Amanda: But because now I have a new Dropbox so, I don't have the, repeat folders*
33. *John: so it's fixed up or?*
34. *Amanda: yeah*
35. *John to Lisa: yeah, I don't know why it worked, that's ...*
36. *Lisa exhales loudly: well, let's check again*

The extract centered mainly on John and Amanda's dialogue regarding a task assigned on the latter. In the beginning of the conversation, John approached Amanda about a problem Lisa was having with a file hosting service. John was very specific in his question as he asked if Amanda had taken the two necessary steps he seemed to assume were needed to fix the problem (line 3). After receiving a confirming nod from Amanda, John proceeded by asking her the same question again, only this time he rephrased it by using a more general approach, and specifically pointed out Lisa (lines 4–5). Once again Amanda responded by nodding. It could be that John was skeptical about Amanda's performance as he repeated his question. His first question contained detailed instructions while the second specified Lisa. Perhaps however Amanda's non-verbal responses did not provide sufficient information for John and his behavior was the result of lack of verbal confirmation on Amanda's part. This appears plausible as John appeared to realize that he would have to change his strategy to avoid a simple head shake as an answer, and rephrased his next question so that it would require a vocal response (line 7). The question John asked is interesting in itself as he did not mention that he himself was amongst those lacking Amanda's consultation (line 7). It would appear that John tested Amanda to see whether or not she would remember everyone, and when she

failed to mention him, he reminded her that he too should be on the list (lines 9–11). Given John's position as the head of the company, it is possible that his reminder could have been seen as a rebuke by others.

Halfway through Lisa joined the conversation as John and Amanda did not appear to be able to solve the issue. She suggested they would make another connection test and pointed out that she had noticed duplicate files on Amanda's computer (line 18). John, having noticed the same thing, seemed to assume the issue was due to a connection problem after all, and repeated his earlier instructions to Amanda (line 28). At this point, Amanda told them that she had in fact reinstalled Dropbox and the duplicate files were a non-issue. The conversation ended with Lisa appearing frustrated and repeating her earlier suggestion of making another connection test. Perhaps she was frustrated that they were unable to solve the issue, and that even after a lengthy discussion her previously suggested approach was still the best course of action.

The conversation seemed to be hindered by the participants' inability to recognize differences in communication styles. Amanda and John both appeared to assume that their messages were correctly understood by the other. Perhaps the conversation had been different if Amanda had chosen to respond to John vocally or John had rephrased his questions differently. However instead of talk, Amanda opted for nodding which might have come across as evasive behavior. In that case, her nods did not alleviate John's insecurities about the handling of the matter and therefore he kept returning to the issue. It was only at the end of conversation that John appeared content with the amount of information Amanda gave her. That is when John seemed to come to the conclusion that she had done what was expected of her, and that the issue would need to be solved some other way (lines 33–35).

This extract demonstrated how the apparent assumption of similarities in communicative styles made both parties repeat themselves, and consequently prolonged the conversation. Indeed, it would appear that John and Amanda perceived the dialogue differently, perhaps because of their different cultural backgrounds, and their roles in the organization. The communication challenges they encountered might have been avoided if there had been a greater awareness and a better understanding of the differences in both communicative styles and cultural backgrounds. One possible solution to prevent this from happening again would be for John to opt for a more discursive approach and ask Amanda to fill the group in on her

progress in her own words. Another solution might be for Amanda to provide vocal responses in which she describes the process more specifically.

In the following extract issues of group membership and accommodation strategies were clearly present as the group discussed Amanda's absence.

6.6 Extract VI - Where's Amanda?

In the following extract the group were discussing non-work related issues when Amanda's absence was noted. The conversation that followed seemed to divide the group. Lisa, for instance, gave three different answers on three different occasions when asked about her colleague's arrival time. In regards to the coding frame presented earlier, this extract was coded under both in-group and out-group references. Lisa's behavior is particularly interesting, as she appeared to change her accommodative strategy at the end.

1. Tom to Steven: *It was the ... cup*
 2. Steven: *Cup, okey. but they lost the cup game?*
 3. Tom: *Yeah, but yesterday was normal game*
 4. Mark to Lisa: *Where's Amanda?*
 5. Lisa: *she's coming soon*
 6. Steven to Tom: *yeah yeah, okey*
 7. Mark to Lisa: *that's good*
 8. Steven to Tom: *so it's over the Cup now?*
- The group discussed various issues for a while until Mark mentioned Amanda again.*
9. Mark: *.... due to end of this month, then two things from Dropbox, I think how far Amanda has ...*
 10. Steven to John: *is she sick today?*
 11. Mark: *she done those already?*
 12. Lisa to Steven: *no, she's coming at twelve*
 13. Steven: *aa, okey*
 14. John to Lisa: *she told you?*
 15. Lisa to John: *she told me yeah. She didn't tell you?*
 16. Steven to John: *where's she at?*
 17. Steven to Lisa: *did she tell you?*
 18. Lisa: *she's ... were somewhere over the weekend as far as I understood and ... is just coming back late so ...*
 19. Steven *exhales loudly, lifts his eyebrows and looks at John*
 20. Lisa *looks at John and Steven: ... she didn't really give me an explanation she just said that I'm coming around one on Monday*
 21. Steven to Lisa: *this morning, no, on Friday? Or when did she tell you?*
 22. Lisa: *On Thursday or Friday*
 23. Steven *laughs and looks at John: okey, well maybe she think it's important to tell you*
 24. John *mumbles (inaudible), and the conversation halts for a while*
 25. Mark: *but now everybody has the new dropbox?*
 26. John: *I still don't know how it ...*
 27. Steven: *at least I haven't gone through that with Amanda*
 28. Nick *shakes his head: me neither*
 29. Lisa *laughs and looks at Steven: I think ...*
 30. Mark to Steven: *maybe you have to ...*

31. *Lisa to Steven: ... the problem is that you need to agree that whether you are going to her or she is going to you because ...*
 32. *Steven: I think John has rather explicitly told her ...*
 33. *John: yesss ... more than once*
 34. *Mark looks at John and smiles*
 35. *Lisa: okey*
 36. *Steven: ... that she's the one responsible, yeah, same thing for the software update-thing, at least as far as I've seen, and on purpose not done that this want to see that she takes that from her side that she takes responsibility of the task*
 37. *Mark looks at John and Steven and smiles*
 38. *Lisa: okey, okey, mmm. Okey, that's what I was afraid of.*
 39. *Steven laughs*
 40. *Conversation halts, Mark looks at John who is eyeing his computer*
 41. *Mark to John: so this week*

Lisa's answers to enquiries into Amanda's absence are interesting as she gave a different answer each time. The group members asked Lisa about Amanda's whereabouts on three different occasions to which she gave three different estimated arrival times, each answer proposing a later time than her previous answers. She originally said that Amanda would arrive soon (line 5) but later said that Amanda would arrive at twelve only to change her answer once more (lines 12 & 20). The variation in her answers is notable as at first she said Amanda would arrive shortly but later said Amanda would be arriving at around one, some four hours later than in her first response. Lisa's behavior seemed to indicate that she tried to provide some form of support for Amanda and minimize the possibly negative effect of her absence. Mark tried to steer the conversation back to the agenda but Steven noted that Amanda had not completed a task given to her (lines 25–27), to which Lisa proposed an alternative viewpoint. Lisa hinted at the possibility that instead of task-related negligence on Amanda's part, there might be a misunderstanding regarding individual responsibilities (lines 29–31). However, as Steven and John pointed out that Amanda had been given clear instructions and it appeared apparent that they were not pleased with Amanda's performance, Lisa withdrew her imminent support and admitted Amanda's possible failure (line 38). It seems that Lisa was willing to support her absent colleague but not at a possible personal cost.

In addition to Lisa's varying estimates on Amanda's arrival, the conversation contained other interesting features. Steven for instance had an active role but it is plausible it was only because John showed interest in Amanda's absence. It is worth noting that Steven appeared satisfied with Lisa's answer in the beginning (lines 12–13) but assumed an active role after John enquired after Amanda. After John's enquiry Steven was intent on figuring out why Amanda was absent, what she had told Lisa, and when. As Lisa told them what she knew about Amanda's weekend plans, Steven appeared amazed that Lisa had information about Amanda that he and John did not have (line 19). Considering Steven's comments at the end of

the extract (lines 32 & 36) it would appear that he emphasized Amanda's, and subsequently Lisa's, behavior as deviating from the regular chain of command by not informing neither him nor John in advance (lines 23).

Another interesting feature in the conversation was Mark's behavior at the latter part of the extract. It would seem that Mark supported Lisa's suggestion of ambiguity regarding individual responsibilities (line 30). If Mark too had stated that he felt the issue was down to misunderstanding in personal responsibilities it might have had an effect on how the discussion ended, and how Amanda's performance was viewed. After all, Mark holds a position of power and oversees the work of others as Production Manager. Instead, after Steven had told Lisa that Amanda had received clear instructions, Mark remained quiet. Perhaps Mark was worried he might be wrong, that there was no ambiguity to begin with, or he feared the possible social consequences of contesting the two. Whatever his reason, the discussion ended in Lisa admitting Amanda's possible mishap.

These six extracts were exemplary cases and structured in a thematical order. Extracts I–II focused on issues regarding in-groups and out-groups, Extracts III–IV on TMC and communication processes, and Extracts V–VI on differences in communication styles. In the following chapter the main findings are discussed.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The initial data examination seemed to suggest that the group had made its cultural diversity an asset and was cohesive, egalitarian, and able to perform at a high level. After a closer examination it became evident that issues of cultural differences and group membership, such as described in the extracts, were hindering the group's performance and creating relational tension. The data analysis indicated that the level of group membership varied between communication events, and that a group member's in-group / out-group membership appeared to be determined by whether or not that person was physically present. More specifically, the data indicated that Tina and Tom, the two workers who attended the meetings via Skype appeared to be considered as out-group members by their colleagues working in Finland. This is visible in Extract III where the group encountered a connection problem and Tina asked for clarification but was ignored.

Before presenting and discussing the study's main findings, here are the study's research questions.

1. How do cultural differences manifest in the interaction of this work group?
2. In what kind of situations does divergence and convergence occur?
3. Are there in-group and out-group members in the work group under scrutiny, and if so, how does group membership manifest?

After a careful examination of the data, three main findings were discovered. They are presented below in a numerical order to match the numbering on the research questions.

1. Cultural differences manifested in negative stereotyping of out-group members
2. Accommodative strategies were applied in situations that contained personal level greeting, task-related issues, and TMC challenges
3. There are out-group members in the work group whose group membership manifested in them getting less regard from in-group members

The following paragraphs contain an example of each finding followed by a short summarizing discussion.

The data revealed that cultural differences manifested in negative stereotyping of out-group members. They were often generalized based on their supposed cultural characteristics. The behavior of out-group members was seen as illogical, and a source of amusement. This was

evident in Extract I where the group made fun of their Japanese associate. Below an example of an out-group member becoming a subject of negative stereotyping.

- 5. John: *and since Ukraine Finland ... same same but different ...*
- 8. Steven: *Looking from Japan, I guess it's very same ..*
- 12. Steven (gestures): *.. he's like aah, they're neighbours ...*

The data revealed that accommodative strategies were applied in situations that contained personal level greeting, task-related issues, and TMC challenges. Both accommodative strategies, divergence and convergence, were applied during the meetings. They particularly manifested whenever the group encountered communication challenges. On every occasion they encountered a connection problem it disrupted the flow of communication and hindered the group from performing optimally. These technological breakdowns appeared to minimize some of the members' input. Here is an example from Extract III where both Tina and Tom were unable to fully participate in the conversation.

- 13. Steven: *this Skype-thing doesn't always work as well as one would hope for*
- 14. Nick: *yeah, there's problem with the*
- 15. John: *Tom?*
- 16. Tina: *huh?*
- 17. John: *Tom, Tom!*
- 18. Tom: *yeah*
- 19. John: *can you hear us well?*
- 20. Tom: *aa, aa, where now, just last fifteen seconds something and*
- 21. Steven *laughs*

The data revealed that there are out-group members in the work group whose group membership manifested in them getting less regard from in-group members. At least in part, this seemed to be connected to cultural differences. The group appeared indifferent to its members' cultural backgrounds and instead assumed similarity. Differences in communication styles and the inability to recognize them appeared to create relational tension between group members. The following example from Extract V reveals how differences in communication styles lead to a situation where John appeared uncertain whether or not Amanda had done the task appointed to her.

- 3. John to Amanda: *okey, we have to check, have you unlink your computer and link it again?*
- 4. Amanda *looks at John and nods*
- 5. John: *you have done with yours, and you have done with Lisa's?*
- 6. Amanda *looks at John and nods*
- 7. John: *Have you done it, who's missing still?*
- 8. Amanda: *um ... Nick, Steven and Mark*
- 9. John: *and me*
- 10. Amanda: *ah*
- 11. John: *haven't done my computer yet. Can you do that as soon as possible because ...*

12. *Amanda looks at John and nods*

13. *John: ... maybe that is created some problems if you haven't done that. So everybody in the, in the circuit has to be already unlinked and linked again to this new account. Have you done yours?*

14. *Amanda: yes*

15. *John: and Lisa?*

16. *Amanda looks at John and nods*

17. *John: those two should work then*

The three main findings were often encountered in the data and their effect on the group's dynamics was evident. The research questions were set to answer questions related to in-group / out-group membership, accommodation strategies, and the manifestation of culture. Based on the findings and the previously presented extracts it can be said that culture, or more specifically cultural differences, were a source of amusement, wonder, and discord that manifested on both explicit and implicit levels. That is, cultural references appeared in speech and gestures as well as on a more subtle level such as communication styles. The cultural references that were made in the meetings were often macro level remarks where a single event was used to amplify and characterize an entire nation or a group of people. These issues were often based in actual real-life events that one or more group members had either experienced or heard of. What was particularly noteworthy is that as the group discussed these issues, the discussion would quickly become polarizing. In other words, out-group members became the target of negative stereotyping, and as was mentioned earlier, the group did not make a single positive remark about out-group members during the meetings.

Implicitly, culture appeared to manifest in the ways people provided and interpreted information. The data revealed that the group members were on occasion unable to recognize and reconcile the differences in their communication styles. This had an effect on the group's performance as it hindered the group's communication, and appeared to create relational tension. It also prolonged the meetings and thus decreased their effectiveness as was seen in Extracts V–VI. The findings also indicate that the group members applied both communication accommodation strategies, convergence and divergence, regularly during the meetings. In particularly discussions that dealt with internet connection problems and task-related performances revealed the use of both strategies. It appeared that the need to emphasize group identity manifested specifically in situations where the group encountered a communication problem that they did not understand or could not quickly resolve. The data also showed a connection between TMC challenges and the level of group membership. More specifically, these malfunctions led to the polarization of the two workers abroad and the surfacing of both convergence and divergence. Though the data did not reveal how the two workers abroad experienced the communication breakdowns, it did reveal that due to

connection problems, the two workers abroad were often excluded from the conversation. In such a situation, even once the connection had been restored, instead of an update on what had passed while being off-line they were met with laughter. Based on the reactions of those attending the meetings physically, it appears that these disruptions resulted in them converging to others physically present and diverging from the two members abroad. In other words, remote workers Tina and Tom appeared to be quickly considered as out-group members by those located in Finland when Skype malfunctioned. Hence, it seemed that the level of group membership varied strongly between the members. The connection problems the group encountered created a number of situations that appeared to have a negative effect on not only on the interpersonal ties between members, but also on everyday task solving.

Based on the findings and in particular in the treatment of Tina and Tom, it appears that the observed work group consisted of not one, but two in-groups. The first in-group consisted of all group members whereas the second in-group consisted of only those members based in Finland. Furthermore, it appeared that these two in-groups had a hierarchical relationship and that the second in-group consisting of only those based in Finland, formed the main in-group. In conclusion, it can be said that in the observed work group, group membership was communicated through the use of convergence and divergence strategies. On the macro-level this manifested in the negative stereotyping of outsiders, and on the micro-level in the distribution of information and personal greetings.

In the following and final chapter, the reader is presented with the study's evaluation and suggestions regarding future studies.

8 DISCUSSION

In this chapter the reader is presented with a concise evaluation of the study and its possible implications. In order to benefit future studies, certain key aspects are raised and discussed.

8.1 Evaluation of the Study

The premise of this study was built on a data-driven, interdisciplinary approach. To ensure adequate amount of data, four meetings were videotaped. The body of data was vast, 89 pages of transcribed text and 13 hours of footage, which made it difficult to narrow down the focus and the appropriate scope of the study. The data contained a wide variety of interesting issues such as leadership, nonverbal communication, and group roles that were regularly encountered but had to be ignored as the scope of the study would have been too broad. Furthermore, the work was to be kept within the bounds of a Master's Thesis and therefore much had to be excluded. Applying an interdisciplinary approach was fascinating though challenging, as it meant finding a theoretical framework that combined both speech communication and intercultural communication, and suited the purposes of the study. It also meant that compromises needed to be made during the research process as there were differing viewpoints to be considered. Even after a suitable theoretical framework was chosen and the scope was narrowed down, the abundance of data made it challenging to recognize and exclude irrelevant information. Part of the challenge of determining what to discard was that much of the information was either directly or indirectly linked to issues that were relevant for the study.

In retrospect, the abundance of data was confusing and overwhelming. The sheer amount of both audio and visual data made it difficult to decide what information to focus on, and which direction to pursue. It would have sufficed to videotape a single meeting instead of four. Furthermore, the data would have been more manageable had only two cameras been used and a strategic choice been made to emphasise the footage of but camera, rather than all three. In regards to the reliability of the study one should also consider having three cameras present in the meetings. With the exception of two occasions where the group members laughed about being observed, they appeared completely oblivious to having cameras present. The material shows that they did not even glance at the cameras once the meetings had started. It appears

that having cameras present in the meetings did not have a direct effect on their communication behavior, however it is impossible to say for certain. Another factor that made the process difficult was that personal gratification lead to setting the aims of the study needlessly high. All this made the work slow and arduous.

The gathered data was unique, vast, and multifaceted. As studies on small groups have often taken place in a laboratory setting (Poole & Hollingshead 2005, 21–50) it was fascinating to attempt to broaden the spectrum by observing a work group in its own environment, especially one so culturally diverse. Another aspect benefiting the reliability of the study is that every single detail recorded was available for analysis. Though the participants were given the opportunity to deny the use of their parts in the analysis, none did. The data revealed the interaction as it occurred, with no limitations on what could be included and what not. Even confidential issues such as trade secrets and personal relationships were available. The use of multiple cameras captured and having both audio and visual data meant that the material could be revisited when needed, which in turn contributed to the accuracy of the analysis. The size of the work group was optimal as the data contained contributions from each member and there was little variation to the line-up. Had the group been smaller, it would have affected the credibility of the findings. The group consisted of three women and five men which meant that both sexes were well represented. The group members were all in their late 20s and early 30s so there were no generation gaps to consider. The group's use of a TMC tool and the location of the two workers abroad enriched the data as it provided various interesting elements for the group's communication. Furthermore, having based the study on two disciplines benefited the accuracy of the analysis as differing viewpoints had to be considered.

Although CAT suited the purposes of this study, it is imperative that the theory's possible shortcomings are noted and considered. CAT has been criticized for the ambiguous use of its key terms, and the lack of an acknowledged and standardized measurement tool for accommodation assessment (Gallois et al. 2005; Soliz & Giles 2012, 26). Indeed, the lack of any kind of measurement tool created uncertainty during the data analysis process as each accommodation occurrence had to be considered both separately and together with other similar incidents in the data. Additionally, the theory is exceptionally complex with many different versions and its testability is challenging (Griffin 2012, 404). Giles admits the challenges of testing the whole theory at one time (Gallois & Giles 1998). Furthermore, as majority of the research on CAT has centered on the actual acquainting process between

strangers, research on more established relationships is scarce. Additionally, research has produced only a limited amount of information on when accommodative behaviors are directly or indirectly responsible for interpersonal outcomes. As most of the observed group members had known each other for two or three years, CAT provided little in terms of what to be aware of on more solidified relationships. Giles also points out that CAT research has not yet been able to answer when accommodative strategies are consciously and unconsciously applied in interaction. (Giles 2008 in Baxter & Braithwaite 2008) The data unfortunately does not provide concrete answers other than the connection between out-groups and divergence which seem to be strongly linked. However, the theory allowed to inspect various aspects of the data, whilst still having a strong pragmatic approach. Another reason supporting the choice of CAT was its applicability as it has been applied to TMC events before (Riordan et al. 2012, 84–85).

Both accommodative strategies, convergence and divergence, appear in culturally diverse small group communication. What is particularly noteworthy, and is supported by the data, is that both accommodative strategies can appear within a single communication event as Soliz and Giles (2012) and Gallois et al. (2005) noted. An individual may want to distinguish himself / herself as a representative of a certain group and yet behave in a converging fashion moments later. Cultural differences tend to be portrayed in a polarizing manner and create amusement if the behavior of others appear unfamiliar. Convergence to out-group members was rarely encountered in the data which seem to support Griffin's (2012) argument of in-group members shunning those who accommodate to out-group members. The data would seem to support this notion given the many occasions the group members made fun of outsiders, simply based on their nationality. Extract VI contained an interesting part directly linked to this matter. In the extract, Lisa initially provided support for Amanda but later withdrew her support as John and Steven stayed adamant on their perspective. It is likely that Lisa changed her behavior in order to avoid been shunned by her peers.

Matteson (2010) argued that members converge strongly on the group interaction level and less so on a personal level. In this regard, the findings remain inconclusive and drawing reliable conclusions to either support or dismiss this notion is difficult. However, it should be noted that certain situations would seem to validate this view. For instance, whenever the group experienced TMC challenges, group members in Finland would laugh and engage with one another during those moments, and once the situation was solved, the meeting continued without Tina and Tom being briefed on what had happened while their connection was down.

This is directly linked to Burgoon et al. (2002) conclusions that there is a strong connection between malfunctioning communication tools and accommodation strategies. As the extracts revealed, malfunctioning communication tools caused distinguishable challenges for the members and had an effect on their in-group / out-group behavior. Though the effect of accommodative behaviors to interpersonal outcomes remains unclear (Giles 2008 in Baxter & Braithwaite 2008) the results of this study however indicate that the use of accommodative behaviors can have interpersonal outcomes. As meetings are an important venue for distributing information and seeking opinions, any behavior that could possibly hinder an individual's input, should be taken seriously.

One aspect that did not have a visible role in this study, but is important to address, is the various nationalities of the group members. As issues of nationality are broadly discussed in various fields of study and also often dominate the intercultural communication forum, perhaps at the expense of other aspects of the communication phenomena, it was a conscious decision to focus less on nationalities. However, as the extracts showed issues related to national culture surfaced in the data. This was visible particularly in the way group members referred to out-group members, mostly through negative stereotyping. Issues of nationality and different cultural backgrounds were seen as amusing, a somewhat unexpected result given the group's cultural make. In the following and final chapter, possible future implications are discussed.

8.2 Future Implications

More studies focusing on the effects of accommodation strategies are needed. As the data reveals, TMC can provide certain advances as opposed to face-to-face communication, but can also can hinder team collaboration and effective participation as proposed by Berry (2011). However, there are ways however to minimize these challenges. Kennedy, Vozdolska and McComb (2010) view that the success of group work may depend on the initial meetings and the processes instigated at those meetings. Hence they propose that having an initial face-to-face session is essential for a TMC to have a successful start. This is however difficult as bringing the group together might cost too much though it would benefit the forming of member relationships and group norms. Another aspect to consider is the use of communication tools. Klitmøller and Luring (2013) propose that geographically dispersed teams should use the richest medium available to counter the possibly negative effect of not

having a common language. Using such a medium would allow for a more immersed communication event for both parties, though it might be difficult to execute given its bandwidth and other technological requirements. Gergmoprez and Zigurs (2009, 23) argue that instead of deciding on a specific tool to be used at a particular communication event beforehand, one should first attempt to understand the communication processes related to that particular event. In other words, choose a specific tool based on the most important aspects of a particular communication event. As more and more emphasis is put on effective communication at work it would be vital that the choice between Tool A and Tool B was not merely a pragmatic choice, but a strategic choice. This would increase awareness for the need for developing strategic choices on what to use and to what purpose. (Gergmoprez & Zigurs 2009, 43.) As a result, the role of communication would be considered as a key element within the company. This would also mean that managers would have to manage communication. Adding a strategic dimension to the planning of remote group work would encourage the group to solve possible connection problems to achieve set goals. For those uncomfortable with incorporating a strategic approach to meeting communication, a simpler way would be to agree on meeting rules and appropriate measures when anything unexpected happens. A simple solution to avoid TMC challenges would be to run two or three communication tools simultaneously, some that use both video and audio, some that use just audio or some that use just text. Keyton (2016) shares a similar stance as she urges scholars to identify new ways for capturing group interaction that would allow to study the micro level of communication. From both a social and economic viewpoint, TMC delays and in-group favoritism should be seen as disruption to the entire organization's agenda, not just a single event at a particular meeting. Future studies should attempt to analyse what kind of an effect TMC delays have on achieving set task goals and members' long-term working relationships. Also, studies on communication accommodation should attempt to disinter the temporal aspect of the phenomenon. In other words, it should be determined when and how the use of accommodative strategies have long-lasting consequences and when they are only momentary. This could help in determining what kind of communication instances produce an undesired and irreparable effect.

More studies conducted in a group's natural environment are needed. As research on work groups in their natural environment are scarce (Poole & Hollingshead 2005, 21–50) communication studies that take place at work would be able to provide interesting insights into specific aspects of a given work group. Researchers are encouraged to conduct their studies in a most natural environment as possible. Furthermore, as to the potential challenges

of finding and attracting a suitable company to partner with, it is worth noting that this study took but one email, one phone call and one meeting before cooperation was initiated. Perhaps companies would be more interested if they were made aware of its possible social and financial benefits. After all, companies are constantly looking for ways to improve their competitiveness and communication studies could provide one such opportunity.

Companies need to realize that successful meetings are planned and managed. Baran et al (2011) propose a strategic yet pragmatic solution to approach work meetings. They encourage to develop a meeting process that incorporates the most important phases of the meeting, such as outlining the goals at the start of the meeting, engaging group members in an equal manner, and revisiting the set goals at the end of the meeting. Also, a simple set of rules should be put in place that outline how group members are expected to behave and what to do when the meeting process is disrupted. Regular, biannual meetings should be held where meetings effectiveness are evaluated, and if and how they are benefiting the organization, the group, and the individual. Also, employees should be encouraged to engage in person-oriented discussions with one another. This is however difficult as time is becoming the most important currency and allocating it properly is a challenging task in itself.

Speech communication and intercultural communication should not be viewed as separate entities. The two phenomena are closely interconnected and complement, rather than contest, one another. Also, the use of multiple theories should be considered. Laborious as it might be, communication events contain too many layers for a single approach to cover adequately. This study supports the notion that the two phenomena can indeed be successfully applied and encourage others to consider utilizing different aspects of the communication phenomena in their own work. Studies on intercultural communication should focus more on understanding what triggers convergence and divergence rather than attempting to evolve the concept of culture. This would most likely increase its appeal, for both scholars and laymen alike, as even the data showed that this culturally diverse work group made derogatory remarks. People have an ever-increasing need to understand intercultural communication and they should be provided practical tools for managing communication in culturally diverse environments. Conversely, speech communication has long regarded issues of culture as a less significant portion of communication. This is however perilous as it is an essential element in the act of communication. After all, communication is highly context-oriented. Abdallah-Preteille (2006, 480) notes that communication studies would benefit from a strong situational and contextual approach. It is thereby highly recommended that researchers

employ a holistic, inclusive approach to studying communication, in addition to the more traditional, segmented approach. Communication is context-oriented, so too should be the studies that study it.

As to how the results of this study might benefit the fields of speech communication and intercultural communication is difficult to estimate. Though the study was strictly qualitative, the field of communication studies would benefit from the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. It would allow for statistical interpretation and allow for a deeper analysis, an approach Klitmøller and Lauring (2013, 405) also support. For instance, quantitative methods could provide interesting information on the amount of interlocutors' verbal input. Another interesting aspect to consider would be the division between personal and task level comments. In other words, to attempt to define what counts as a relationship-oriented comment and why. This could assist in determining what kind of choices group members make to strengthen or weaken personal ties between each other. Still, much remains in the realm of qualitative study for communication studies to discover. As was mentioned earlier, the data contained a variety of issues that had to be discarded such as leadership, group roles, and nonverbal communication. The data even contained issues related to management distribution within the group. In other words, the observation provided much more data than was initially expected. Perhaps however it is not the results the study produced nor the questions it raises, but its approach and suggestions on how to capture the attention of companies to partake in such studies that are its major contributions to the study of communication.

Based on this study and for future purposes, it is important for a culturally diverse work group to focus on issues benefiting its cohesiveness, develop procedures minimizing the effect of technological breakdowns, and increase the understanding of cultural differences. Meetings that take place regularly should be designed to incorporate a processual foundation, norms and rules should be established, and group members should be equally engaged. In other words, communication should be managed.

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