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## Membership Negotiation in the First Workplace – Newcomers’ Experiences

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## Membership Negotiation in the First Workplace

– Newcomers' Experiences

### Substructed abstract

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

## Introduction

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

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

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

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

### 19 **Newcomers' Entry**

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

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

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3 Social support and information from peers and managers help newcomers become members  
4 of their workplace (Kramer and Sias, 2014), enabling the development of job competency  
5 and preventing turnover (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). Support from people with  
6 different areas of expertise promote membership in coworking spaces (Walden, 2019).  
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8 Employees work in different kinds of workspaces with multiple purposes and possibilities for  
9 social support. Understanding employees' personal experiences of social interaction in the  
10 workplace can show what processes are meaningful during various newcomers' entry.  
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19 This study approaches newcomer's entry from the perspective of membership  
20 negotiation by focusing on young professionals' experiences of workplace communication.  
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Newcomers' experiences in their first workplaces can provide information about the occurrence and quality of communication processes' during early membership negotiation.

### **Theoretical Background**

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

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

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

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

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

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3 from performativity” (Brummans et al., 2014, p. 187). The four flow model, nevertheless, is  
4 grounded on Giddens’ (1984) idea of the duality of structure, which separates it from other  
5 CCO approaches. It explains employees’ experiences through organizational structures and  
6 rules, but it simultaneously sees how members of the organization assign new meanings to  
7 the structures through communication. Workgroups form organizations in which members  
8 actively reconstruct their relationships and identities (McPhee and Zaug, 2009). Thus,  
9 exploring membership negotiation enhances the understanding of workplace communication  
10 in general.  
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21 Even though the CCO has initiated a lot of empirical research, the four flow approach  
22 has been applied less frequently (Kuhn and Putnam, 2014). So far, only a couple of studies  
23 have empirically focused on Four Flow model and newcomer’s membership negotiations  
24 with it. Woo and Myers (2020) showed that organization’s boundary spanning—employees  
25 need to manage information and relationships across different units, hence complicating their  
26 membership negotiation. Endacott and Myers (2019) showed that earlier work experience  
27 enables membership negotiation to transform: earlier work experience leads to improved role  
28 positioning, influenced decisions and practices, and facilitated interorganizational  
29 collaboration; in addition, membership negotiation was constructed through the interaction of  
30 past and new organizational experiences. Here, we can assume that young professional  
31 newcomers construct their expertise during membership negotiations. To understand their  
32 early experiences, this study focuses on communication processes appearing in membership  
33 negotiation.  
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51 *The aim of this study* is to examine the communication processes involved in  
52 membership negotiation in the entry phase. This is studied by analyzing the communication  
53 processes described by the newcomers when they talk about their experiences of social  
54 interaction in their first workplace after graduation. *The research question:* How do young  
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3 professional newcomers experience proceeding of membership negotiation as a part of  
4 workplace interaction while entering in their first workplace? This is studied by constructing  
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6 membership-related communication processes during their first three to 10 months of the  
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8 beginning entry.  
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### 11 12 **Method**

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14 This study sought to uncover newcomers' experiences of membership negotiation in  
15 workplace communication over time. To catch up and understand these experiences and  
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17 identify the communication processes, the study was conducted with a qualitative  
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19 methodology following the symbolic interactionism approach, in which meanings are seen as  
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21 created through social interaction (Mead, 1935) and experiences are understood as  
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23 individuals' interpretations (Blumer, 1969). Here, the newcomers are seen as active agents in  
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25 the world whose experience and understanding of the self are constructed through dynamic  
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27 and interpretive social interactions "where people create, enact and change meanings and  
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29 actions" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7).  
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35 The study was conducted by two researchers. The first author carried the main  
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37 responsibility of data collection and analysis. However, the authors critically discussed about  
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39 the choices in data collection and interpretations in analysis to increase the credibility of the  
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41 study.  
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### 44 **Participants**

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46 The goal of data collection was to follow participants' early career experiences by  
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48 capturing their descriptions of communication and experiences of the transition phase at  
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50 multiple time points. Recurring interviews were used to understand the dynamics of these  
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52 experiences in time and the different meanings participants' create in workplace interactions.  
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54 An invitation to participate was shared on social media and in several Finnish universities.  
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3 The participants were 23 young Finnish professionals working in their first position  
4 after graduation at different kinds of organizations. Twenty-one were female, and two were  
5 male; they ranged in age from 23 to 32 years (born between 1985 and 1994). Eleven had  
6 bachelor's degrees and twelve master's degrees in diverse fields: nursing, education,  
7 humanities, economics, engineering, social sciences, natural science, and police and law  
8 studies. They worked in small and large companies, public-sector organizations, and other  
9 associations. The participants and the amount of the data are detailed in Appendix 1.  
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19 Ethical principles were carefully followed; the autonomy of the research subjects was  
20 respected, harm was avoided, and privacy and data were managed (National Advisory Board  
21 on Research Ethics, 2019). The participants were informed about the research and that  
22 participation was voluntary; they were provided with written consent before data collection  
23 started. Their anonymity was ensured throughout all phases of the study.  
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### 30 **Data Collection**

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

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3 The participants were asked to freely describe their personal experiences (Lindlof and  
4 Taylor, 2002), but as a researcher the first author also asked questions. Data were collected  
5 via e-mail, phone, and WhatsApp voice messages. The participants chose which channels  
6 they wanted to use. If they chose e-mail, the researcher sent questions, and the participants  
7 reflected on their answers when it was suitable. If a participant wanted to answer with voice  
8 messages in WhatsApp, the researcher sent questions via written messages. If the participants  
9 chose phone calls, questions were asked during the call. During first contact, the researcher  
10 asked everyone the same questions. As data collection proceeded, the researcher asked more  
11 specific questions related to the participants' personal descriptions. The questions were  
12 related to social interaction, belonging, coworkers, managers, roles, relationships, and the  
13 workplace environment.  
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28 Data collection was an emergent process, meaning that every time a new description  
29 was revealed, it was analyzed to create questions for the subsequent contact. Thus, the  
30 participants' descriptions guided the data collection process, making it inductive. For  
31 example, if during the first contact one participant described that they had spent time with  
32 coworkers outside of working hours, as the researcher the first author would ask other  
33 participants, "Do you spend time with your coworkers outside work, and are there any  
34 differences in communication?" This was done to identify variations and similarities in their  
35 experiences, and it allowed the researcher to ask specific questions over several iterations to  
36 observe participants' experiences with communication dynamics. The data include oral and  
37 written material. The oral material (WhatsApp voice messages and phone discussions) were  
38 later transcribed (340 MS word pages, font Arial 12).  
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54 When planning long-term data collection, the challenges of different communication  
55 platforms were considered by being aware of the quality differences between face-to-face  
56 interviews and Internet interviews (James and Busher, 2014). The different communication  
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3 platforms give the participants the freedom to use the channel they wanted and did not  
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5 require synchronous presence. Hence, the participants could choose the most natural channel  
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7 to express themselves (i.e., through writing or speaking). Some of the participants switched  
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9 from e-mail to WhatsApp voice messages or from phone calls to e-mails.  
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12 The data collection was heuristic and produced rich data. The method captured the  
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14 participants' multivoiced experiences and the communication processes of membership  
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16 negotiation during entry. The first author had a recent experience of entering her first  
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18 workplace after graduation, which supported the data collection and analysis process. This  
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20 might have produced biases in the analysis (Sword, 1999), but these biases were managed  
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22 through self-reflection.  
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### 25 26 **Data Analysis** 27

28 The data analysis was executed concurrently with data collection, leading to the  
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30 adoption of the comparative constant method (Charmaz, 2006). This method is part of the  
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32 grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), and the aim is to first compare the initial data  
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34 and then subsequent codes to understand the similarities and differences in participants'  
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36 experiences (Charmaz, 2006). When a participant provided a response, it was analyzed to  
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38 form questions for the next interview. Thoughts and observations were written down and the  
39  
40 data were transcribed. When data collection was completed, all data were read through  
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42 several times to make notes and compare descriptions. Because the participants had the  
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44 opportunity to say whatever was on their minds, some content was irrelevant (e.g.,  
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46 descriptions of specific work tasks or questions/comments about the study). Data that did not  
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48 describe the experiences of communication or belonging were disregarded.  
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53 The essential analysis began with initial open coding. All data were given descriptive  
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55 codes to represent the newcomers' experiences. These open codes included labels such as  
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57 "getting to know your coworkers," "support," "feedback from supervisor/coworker," and  
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3 “easy to participate in conversations.” Memos containing ideas and comparing different  
4 participants’ experiences were created. Then, focused coding was performed, in which the  
5 most significant and frequent codes were looked for. These two coding processes partly  
6 overlapped (see Charmaz, 2006).  
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12 As part of axial coding and category defining, codes and memos were sorted and the  
13 connections between participants’ experiences were compared. Through this process, the  
14 dimensions of the newcomers’ experiences of communication involved in membership  
15 negotiation were constructed. The eight dimensions were as follows: impression  
16 management, newcomers’ communication orientation and coworkers’ interest, self-  
17 disclosure, feedback and social support, appreciation of expertise, creating atmosphere, social  
18 influence, and shared trust. Then, the temporal occurrence of the communication dimensions  
19 were examined to structure the dimensions into the communication processes. These  
20 dimensions and their timing are presented in Table 1.  
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35 <Table 1 here>  
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40 Finally, the level of abstraction was raised to designate the three communication  
41 processes of membership negotiations: *development of reciprocity*, *seeking and perceiving*  
42 *acceptance*, and *becoming an active member*. The repetitive data collection method enabled  
43 the following development of communication processes over time.  
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## 51 Results

52 The aim was to examine the communication processes involved in membership  
53 negotiations. Three processes were identified that were formed from various dimensions and  
54 appeared differently in time. *Developing reciprocity* consisted of feedback and social support  
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3 and appreciation of expertise. *Seeking and perceiving acceptance* consisted of impression  
4 management, newcomers' orientation and coworkers' interest, and self-disclosure. *Becoming*  
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8 *an active member* consisted of creating atmosphere, social influence, and shared trust.

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10 Different processes emerged phase to phase, but they also overlapped and were dynamic.

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12 Three or four months after entering the workplace, concurrent negotiating of reciprocity and  
13 acceptance allowed the newcomers to experience their membership. Most of the newcomers  
14 had become members of their workplace, and their descriptions of communication within the  
15 workplace had altered. Figure 1 presents the communication processes the newcomers  
16 described. Arrows show the timing of the communication processes in membership  
17 negotiation, and the circle describes the ongoing membership negotiation in workplaces.

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29 <Figure 1 here>

### 30 31 32 33 **Developing Reciprocity**

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

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

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3 When the newcomers perceived themselves as accepted, they were able to share their  
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5 opinions and thoughts in workplace relationships. They also started to give feedback and  
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7 support to others. *Laura* describes how small things, such as asking “how are you,” can be  
8  
9 supportive:

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11 Relationships where people take others into account, greet, and catch up support my  
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13 belonging at my workplace. That is why I also try to remember to ask how everyone’s  
14  
15 doing and to greet everyone I meet when I go to the work. (*Laura*, five months at the  
16  
17 workplace)  
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21 The newcomers noted that a growing *appreciation of expertise* expressed by  
22  
23 coworkers in conversations made it easier to adapt. The newcomers wanted to be appreciated  
24  
25 as professionals and feel that their ideas were valued. *Marianne* describes how becoming part  
26  
27 of decision making supported her expertise:  
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31 It feels nice when my opinion is asked and they [coworkers] take that into account in  
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33 the same way, like someone experienced would have said that. (*Marianne*, two  
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35 months at the workplace)  
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39 The importance of appreciating expertise emphasizes that suspicion and mistrust of  
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41 newcomers’ skills can negatively affect the development of reciprocity. The newcomers were  
42  
43 very sensitive about their expertise, and negative experiences with coworkers or managers  
44  
45 bothered them. For *Sophia*, it was challenging to express her expertise:

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47 With some work tasks, others may think that new employees could not do them. I  
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49 think it is a bit of that they don’t trust that things would get done.... I have a different  
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51 perspective to do my work than others. In a way, I have felt that I am stepping on  
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53 someone’s toes if I do my work in a different way than others are used to. (*Sophia*,  
54  
55 two months at the workplace)  
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59 *Ida* instead describes how her questioned expertise affected her communication with others:  
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3 That kind of interaction with coworkers, where you don't get some work tasks to do  
4 because you are a young woman and instead those tasks are given to someone only  
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6 because he happens to be man (which they never say aloud, of course, but it is clear),  
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8 dilutes the experience of belonging, I think. (Ida, seven months at the workplace)  
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12 Developing reciprocity appeared constantly in newcomers' experiences, along with seeking  
13 and perceiving acceptance supported membership development.  
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### 16 **Seeking and Perceiving Acceptance**

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18 Seeking and perceiving acceptance was a core process that became apparent at the  
19 beginning of the newcomers' entry through impression management, newcomers' orientation  
20 and coworkers' interest, and self-disclosure. At first, the newcomers constantly developed an  
21 understanding of how to behave in different situations by observing different coworkers and  
22 comparing their own behavior to develop their *impression management*. In this way, the  
23 newcomers tried to fit in. Leila describes the change in her self-expression:  
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33 In the beginning, I tried to give a more neutral expression of myself, but now I can  
34 bring more of my own personality. I have recognized that here is space to be who you  
35 are; there are different kinds of people, and overall everyone's approving toward  
36 others. (Leila, one month at the workplace)  
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42 The newcomers emphasized the importance of being noticed and having a clear  
43 *communication orientation* to understand their tasks, communication practices, and with  
44 whom they would work. When *coworkers expressed interest*, the newcomers found it easier  
45 to participate in conversations. This was particularly true during group encounters at the  
46 workplace, such as coffee and lunch breaks. These kinds of early interaction situations are  
47 crucial when seeking out and perceiving acceptance. A lack of orientation and conversations  
48 with coworkers negatively affected the acceptance. Marianne highlights the importance of  
49 coworkers' interest and active role:  
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3 Coworkers offered help and told me that “you are not alone in any case.” In my first  
4 day, my supervisor introduced me to everyone, and we had our team’s internal  
5 orientation meetings. [--] Coworkers’ friendliness was shown from that they had time  
6 to talk with me on my first day; they were not in a hurry. They were ready to help me,  
7 which made me feel welcome, so it was easier to approach my coworkers and ask for  
8 help. (Marianne, two months at the workplace)

9  
10 Seeking acceptance in social interactions focused on work-related information, but  
11 personal information was also desired. Reciprocal *self-disclosure* with other members helped  
12 the newcomers control uncertainty while developing relationships. For these newcomers, it  
13 was easier to share personal issues when coworkers shared something about themselves first.  
14 This was significant for perceiving acceptance, but differences appeared in how much they  
15 shared. Sharing jokes, personal details, emotions, and thoughts about work increased self-  
16 disclosure. It was easier for Carl to participate in future interactions after self-disclosure:

17  
18 Interaction with others has become easier because of shared issues and experiences,  
19 so there are more topics to talk about. It is easier to trust someone when I know that  
20 person better, and to participate in conversations. (Carl, one month at the workplace)

21  
22 Petra experiences the different forms of self-disclosure as an indicator of acceptance:

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

28  
29 Experiences of perceived acceptance in workplace communication supported the membership  
30 negotiation and led to the newcomers’ active membership.

### 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 **Becoming an Active Member** 57 58 59 60

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3 Remarkable change was observed after three to four months, when most of the  
4 newcomers stated that they could be themselves in the workplace because of the perceived  
5 atmosphere. They described how coworkers started to show interest in them by giving them  
6 responsibility, providing deeper support, and expressing trust. The newcomers started to  
7 express their expertise and values more openly to *create an atmosphere*. This was a starting  
8 point for active membership; the newcomers described that perceived safe and open  
9 communication helped with participation in conversations. Natalia describes how open  
10 communication encouraged her to be reciprocally active in a workplace:  
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21 I would describe that open communication in a way where the workplace atmosphere  
22 is safe so that everyone dares to say their opinion and there occurs spontaneous  
23 conversations and dialogue with others. You can express your thoughts, and you feel  
24 that others appreciate your sayings and yourself, too. And in a way, others welcome  
25 you warmly or your new ideas or new people into the workplace. (Natalia, ten months  
26 at the workplace)  
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35 The communication atmosphere of the workplace created possibilities for  
36 communicating with others and guided membership development. Workplace values, the rush  
37 at work, and changes in personnel affected communication and the time that could be spent  
38 interacting with coworkers. Joanna's experience of the workplace's atmosphere makes it  
39 difficult to adjust:  
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46 Even though others recognize my face now, they don't have the energy to make  
47 contact with me because everyone is in a crazy rush and stressed all the time. That is a  
48 shame, I think. (Joanna, three months at the workplace)  
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54 After becoming acquainted with coworkers, the newcomers perceived that it was  
55 easier to interpret coworkers' communication behavior, which affected the newcomers'  
56 *social influence* in different situations. In particular, their motivation to make an influence at  
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3 the workplace started to increase when they described themselves as members. Active  
4 membership emerged in the workplace's communication practices, and the newcomers  
5 started to support reciprocally coworkers' membership. When developing active membership,  
6 the newcomers gained more information about their coworkers and their expertise, which  
7 naturally made it easier to participate in interactions. Sanna describes how her own and  
8 coworkers' behavior support her membership:  
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12 I have tried to be consciously active, interested and open toward other members, but  
13 our workplace has been an ideal environment for that: I want to create positive  
14 working environment for all, but it would have been very difficult if my coworkers  
15 would only see me as an assistant, who is here only for short period. (Sanna, eight  
16 months at the workplace)  
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20 Some of the newcomers had difficulty expressing their expertise and participating in  
21 conversations, diminishing their opportunities to become active members. This resulted in  
22 uncertainty or difficulties in workplace communication and feeling that others did not respect  
23 the newcomers' expertise. Feelings of being an outsider were common, but they were usually  
24 temporary. If difficult experiences in the workplace were encountered, a perception of  
25 exclusion emerged, and even an intention to leave appeared. Nina describes her difficulties  
26 with experiences of exclusion:  
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30 Sometimes, it still feels that I'm not fully member of team x. In speech, I am not  
31 included in team x. Before our new supervisor arrived, others always said about that x  
32 team includes two people, Anna and Ben. Every time I hear that, it bothers me, but I  
33 haven't said anything about it. Also, in meetings, I feel like an outsider because I have  
34 nothing to contribute. (Nina, three months at the workplace)  
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38 The experience of *shared trust* was shown, for example, in communication in which  
39 the newcomers could talk with coworkers about workplace targets for development. Most of  
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3 the newcomers began expressing critical opinions or disagreement when they felt themselves  
4 as fully accepted members. At this point, they felt they had gained enough trust among their  
5 coworkers, as Tilda describes:  
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10 I think I have been able to be more open and be myself. I have learned to disagree  
11 with my coworkers about issues and, maybe, dare to be more effective to step into  
12 situations. (Tilda, four months at the workplace)  
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16 Expressions of shared trust were experienced when the newcomers became part of the  
17 negative talks, which is found as talking behind people's backs. Even though criticism was  
18 seen as negative, it was also an indicator of shared trust. Ellen experiences negative talk as an  
19 expression of trust:  
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26 Always when I am in an interaction with someone, it adds solidarity with them. When  
27 someone tells me something negative, it feels like I am worth the trust. If I wouldn't  
28 say anything to that person, who is saying something bad about some other coworker,  
29 I think I would end up as an outsider. So that is why I always at least listen and say  
30 "ok" or something like that. (Ellen, seven months at the workplace)  
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38 To conclude, developing reciprocity and seeking and perceiving acceptance are  
39 crucial processes when becoming an active member. Newcomers pursued acceptance from  
40 other members and actively sought it in the workplace. At first, they managed their  
41 impressions more and wanted to identify other members' communication behavior and  
42 compare this with their own expectations. Coworkers' sensitivity toward the newcomers and  
43 experiences of a positive orientation made it easier for the newcomers to adapt to their  
44 workplaces. Sharing work-related and personal information helped the newcomers'  
45 membership and supported the construction of relationships in which perceived acceptance  
46 was experienced after three to four months. When there were difficulties regarding  
47 orientation or disclosure, it took longer for the newcomers to experience acceptance. Thus,  
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3 supportive communication showed the newcomers that they had something to offer as  
4 professionals, increasing the experience of acceptance. This, in turn, allowed the newcomers  
5 to participate in interaction situations more actively to fulfill their professional and personal  
6 needs to achieve active membership.  
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### 15 **Discussion**

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17 This study contributes to the research on organizational entry and membership negotiation by  
18 identifying the communication processes that emerge during a newcomer's entry. The  
19 findings show that membership negotiation consists of developing reciprocity, seeking and  
20 perceiving acceptance, and becoming an active member. These ongoing communication  
21 processes evolve in the entry phase; the results suggest there is certain order in occurrence.  
22 The findings confirm earlier notions that becoming a member is a complex, overlapping, and  
23 changing communication process (Scott and Myers, 2010; Woo and Myers, 2020).  
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33 According to the findings, developing reciprocity and perceived acceptance leads to  
34 membership. This is in line with earlier findings of increasing familiarity and emotion sharing  
35 in membership negotiations (Myers and Oetzel, 2003; Scott and Myers, 2005); the findings  
36 also support Moreland and Levine's (2001) suggestion that acceptance is a precondition for  
37 membership. The development of reciprocity and achieving acceptance took time, depending  
38 on the newcomer's expectations and workplace structures. In this study, it was easier for  
39 newcomers to share information and disclosure when a coworker did this first, emphasizing  
40 the importance of the attentive behavior of coworkers during membership negotiations. This  
41 supports the earlier findings of Woo and Myers (2020), where other members' recognition  
42 toward a newcomer was significant for membership negotiations.  
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55 Developing reciprocity, especially sharing personal information at some level and  
56 receiving social support from others, was important for newcomers. These findings confirm  
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3 earlier studies of information sharing (Lapointe et al., 2014) and social support in  
4 newcomers' entry (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Kramer and Sias, 2014; Walden, 2019).  
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6 Reciprocal self-disclosure enables the experience of inclusion. Newcomers valued repeated,  
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8 supportive, and open communication, which is in line with the findings from Myers and  
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10 Sadaghiani (2010). However, there were different ways of experiencing communication  
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12 processes: some newcomers were less actively participating than others yet still might  
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14 experience being accepted as active members.  
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19 While becoming an active member, the newcomers needed to construct their expertise  
20 during entry. With early career employees, this might take longer to seek information and  
21 adapt because of their work history (De Vos and Freese, 2011). Earlier work experience  
22 reproduces membership negotiation by improving role position and influencing decisions and  
23 practices (Endacott and Myers, 2019). In the case of young professional newcomers, their  
24 lack of professional work experience might explain why they express a greater need to  
25 develop their expertise before they can focus on their membership. The newcomers'  
26 individual expectations of communication revealed the challenges they faced (e.g.,  
27 difficulties with coworkers and experiences of exclusion) in membership negotiation, which  
28 could delay active membership. The results suggest that experiences of acceptance and  
29 memberships take time, in this case approximately three months. Thus, this produces new  
30 insights into newcomers' entry by showing that time matters in orientation processes,  
31 challenging the idea of short orientation programs.  
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49 Theoretically, this study contributes CCO approach and McPhee and Zaugg's (2000)  
50 Four flow model by describing how early career newcomers join the membership negotiation  
51 flow and become part of the flow. Figure 1 describes how the membership negotiation flow  
52 constantly runs in organization, constituting the organization and illustrating the processes  
53 through which a newcomer becomes a part of the flow. Thus, the results show how an  
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3 individual employee can become attached to an organization through membership  
4 negotiations and how they experience the process. The findings also broaden the theoretical  
5 understanding of Scott and Myers' (2010) membership negotiation model by showing the  
6 complexity and variation of communication processes and the quality of communication  
7 during membership negotiations.  
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### 14 **Conclusion**

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17 The aim of this study was to examine the communication processes involved in  
18 membership negotiation in newcomer's entry. The objective was pursued by analyzing young  
19 professional newcomers' descriptions of communication processes in their first workplace  
20 after graduation.  
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26 The data collection aimed to catch the participants' descriptions of changes in their  
27 experiences over time. This produced multivoiced, extensive descriptions of the participants'  
28 experiences with rich rigor (Tracy, 2010). However, in a qualitative inquiry, a researcher  
29 cannot separate the self and subjective biases, assumptions, or personality from the research  
30 (Sword, 1999), but this was pursued to manage with the researcher's reflexivity.  
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38 In addition, the long-term data collection might have affected the participants'  
39 motivation, including the quality of their descriptions (James and Busher, 2014); this carried  
40 the risk of participants dropping out. On the other hand, the first author's active role as a  
41 researcher might have affected the participants' experiences of familiarity with the researcher  
42 (Tracy, 2010), which could motivate participants to commit to the study. The type of data  
43 collection may also have had positive consequences for the newcomers' transition. The  
44 participants described that the method "make[s] it easier to adapt to a workplace" and that it  
45 "support[s] the transition from student to professional." The credibility of the data also has a  
46 gender limitation because only two participants were men.  
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3 The credibility of the data analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) relies on the credibility  
4 of the interpretations of the data. Here, the credibility of the interpretations was strengthened  
5 by the authors' critical discussions, and to confirm the transparency of the study, the data  
6 analysis was described step by step; data examples are shown, making it easier to evaluate the  
7 results.  
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12 The characteristics of the communication process are transferrable to other  
13 organizations but with certain limitations. First, the data cover mainly knowledge-based  
14 professional work, meaning there would be variations in different fields of work. Second, the  
15 data were collected from newcomers in their first workplaces, so one should be careful when  
16 applying the results to a more experienced newcomer's entry.  
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Despite the limitations, this study showed that young professional newcomers create their membership in the workplace through the communication processes of developing reciprocity, seeking and achieving acceptance, and becoming an active member within membership negotiation. This study illustrates how newcomers become part of the membership negotiation flow in workplaces and how they start to influence organizational existing structures within communication processes. The focus was on young professionals' experiences: further studies are needed to discover whether these kind communication processes of membership negotiation appear when newcomers are more experienced. The current study showed that time is important in achieving membership, but more research is needed to confirm this.

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



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3 full membership, which is longer than often used orientation programs are in organizations.

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5 To feel like they fit in, newcomers must engage in communication in which coworkers and  
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7 managers are responsive. Managers and coworkers can consciously support newcomers  
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9 during the first three months by involving newcomers in interactions so that both the  
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11 newcomer and other members can actively support the development of membership  
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13 negotiations. There is not one ideal process to follow; instead, an understanding of the  
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15 differences in newcomers' experiences can support and enable membership development  
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17 individually.  
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Table 1

*Communication Dimensions, First Appearance, and Examples of Data*

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



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

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Social influence	3 to 10 months	“Knowing that I am doing my work fine and others accept me makes it easier to share my expertise. I can help my coworkers too.”(Daniel)
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Shared trust	4 to 10 months	“I can trust my coworkers, and they can trust me—we can share our ideas but also express disagreement.”(Anne)
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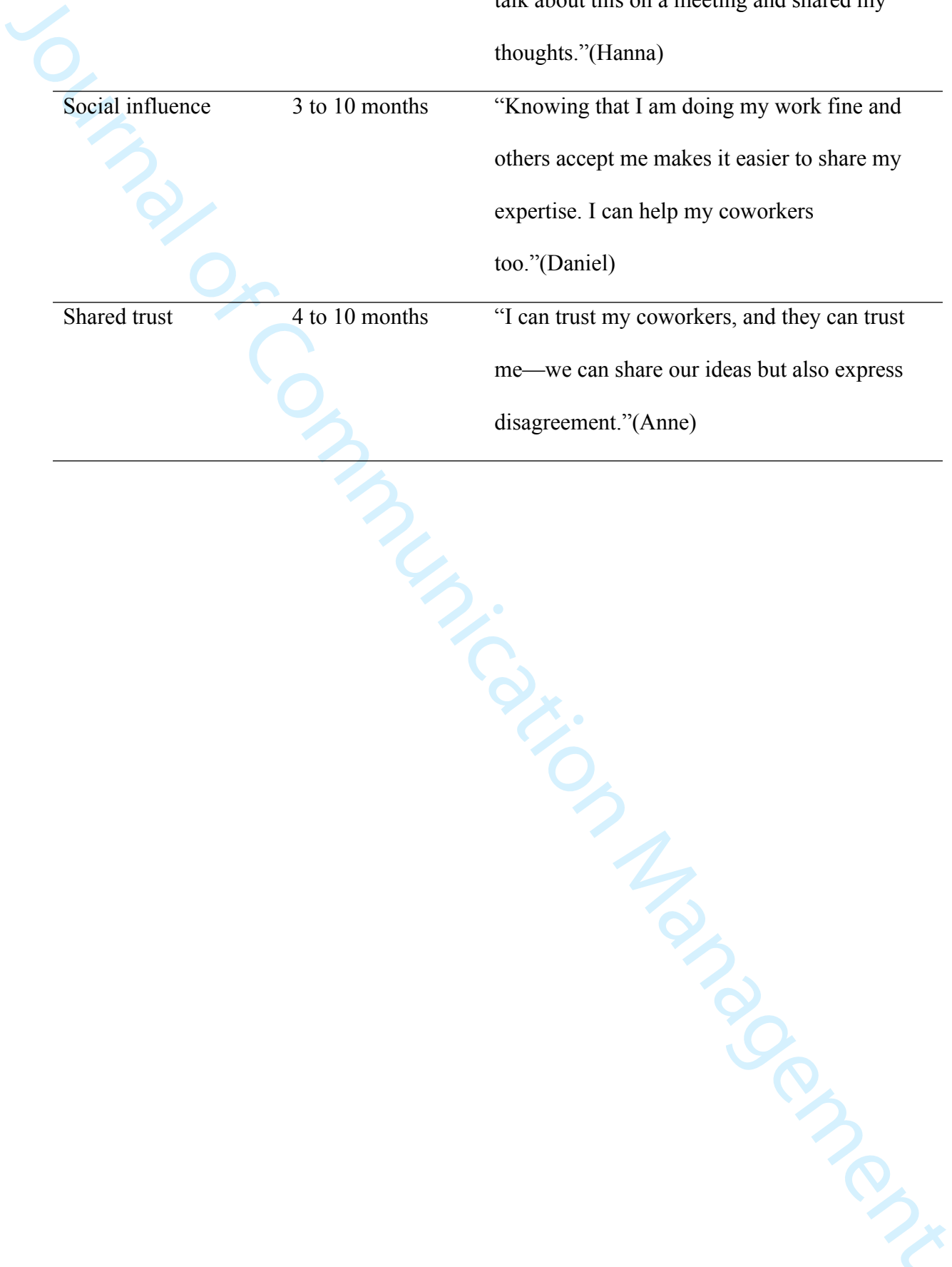
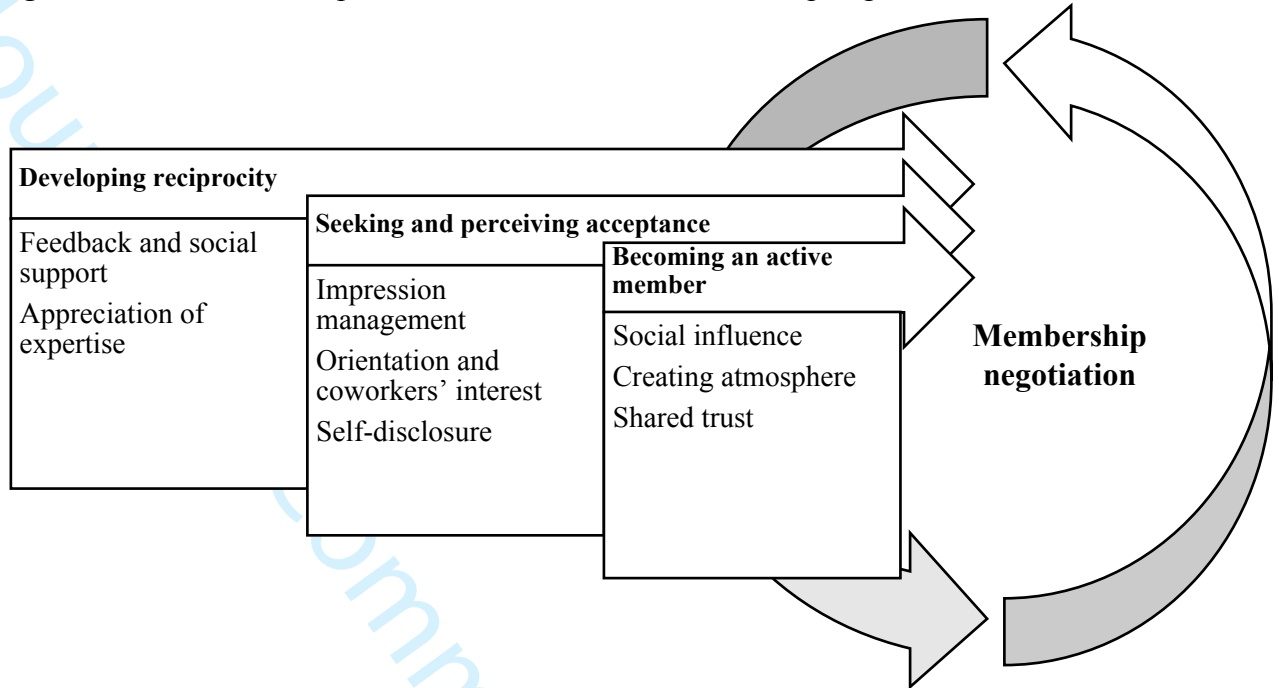


Figure 1. Communication processes in newcomers' membership negotiations



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## APPENDIX 1: Detailed Information of the Participants and the Data

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