

Malgorzata Lahti

Communicating Interculturality in the Workplace



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN HUMANITIES 262

Malgorzata Lahti

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in the Workplace

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston Liikunnan salissa L304
lokakuun 24. päivänä 2015 kello 12.

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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 2015

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URN:ISBN:978-951-39-6317-0

ISBN 978-951-39-6317-0 (PDF)

ISSN 1459-4331

ISBN 978-951-39-6316-3 (nid.)

ISSN 1459-4323

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Jyväskylä University Printing House, Jyväskylä 2015

ABSTRACT

Lahti, Malgorzata
Communicating interculturality in the workplace
Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä, 2015, 70 p.
(Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities
ISSN 1459-4323; 262)
ISBN 978-951-39-6316-3 (nid.)
ISBN 978-951-39-6317-0 (PDF)
Diss.

The theme of intercultural communication in the workplace has mostly been examined from organisational perspectives, utilising theoretical frameworks that see culture as an objective set of national/ethnic attributes and experiences that shape interaction. This has resulted in the production of polarised images of intercultural issues as either an organisational challenge or an asset. The study at hand deepens our understanding of workplace interculturality by focusing on the very interpersonal communication processes through which people's different cultural memberships may surface at work. Informed by critical constructivism and ethnomethodology, the study seeks to develop insights into how people may perceive and perform interculturality across a variety of workplace arrangements, relationships and communication situations. The study comprises four articles. The first one is a critical review of intercultural workplace communication scholarship. The other three articles are empirical research reports that explore relational development, cultural identification and cultural knowledge sharing. They are respectively based on interviews with employees of a Finnish recruitment agency and metal workers recruited from Poland, interviews with female Russian immigrants in Finland performing interaction-intense knowledge work, and records of Skype™ chat conversations of a four-member team embedded in a Finnish organisation and dispersed in Finland and Russia. The findings suggest that understandings and manifestations of interculturality are in constant motion. National and ethnic identities are social constructs that may emerge as relevant in different ways across interpersonal relationships and communication situations. Language is a social tool intertwined with the process of communicating interculturality. Linguistic choices and competences can be a powerful means for identification, and they may affect the patterns of interaction. Constructions of interculturality may become imbued with ideologies and have material extensions. At the same time, interculturality is only momentary and not a stable feature of communication.

Keywords: critical intercultural communication, cultural identity, interculturality, interpersonal communication, interpersonal relationships, knowledge sharing, small groups, teams, workplace interaction

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PREFACE

I can still vividly remember the sensation of fellowship that I experienced upon my first reading of Ingrid Piller's book *Intercultural Communication: A Critical Introduction* (2011). In the introductory chapter, Piller reflects on how inadequate much of the intercultural communication literature has been with relation to her work as an intercultural communication teacher. Couched in outdated, romanticised and deterministic ideas about *culture*, this literature fails to reflect real-life issues encountered by people who lead linguistically and culturally diverse lives, as they interact and develop relationships with others, and are embedded in the webs of social, economic and political contexts, globalisation and transnational migration.

When I began my doctoral studies, I was in the depths of a cognitive dissonance. The traditional analytical tools of intercultural communication were all I had at my disposal, yet I was at odds with their assumptions, objectives and practical implications. Piller's (2011) observations capture what gradually emerged as my main impetus for working on this dissertation: to search for alternative positions for understanding and teaching about issues of intercultural communication. There are a number of persons and organisations that supported and stimulated my work, and therefore deserve words of gratitude.

I would like to thank all intercultural communication scholars who are dissatisfied with the conventional approaches to intercultural research, and who understand that there are different, much more relevant and pressing objectives for the field than to identify, map and catalogue cultural differences. It has been an honour to read and learn from your work. I am looking forward to learning from you and dialoguing with you in the future.

I am also indebted to my research participants who offered their time and privacy, their stories and actions for the sake of my study.

I started working on my doctoral dissertation in 2010 at the Department of Communication, University of Jyväskylä. I would like to thank everyone at the department for being my academic home over all these years. My research was financed by the University of Jyväskylä, the Finnish Work Environment Fund, the Academy of Finland, the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Finnish Concordia Fund.

I am deeply grateful to Professor Maarit Valo who supervised my work. The term *supervision* does not do justice to the act of saving someone on so many different levels. Maarit, thank you for being so wise and patient, for being gentle yet firm, for allowing me to search for solutions myself instead of handing them on to me on a silver platter, for giving me the safety to say silly things and feel clever at the same. I dread to think what I would be now if I had not met you. I am forever changed by you and I hope to keep you in my life.

I would like to thank my two reviewers, Professor Fred Dervin and Professor Leena Louhiala-Salminen, for their constructive and encouraging feedback.

Postdoctoral Researcher Margarethe Olbertz-Siitonen and Senior Lecturer Marko Siitonen became my role models quite soon after I started as a doctoral student. I admire your high standards, integrity and devotion as academic researchers and teachers. Grethi, thank you for opening my eyes to the wonders of human interaction, and to the alternative ways of studying it. Thank you for all the dark conversations on the side. They helped me grow my academic spine.

Another thank you goes to University Teacher Lotta Kokkonen who supervised my master's thesis and, in a skilful and cunning way only she is capable of, cajoled me into continuing onto a doctoral degree. You were the first person who made me understand that doing research could be my thing. Through participating in your classes as a student, I got infected with your enthusiasm for teaching. Thank you for always watching my back and pushing me ahead!

My learning would not have been possible without the Speech Communication crowd. Senior Lecturer Tarja Valkonen, Senior Lecturer Leena Mikkola and Senior Researcher Maili Pörhölä, thank you for welcoming me to your community, for sharing your expertise and support with me, for questioning my choices and asking for justifications. The discussions we had in our doctoral seminars in Speech Communication were the most joyous occasions that came to stand for true university to me. The same goes for our academic lunches!

I would like to thank all my fellow, present and former, doctoral students whom I have had the pleasure to get to know in seminars, conferences and shared workspaces. A special thank you to Mitra Raappana, Tomi Laapotti, Eveliina Pennanen, Tessa Horila, Salme Korkala and Dr. Anne Laajalahti. You are the most wonderful bunch of people whose academic adventures definitely deserve that reality television series. Thank you for never pestering me to tell you about "Polish traditions" or to say tongue twisters in Polish so that you could marvel at the exotic sounds of my first language.

Last but not least, there is a man and a dog whose love has kept me sane. My thanks to them.

Culture is a ubiquitous term drawn upon to add credibility and gravity to any description and explanation of the social world. I have come to understand that framing the other as "culturally different" and pinning her or him down to a territory or a group, even if done with good intentions, can be an act of violence. In his critical essay on the UNESCO concept of culture, Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2001) reminds us that culture is just a construct and not an object that needs reverence like some old precious china. We should not let it obscure our universal right to self-definition, and to physical, psychological and social mobility.

Jyväskylä 28.9.2015,

Malgorzata Lahti

LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

- I. Lahti, M., & Valo, M. (2015). The workplace as a site for intercultural communication: A critical literature review. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- II. Lahti, M., & Valo, M. (2013). The development of intercultural relationships at work: Polish migrant workers in Finland. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 31.
- III. Lahti, M. (2013). Cultural identity in everyday interactions at work: Highly- skilled female Russian professionals in Finland. *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 3(4), 21-43.
- IV. Lahti, M. (2015). Sharing cultural knowledge at work: A study of chat interactions of an internationally dispersed team. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 15(4), 513-532.

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1 INTRODUCTION

We are living in the age of accelerated globalisation characterised by multidirectional and fragmented mobility of people, ideologies, capital, media and technologies (e.g. Pieterse, 2000). Within this changing landscape, the workplace has emerged as a critical site for persons who come from diverse contexts and locations and/or are speakers of different languages to engage in meaningful interactions with one another, collaborating on shared tasks and developing relationships. Such workplace encounters and relations, usually described as “intercultural,” and instances of “intercultural communication,” are increasingly becoming a rule rather than an exception.

At the same time, the workplace is not a mere container for encounters and relations. It is a social space that prescribes a specific orientation to relationships and actions, and suffuses interactions with considerations of professional and organisational identification, and with economic and political implications. The particularities of interculturality in the world of work are not only of considerable social significance, but they also stand apart from those in other social realities, such as in the context of family, travel or education.

While the theme of intercultural communication at work has encouraged intense scholarly interest, it has most often been examined from the vantage point of organisational efficiency and productivity. Scant attention has been paid to the very processes through which people’s different cultural memberships may surface at work. My study addresses this gap in our understanding by developing insights into how people may perceive and perform interculturality across a variety of workplace arrangements, relationships and communication situations.

I am interested in cultural identities related to people’s memberships in national, ethnic and linguistic groups. These memberships have traditionally been in the focus of mainstream intercultural communication literature (Piller, 2012). Unlike the aforementioned scholarship, my study does not aim to document patterned ways in which members of different national and ethnic groups or speech communities would interpret the social world and communicate at work. I choose to work with the concept of *interculturality*,

viewing it as a process in which individuals involved in specific communication situations and relationships produce and interpret subjective and intersubjective constructions of cultural identities (e.g. Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013).

The multidisciplinary field of intercultural communication is characterised by conceptual and methodological heterogeneity, with terms such as *intercultural*, *cross-cultural*, *multicultural* or *transcultural* employed to denote complementary, overlapping or contradictory approaches without any apparent agreement or consistency (Dervin, 2010; 2011). Among these concepts, intercultural has been by far the most widely used, abused and manipulated one (Lavanchy, Gajardo, & Dervin, 2011).

Orienting oneself in the swampy terrain of intercultural communication inquiry calls for a careful examination of the assumed ontological status of *culture* that different researchers employ (Piller, 2011). Approaches can be divided into those that understand culture as an objective fact or “something people have,” and those that view it as a process or “something that people do” (Piller, 2011, p. 15). A similar division has been proposed by other authors (e.g. Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011). While the predominant first type of approaches focus on the root component of the word “intercultural” - “culture,” shifting the analytical focus onto the prefix “inter-” facilitates a processual perspective (Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013). Lavanchy, Gajardo and Dervin (2011) further make a distinction between intercultural and interculturality: while the former term is an adjective that may be misused to produce a priori assumptions about interaction as “an encounter of different cultures” (p. 12), the latter points to a process, emphasising its socially constructed and dynamic nature.

I enter the field of inquiry into workplace interculturality through the door of interpersonal communication. This is a very adequate door indeed, as it is at the level of interpersonal interaction and interpersonal relationships that cultural memberships may (or may not) become relevant - be avowed, ascribed, reworked, or resisted. This is where interculturality may emerge.

1.1 Interpersonal communication in the workplace

Interpersonal communication will be described here as a symbolic process where two or a few persons create and negotiate meanings (Braithwaite, Schrodt, & Carr, 2015). In this study, interpersonal communication will be used interchangeably with *interpersonal interaction*. A vital characteristic of this definition is that it takes a constitutive view of communication, and places people’s communicative practices and processes at the centre of the social reality. In other words, this study is founded on a view that it is in and through interpersonal interaction that people define their reality and establish their relationships and identities.

When exported to the world of work, this conceptualisation renders the *workplace* as instantiated in communicative processes and practices among its

members, and between its members and external agents and stakeholders (e.g. Gibbs, Nekrassova, Grushina, & Wahab, 2008). Practically all organising phenomena, such as knowledge sharing, collaborating, distributing tasks, decision making, discussing, gossiping, socialising, conflict, its management and resolution, or leading and following, are communicative in nature (see also Sias, 2009). A lion's share of these processes take place in the context of *workplace relationships*, or interpersonal relationships that people become involved in as they perform work, such as peer co-worker, subordinate-supervisor, or customer relationships (Sias, 2009). Interpersonal relationships are seen here to emerge in temporally extended, recurrent and patterned interaction (Sias, 2009). In this way, a distinction is made between workplace relationships and one-off encounters with strangers that are characteristic of, for instance, customer service work. What workplace relationships and encounters have in common is that they are consequential for people's interpersonal lives as such. It should suffice to consider that persons in full-time employment may spend much more time communicating with people at work than they do with their family and friends (Fingerman, 2009; Sias, 2009).

Aside from workplace interactions in the context of encounters and relationships, contemporary working life communication increasingly features *small groups* and *teams*. A team denotes a small group of people with complementary expertise who work interdependently on common tasks towards accomplishing a shared purpose or set of objectives (Scott, 2013). Teaming places an additional emphasis on interpersonal interaction as it relies on team members' knowledge sharing, achievement of mutual understanding and coordination of activities, all of which are inherently communicative processes. Teams have become especially popular in the growing sector of *knowledge-intensive work* that, unlike the performance of menial and repetitive tasks, relies predominantly on the highly creative use and sharing of complex expert knowledge to address emergent problems and develop better solutions to them (Blyton & Jenkins, 2007).

Interpersonal communication at work has also been undergoing another type of transformation. Encouraged by technological advances, persons involved in the working life more and more often engage in interactions that occur in *technology-mediated* ways. The proliferation of modern communication technologies has also led to the rise of *dispersed teams* whose members, rather than sharing a physical location and working mostly face-to-face, operate from different locations and rely primarily on technologies for collaboration (e.g. Klitmøller & Lauring, 2013).

In this study, I am interested in interpersonal interactions in relationships between peer co-workers, subordinates, supervisors and business partners, communication in small groups and teams, and encounters with customers. I zoom in on a number of different workplace contexts and arrangements: temporary migrant industrial work, expert knowledge work, and internationally dispersed teaming. These are the types and contexts of interpersonal workplace interactions where interculturality may emerge as relevant.

1.2 Organisational approaches to cultural diversity

Theoretical developments in research are embedded in and informed by their social and historical milieu. Before proceeding to examine previous research on intercultural communication at work, it is necessary to understand the nature of the political and social debates concerning the nature and treatment of difference in organisational life. Several scholars (e.g. Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus, 2002; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Konrad, 2003; Omanovic, 2009) have pointed to the influential role of the US context where “cultural diversity” is said to have first emerged both as an object of organised political, social and institutional practices, and as a research topic in organisational studies.

Prasad (2001) identified “diversity” and “discrimination” as the major themes shaping the organisational discourse of difference in the US, and investigated how the themes’ contours changed between the 1930s and 1990s. The period between the 1930s and 1950s, marked by mass-scale employment-related migration of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North, was dominated by flagrant racial discrimination that was slowly becoming recognised and addressed by the labour unions. Meanwhile, the theme of diversity did not entail national, ethnic or linguistic memberships. It was mostly associated with socio-economic stratification and the related fear that persons from lower social classes might come to embrace communist ideals. This concern was addressed through national-level initiatives where ideological representations of a shared homogeneous US American identity were produced.

The gains of the civil rights and women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s gave considerable impetus to the theme of discrimination, and led to the emergence of the anti-discrimination approach in organisational life (Prasad, 2001). Anti-discrimination sees difference, with a focus on ethnicity, religion and gender, as a political and group-based issue, and it arises from the acknowledgement that women and specific cultural minorities have been historically excluded in the world of work (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Wrench, 2005). The approach builds on an ethical argument and a principle of sameness, positing that persons with similar abilities should be given similar opportunities in the working life (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Organisational initiatives originated within this approach, such as affirmative action and equal employment opportunity, were geared at increasing the representation of the disenfranchised groups, and addressing their systemic discrimination through hard-type structural changes, such as introducing strict anti-discrimination policies or setting targets for hiring and promotion (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Wrench, 2005). Parallel to the pronounced anti-discriminatory ideology, the 1960s and 1970s saw a rise in the celebration of cultural diversity – a heightened sense and pride in ethnic identity and heritage (Prasad, 2001). This accentuated experience of self as essentially culturally different called into question the mythology of the American melting pot (Prasad, 2001).

In the 1980s, the emphasis in the discourse of difference shifted towards what Prasad (2001) calls the “diversity industry.” The disjuncture is marked by the publication of the renowned Workplace 2000 Report authored by Johnston and Packer (1987; as cited in Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Prasad, 2001). The document posited that by the year 2000 the demographic composition of the US labour force would mostly consist of women and members of ethnic minority groups, a prognosis that pushed corporate managers and academics alike to consider the implications of cultural diversity for efficient management and productivity (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Prasad, 2001). These new considerations gained support from the rise in neo-liberalism steeped in the rationales of individualism and meritocracy, a “white male backlash” against both the cult of ethnicity, and the moralising and litigious tone of the anti-discriminatory discourse (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Wrench, 2005). The new approach that emerged, diversity management, was fashioned as a positive policy that replaced the exclusive preoccupation with the plight of under-represented groups with an inclusive focus on the interests of all employees, white males included (Wrench, 2005). Diversity management draws on economic argumentation and it embraces the principle of difference (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Wrench, 2005). It urges organisations to expose and make practical allowances for cultural differences between employees (Wrench, 2005). The idea is that persons with different cultural backgrounds have different knowledge and skills, and they provide the organisation with a broader range of alternative perspectives. If managed skillfully, cultural differences among the employees can enrich the pool of organisational resources, leading to more innovative and efficient decision-making, improving productivity (Wrench, 2005). Diversity management puts an emphasis on soft-type interventions that focus on interpersonal communication, such as intercultural awareness training. Not surprisingly, the rise of diversity management led to a rapid expansion of the intercultural training industry (Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000).

Diversity management as a managerial approach to treating difference went from strength to strength; in the 1990s it started making inroads into workplaces around the world (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Omanovic, 2009). Its global expansion has been paralleled with mounting criticism from critical organisational scholars (e.g. Litvin, 2006; Zannoni & Janssens, 2007), who have challenged it for, among others, covering up the systemic bases for discrimination of groups, and imposing a US-originated set of managerial ideas on local contexts with their own unique intercultural concerns and relations. At the same time, diversity management has not simply replaced anti-discrimination; the two approaches co-exist in their locally translated hybridised forms (e.g. Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Klarsfeld, 2009; Omanovic, 2009; Ostendorp & Steyaert, 2009).

Although anti-discrimination and diversity management espouse radically different social and political ideals, their underlying assumptions about culture and cultural memberships in interpersonal interactions in the working life are strikingly complementary. Diversity management sees cultural identities as

finite sets of values, interpretations and discursive patterns that individuals naturally possess and reveal in interaction. Anti-discrimination has traditionally focused on systemic oppression experienced by members of specific cultural minority groups. As I discuss in two articles that are part of this study (Lahti, 2013; Lahti & Valo, 2015), both approaches place a pronounced emphasis on cultural differences or culturally distinctive qualities and experiences. They operate from a reified view of cultural identity by assuming that cultural identities remain the same in different contexts and interactions, consist of a confined set of meanings, practices and experiences, and are similar for all the members of the group.

1.3 Dominant perspectives in intercultural workplace communication research

Communication in the context of work and professional interaction has always been among the primary applied areas of interest, and a driving force for the discipline of intercultural communication. In the early days, the focus was on the preparation of US military personnel, diplomats and businessmen for foreign missions and negotiations (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1990; Piller, 2011). The transformations of the social landscape, recently intensified by the forces of globalisation, have expanded the scope of intercultural workplace communication inquiry. It now includes everyday face-to-face and technology-mediated interactions in the context of encounters, relationships, groups and teams across a variety of private and public organisations and working arrangements around the world.

For the most part, the expansion in the scope of workplace communication situations and phenomena under investigation has not been reflected theoretically. The predominant view embraced by intercultural workplace communication research continues to see culture in essentialist terms (e.g. Holliday, 2011; Piller, 2011). Within this view, culture is taken to denote a stable and confined system of communicative traits and underlying cognitive patterns that is territorially bound to a nation-state or an ethnic group, and that is mutually exclusive with other such cultures. Culture is seen to affect people's behaviour and interpretations in mostly unrecognised ways. It is a natural attribute carried by all the group members and expressed through a national language. Analytical emphasis is placed on manifestations of (irreconcilable) cultural differences in interaction, such as possible misunderstandings and conflicts.

The developments in intercultural communication research that have led to such theorising have been under intense scrutiny (e.g. Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009; Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002; Moon, 1996; Noma, 2009; Piller, 2011). Critical investigations unanimously point to the foundational role of the work of Edward Hall and Geert Hofstede in first establishing, and then consolidating an essentialist idea of culture.

Moon (1996) has traced research developments in the field since Edward Hall's work at the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in the 1950s. She discusses how, at the request of the FSI, Hall was brought to relinquish an anthropological view of culture for a practical approach that could be easily applied to sensitise diplomats to cultural differences that thwart communication. It entailed the "comparison of national cultures, breaking communication processes down to micro-level phenomena, a view of communication as analyzable and predictable, a focus on a-historic and decontextualized dyadic interactions, and an international business orientation" (p. 72). Hall (1990/1959; 1989/1976) categorised societies into those that were "low context" and "monochronic" versus "high context" and "polychronic." He should be credited for bringing to attention the existence of different cultural realities in the world of work (Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009). However, his routine references to national groups as the locus of culturally constructed ways of life, insistence that the opposite cultural systems are incompatible, and the way of presenting culture as a code to be cracked paved the ground for the subsequent scholarly initiatives to divide of the world into a "patchwork of cultural boxes with quantifiable variables of difference" (Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009, p. 270).

The understanding of culture and intercultural communication became more complex and diversified in the 1970s (Moon, 1996). In the 1980s, another shift occurred, ushered in by a combination of circumstances such as the rise in neo-liberalism, and the discipline's pursuit of an image as a "proper" field of research through the adoption of social scientific methods of inquiry (Moon, 1996). Culture started to be equated with a nation-state, and treated mostly as a variable in statistical projects (Moon, 1996). In other words, national culture came to be treated as a social fact that accounts for differences in people's behaviour, attitudes and motivations. An important place in these efforts has been occupied by the work of Geert Hofstede (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) who, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, worked as a psychologist at IBM. Hofstede's study on work-related values based on questionnaire survey data gathered from IBM employees in 72 countries (Hofstede, 2001), and published as *Culture's consequences* (1980), can be regarded as fundamental to mainstream intercultural communication inquiry (Holliday, 2011; Piller, 2011). Interested in collective, nation-based, differences in work-related values, Hofstede initially distinguished four value orientations: "power distance," "collectivism/individualism," "masculinity/femininity," and "uncertainty avoidance" (Hofstede, 1980). Following additional data collections, more dimensions were added (e.g. Hofstede, 2011). Hofstede's ideas reverberate in other cultural dimensions models concerned with intercultural communication in the context of work (e.g. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1997).

Some critics (e.g. Piller, 2011) explicitly associate essentialist conceptualisations of culture with work that follows a social scientific, quantitative and comparative research design. However, also some interpretive scholarship in intercultural communication that makes statements about culture as constructed in communication (e.g. Kim, 2001; Philipsen, 2015) appears to embrace an essen-

tialist view. It works with a presupposition that culture is a bound system of meanings and practices contained in the nation-state, and that is fundamental to, and can explain, people's discursive patterns across communication situations (see also Holliday, 2011). This was also one of the observations of the review of intercultural workplace communication research included in this study (Lahti & Valo, 2015).

Mainstream research into intercultural workplace communication tends to combine the preoccupation with essential cultural (national, ethnic, linguistic) differences between people working together, and their effect on their interpersonal relationships and productivity, with the arguments and goals of either diversity management or anti-discrimination (Lahti & Valo, 2015). The effects of this integration are reflected in the theoretical frameworks that are prevalent in mainstream intercultural workplace communication research: information and decision-making, social identity and categorisation, and modern critical theorising (Lahti & Valo, 2015; see also Lauring, 2009; Mannix & Neale, 2005).

The information and decision-making framework focuses on how differences in individuals' culturally shaped interpretations, knowledge, and skills hinder or enhance workplace performance in terms of building mutual understanding, problem solving or innovation (see also Mannix & Neale, 2005). The social identity and categorisation framework (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1987) considers different cultural memberships as triggering the formation of subgroups that prevents individuals from developing relationships and sharing information with members of the perceived outgroup. The critical modern framework (Baxter & Asbury, 2015) uncovers the systemic oppression of culturally non-mainstream employees that undermines their wellbeing and efficiency. When these frameworks are put together, one can see how intercultural workplace communication has been seen as a "double-edged sword" (e.g. Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010). In other words, intercultural communication at work may denote both misunderstandings, intergroup bias and discrimination, and enhanced decision-making, learning and synergy.

Culturally diverse employees with different first languages, values, schemes for perception and conduct have been argued to experience misunderstandings (e.g. Mak & Chui, 2013; Peltokorpi, 2007) and favor interactions with those colleagues whom they perceive to be culturally similar to them (e.g. Ferguson & Porter, 2013; Vallaster, 2005). Moreover, organisations subject the representatives of cultural minority groups through sanctioning mistreatment and exerting pressures on them to conform to the mainstream workplace culture (e.g. Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006; Trux, 2005). At the same time, it has also been proposed that cultural differences associated with employees' diverse perspectives, knowledge and skills can enhance organisational performance in terms of information processing, problem solving, innovation, and intercultural learning (e.g. Ely & Thomas, 2001; Méndez García & Pérez Cañado, 2011).

Such polarised accounts of intercultural workplace interactions are the upshot of the limited conceptualisation of culture and its relationship to communication. All the research strands discussed above focus on cultural differences

among people interacting in the workplace that are, as if by default, associated with their national or ethnic backgrounds (in some cases, also “race” is presented as an apparent proxy for ethnicity). The underlying assumption is that culture is synonymous with nation/ethnicity that exists as an objective entity and an a priori fact. Such culture entails a static and monolithic set of values, skills, experiences, perception modes and psychological states that are omnipresent, “naturally” shared by all group members, and expressed in communication.

2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Critical approaches in intercultural communication research

Within the last two decades, several critical intercultural communication scholars (e.g. Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011; 2013; Hunsinger, 2006; Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002; Piller, 2011; 2012), as well as researchers working in the related fields of anthropology (e.g. Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009; Eriksen, 2001), applied linguistics (e.g. Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2014; Sarangi, 1994) or cross-cultural management (e.g. Angouri & Glynos, 2009; Sackmann & Phillips, 2004) have called upon intercultural communication researchers to reconsider the needs and goals for their work. The essentialist approach has been criticised for ignoring the social construction of cultural identities, offering misleading descriptions and predictions of the social world that flatten out human behavior by emphasising only certain differences, neglecting interactants' other individual and group identities, overlooking the social, political and historical context of human interaction, or the pluralisation of life forms enabled by globalisation.

Nation- and ethnicity-based groups are too large to warrant attempts at providing finite cultural descriptions of their purported values and communicative traits (Piller, 2012). It appears more fitting to treat these communities as imagined, rather than real (Piller, 2012). As discursive constructs, they are characterised by porous boundaries, fluidity and constant re-interpretation. They cannot possibly contain and shape individuals who may imagine themselves as their members. People continuously fashion and refashion their cultural identities (as in interpretations, aspirations, ways of life) through interactions with myriad different groups and ideas; memberships related to nation, ethnicity and national language are only few among the myriad others that may emerge as relevant in different situations and aspects of people's lives (e.g. Holliday, 2011). The traditional ideas about culture and language as static and territorially bound have been further problematised by the intensification of global interconnectedness driven by increased mobility and technological innovations (e.g.

Hunsinger, 2006; Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2014). This is especially the case in the realities of the globalising workplaces where the notion of hidden national traits influencing or shaping how people behave in interaction may be of little use (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004).

These challenges do not occupy the research plain only but have practical implications and enter the social world in very concrete, material ways. The predominant ways of theorising intercultural communication have left their mark on the language that social actors have at their disposal to even consider and orient themselves towards interculturality. Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009) have noted that the dominant discourses on cultural diversity and multiculturalism provide us with only two extreme images that pivot on either celebrating or then pathologising cultural differences. Essentialist descriptions of cultural groups are intuitively appealing, and they are drawn upon to market intercultural communication trainings, inform organisational policies and practices, and justify our actions towards those we imagine and frame as “different others.” The categorical emphasis on essential cultural difference runs the dual danger of ignoring relevant commonalities among people, and overlooking vital issues that may not at all be “cultural.”

With the mounting criticism of the project of mapping and cataloguing cultural characteristics to explain and make predictions about how members of different national, ethnic and linguistic groups may act in interaction, an alternative agenda for intercultural communication research has been proposed. This agenda highlights exploration of the processes of identification, othering and representation, issues related to language choices and competencies, and the construction of inclusive and shared local cultures (e.g. Piller, 2012; Holliday, 2013). Critics foreground that understanding the complexities of intercultural contact calls for a “careful, case-by-case approach” (Breidenbach & Nyiri, 2009, p. 323), and articulating instability (Dervin, 2014).

2.2 Research objective

My study is informed by the anti-essentialist critique. I aim to explore the situated, dynamic, subjective and intersubjective processes constituting the communication of interculturality at work. Among the systematic research programmes that address the challenges of essentialism, I set for the critical constructivist and ethnomethodological frameworks to guide the three empirical articles included in this study. Working within these frameworks, I aim to develop an understanding of how people may perceive interculturality and how they may “do” interculturality (Piller, 2011) at work. Meeting this objective entails building thick descriptions of perceptions and accomplishments of interculturality in a variety of workplace arrangements and situations with their unique constellations of tasks, relationships and contexts – in menial and knowledge-intense work, in face-to-face and technology-mediated interactions, in relationships with peer colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates, in groups

and teams, or interactions with customers and partners. I am interested in how interculturality may be understood and produced in such interpersonal communication processes as relational development, cultural identification, and knowledge sharing.

Owing to the two frameworks employed in the empirical articles, the title of this study, *Communicating Interculturality in the Workplace*, has a dual meaning. It pertains to two aspects of interculturality at work: the meanings and interpretations that people develop of interculturality in workplace interactions, and the actions that people take to enact interculturality in their workplace interactions. In other words, the study acknowledges interculturality both as situated in people's interpretations, and in people's actions. I see the two approaches as complementary.

2.3 Critical constructivism

One of the solutions offered by critical scholars is to explore the emergent, nuanced, complex and fluid character of interculturality by constructing bracketed thick descriptions of particular social realities as experienced and discussed by social actors. This critical constructivist perspective resonates with Holliday's (2011) critical cosmopolitanism. The viewpoint's underlying methodology combines constructivist (or interpretive) and critical postmodern methodologies.

Constructivism (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Moses & Knutsen, 2012) embraces a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, emphasising the subjective multiple-view character of social reality, and the constructed and situated nature of experience. It sets out to explore people's interpretations to develop understanding of how individuals may orient themselves to the social world, which is considered here as an important aspect of the social reality as such (Schwandt, 2000). Communication is given a constitutive role as individuals are seen as constructing experience through social interaction.

Critical constructivism rejects both the optimistic postmodern view of free-floating identities, and the traditional critical view of systemic discrimination (Holliday, 2011). In its integration of critical theorising, it draws on postmodern critical theory (Baxter & Asbury, 2015). While it acknowledges the social, historical and political aspects of interculturality, and is suspicious of the apparent neutrality and projected image of the status quo as harmonious, it distances itself from the tectonic view of systemic discrimination. Such static understanding is considered as a form of othering: a patronising imposition of the role of the repressed on one's subjects, and a way of denying them the possibility of autonomy (Holliday, 2011). Instead, a bottom-up approach is employed to examining how ideologies may enter interaction in multiple fragmented ways (Baxter & Asbury, 2015). The viewpoint places an emphasis on people's inherently unstable, multiple and multifaceted identities, examining the various ways in which they may become intertwined with knowledge claims, and emerge as meaningful in interaction. It does not presume that interaction be-

tween persons from different contexts and locations is automatically intercultural. Individuals may only frame the situation as “intercultural,” and they may do so for a variety of reasons.

The approach has focused my analysis in the first two empirical articles (Lahti & Valo, 2013; Lahti, 2013) onto the contextualised and emergent meanings and understandings that people may give to their workplace interactions as “intercultural.” Both articles work with open-ended interview data to develop insights into the processes of relational development and cultural identification. These processes are therefore approached from the point of view of people’s individual subjective understandings discussed in an interview. The respondents’ comments are not treated as “reality reports delivered from a fixed repository” (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 127). The accounts are considered as constructed in the interaction between me and my research participants in the social context of a research interview (Constantino, 2008; Creswell, 2009).

Article II (Lahti & Valo, 2013) is theoretically informed by an understanding of an interpersonal relationship as an ongoing process enacted through communication that entails repeated interaction and is never complete (e.g. Sias, Krone, Jablin, 2002; Sigman, 1995). While a relationship is jointly constructed by the partners, each of the partners understands the relational process in their unique way. Operating from a constructivist viewpoint, it is these individual perceptions that the article set out to investigate. The article builds insights through a theory-guided qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2006). As a strategy for analysis, qualitative content analysis prescribes a circular process of identifying, coding and grouping patterns in the data (e.g. Mayan, 2009). The theoretical framework of social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) and Kram and Isabella’s (1985) typology of workplace relationships were used as sensitising devices in developing interpretations of the interview data.

Social penetration theory seeks to explain the development of interpersonal closeness. Its major premise is that relational development occurs in and through changes in interpersonal communication. The process of social penetration is enacted through a range of interpersonal behaviours, the most important of which is self-disclosure, or revealing information about oneself to the other. Self-disclosure can be examined in terms of breadth, or amount of exchanged information, as well as in terms of depth, or its level of intimacy. The interpersonal relationship becomes closer with gradual systematic, and mutual self-disclosure and other interpersonal behaviours between the partners. The process does not follow a strictly linear course but “cycles and recycles through levels of exchange” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 136). Since workplace relationships are imposed on organisational members, I was interested in relational development beyond the most basic level. I drew on a typology of workplace relationships (Kram & Isabella, 1985) that differentiates between three relationship stages: information (where work-related information is shared, and there is a low level of trust), collegial (with additional exchanges of feedback, personal information, emotional support, and confirmation and validation of self-worth),

and special (with profound self-disclosure and self-expression, and a sense of an emotional connection).

What theory-guided analysis meant in practice was that I first identified relevant themes through an inductive reading of the data. These themes were then reflected against the theoretical concepts to expand and focus the interpretations of relational development beyond the information level. Despite its socio-psychological roots, social penetration theory rendered itself to being used as a heuristic theory or a sensitising device. It is important to note that the interview guide used for constructing the data in the first place was not shaped by either of the theoretical frameworks.

Article III (Lahti, 2013) is theoretically grounded in a critical constructivist understanding of cultural identity as a communicative process occurring in the social spheres between and among people that is inherently dynamic and problematic. I specifically draw on communication theory of identity (CTI; e.g. Hecht, 2015) that acknowledges the complex and fluid nature of identity by articulating it as constituted in communication. The basic premise of CTI is that identity is situated in four layers: personal, relational, enacted, and communal. The personal identity denotes one's self-definition. The relational identity pertains to identities ascribed to us by others, to identities defined in terms of relationships, as well as to identities in relation to other identities. The enacted identity resonates with the notion of identities as expressed or performed. Finally, the communal identity focuses on social articulations of particular identities, for instance as media representations. Identity formation is a communicative process that involves negotiations between and among the layers. The frames are not always congruent, and discrepancies, or identity gaps, may occur between and among them (Jung & Hecht, 2004). I also acknowledge that the negotiation of cultural identities in interaction is suffused with power inequalities, access to sociocultural resources, or culturalist ideologies (Collier, 2005; Piller, 2011). A person's ability to claim and perform their desired identities may be affected by their position in the interaction, competence in the shared language, or social prestige of the cultural group they may be taken to represent.

These theoretical underpinnings informed the design of the interview protocol with the help of which the data were constructed. The view of cultural identity as a process unfolding in interaction first led me to experiment with a thematic narrative approach to analysing data (Riessman, 2008). I abandoned narrative analysis upon a realisation that the analytical unit of a story biased my attention towards certain types of accounts in the data set: the respondents' stories about cultural identities becoming relevant in workplace interactions. This led to me disregard all the other views expressed about cultural identities not becoming salient or meaningful in relationships and encounters at work that were not expressed in a story format. Finally, I settled for the alternative method of interpretive description that allowed me to treat my dataset comprehensively. This method aims to explore people's subjective understandings of the phenomenon to produce a coherent experiential account of that phenomenon applicable to informing practice (Thorne, 2008). The product of an interpre-

tive description is a systematic conceptual description of the explored phenomenon or process that highlights its distinctive patterns, and accounts for individual variations within it (Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O'Flynn-Magee, 2004). As a strategy for organising, grouping and transforming the data, qualitative content analysis was used.

2.4 Ethnomethodology

The other type of solution that critical scholars have proposed to counter the dangers of essentialism is to conceptualise culture as a purely discursive notion existing nowhere else but in communication (e.g. Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002). Piller (2011), for instance, has called upon researchers to shift their attention from the inquiry into "what culture is" towards tackling a different type of question: "who makes culture relevant to whom in which context for which purposes?" (p. 72). Full commitment to this focus calls for employing an interaction-centred approach to studying intercultural communication that is founded in the use of naturally occurring data, as is characteristic of social constructionist approaches.

For the purpose of my third empirical article, I initially considered working with a social constructionist perspective, such as with the toolkit of discursive psychology (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 2007). I gained access to records of chat conversations of a four-member Finnish-Russian dispersed team that rendered itself to an exploration of cultural knowledge sharing processes. The nature of this data set swayed me towards choosing an ethnomethodological approach. Social constructionism (e.g. Burr, 2003) approaches culture as a social construct and draws on heuristic theories to explain or unmask it. Ethnomethodology offers an alternative vision of social life and scientific inquiry that departs from theoretically driven accounts of phenomena (Hester & Housley, 2002; Lynch, 2008).

Ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967) is a research approach in sociology that challenges the traditional sociological treatment of social facts as pre-discursive and restricting the actions of individuals by proposing that such social facts are constituted in individuals' practical activities, or "members' methods" (Lynch, 2008; ten Have, 2004). Ethnomethodology treats communication as a publicly available interactional process unfolding between persons (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). In addition to meaning making, communication is seen as action through which social life is produced (Mandelbaum, 2008). Ethnomethodology further emphasises the routine-like and patterned character of interaction that is the central apparatus for the production of social order (ten Have, 2004). Ethnomethodological inquiry pivots on identifying and describing phenomena as they are produced by people in and through language in social interaction (Francis & Hester, 2004). Phenomena under investigation are not treated as analytically or theoretically problematic, and the task of the analyst is not to explain or deconstruct the phenomenon but to demonstrate its relevance

in people's lived reality (Hester & Housley, 2002). Such analysis cannot presume an omnirelevance of some theoretical concept for a specific aspect of social life, nor can it peek inside members' minds; the focus remains solely on what members make observably salient for their interaction (Hester & Housley, 2002).

Article IV (Lahti, 2015) included in this study specifically employs the ethnomethodological method of membership categorisation analysis (MCA; e.g. Sacks, 1986; see also e.g. Lepper, 2000; Silverman, 1998). MCA offers a systematic way of examining how relevant interactional identities are talked into being by the interactants communicating with one another.

The method sheds light on the ordinary and commonsensical reasoning that people lean on to categorise themselves and others as specific kinds of people. It examines how this categorisation is used by people in mutually recognisable ways to inform their interaction. MCA postulates that persons can be classified with a number or labels, or membership categories. These categories have specific normative expectations attached to them concerning their characteristics, or predicates. Such predicates may entail behaviours, rights, responsibilities, values, social ties, and distinct knowledge. "Cultural knower" is a membership category characterising an individual who has access to specific cultural and linguistic knowledge. As the interaction unfolds, specific membership categories may be selected and made visible through directly naming the category or through a reference to or performance of the category's predicate (Busch, 2010). In specific communication situations, categories with complementary predicates may be used and heard as bound together with mutual rights and obligations. "Cultural knower – not knower" is such a category pairing built around the unequal distribution of cultural knowledge. It can be made relevant in interaction if the participants make their potential asymmetry in cultural knowing visible and consequential.

MCA enabled me to analyse how the participants took interactional steps to invoke the categorisation as "cultural knower" and "not knower" for oneself and the others, therefore instantiating the process of cultural knowledge sharing. What is noteworthy is that instead of treating cultural difference as a constant feature of the interaction, the ethnomethodological perspective allows for seeing interculturality as momentary and teasing out the interactional moments when the participants talk the cultural distance between each other into and out of being (e.g. Bolden, 2014).

Following the guidelines of ethnomethodology, I refrained from working with an a priori concept of culture and cultural knowledge, and examined how any kind of knowing about local group-based meanings, symbols and practices was made salient, and therefore "done" in interaction by the participants themselves. The initial research report presented in-depth discussion of chosen data excerpts. However, following Silverman (2011), I revisited the analysis for recurrent patterns throughout the data set and counted how frequently they were produced. This tabulation strengthened the analysis by illustrating that the specific kinds of categorisation as "cultural knower" and "not knower" were not limited to a few data extracts, but were a recurrent feature of the whole data corpus.

3 ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY

3.1 Research stages

This study consists of four research articles and the compilation section at hand. One of the articles is a literature review and the other three are empirical research reports. One of the empirical articles and the literature review were co-authored with my doctoral research supervisor. In the case of co-authorship, I carried the main responsibility for the research process and writing. The second author made her contribution through discussions on the theoretical and methodological framework, data analysis, and writing up the research report.

The onset and completion of work on the literature review marked the beginning and end of my doctoral research project. The process of reviewing and integrating existing research on intercultural communication in workplace contexts was central to my search for adequate positioning for myself as a researcher within the heterogeneous field of intercultural communication inquiry. Work on the review article evolved as the search scopes were expanded, and the categorisation of findings revised several times.

My deepening understanding and pursuit of theoretical and methodological positions is illustrated in the three empirical articles. As a collection of articles completed and published over the course of a few years, this study documents my learning process. The first empirical article could well be classified as a fine example of a Janusian approach (e.g. Dervin, 2010) where both essentialist and constructivist discourses on interculturality are employed. This was my first study and my understanding was evidently steeped in dominant intercultural communication theorising. Moreover, the idea for the most indicative paragraphs on "Finnish speech culture" and Hall's (1976/1989) framework did not originate from me; I was asked to cover these issues by the anonymous peer-reviewers. The three empirical articles have thematic, theoretical and methodological connections, as observations and reflections developed in the course of earlier projects informed the framing of the subsequent ones. In the discussion section of Article II, I consider issues of identification and insights from critical

theorising; these ideas helped me frame the research problem in Article III. In the discussion section of Article III, I contemplate the benefits of working with naturally occurring data. I also reflect on cultural knowledge processes in organisations. Both issues inspired my work on Article IV. All the articles contribute to achieving the objective of the study as they offer insights into how people may perceive and perform interculturality in specific workplace contexts. The articles and their research questions are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Research articles included in the study

Article	Research questions
I Lahti, M., & Valo, M. (2015). The workplace as a site for intercultural communication: A critical literature review. Manuscript submitted for publication.	<i>Research question 1:</i> 1 How has intercultural communication been approached in the scholarship into intercultural communication at work?
II Lahti, M., & Valo, M. (2013). The development of intercultural relationships at work: Polish migrant workers in Finland. <i>Journal of Intercultural Communication</i> , 31. (ref.)	<i>Research question 2:</i> 2 How do temporary migrant workers and the persons they work with in their foreign workplace perceive developing interpersonal relationships with each other?
III Lahti, M. (2013). Cultural identity in everyday interactions at work: Highly-skilled female Russian professionals in Finland. <i>Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies</i> , 3(4), 21-43. (ref.)	<i>Research questions 3-5:</i> 3 How does Russian identity matter to highly skilled female Russian professionals as they make meanings about their workplace interactions? 4 How do they perceive the unfolding of Russian identity formation processes in specific contexts at work? 5 What general patterns in their experiences can be identified?
IV Lahti, M. (2015). Sharing cultural knowledge at work: A study of chat interactions of an internationally dispersed team. <i>Language and Intercultural Communication</i> , 15(4), 513-532. (ref.)	<i>Research question 6:</i> 6 How do the team members share cultural knowledge in their unfolding chat conversations through mobilising category collections "cultural knower - not knower"?

3.2 Summaries of the articles included in the study

3.2.1 The workplace as a site for intercultural communication: A critical literature review

This section presents a summary of the first article included in this study (Lahti & Valo, 2015). The article's objective is to integrate the disparate scholarship into intercultural communication at work to determine what research approaches have been employed to deal with culture and cultural memberships in workplace interactions. Under investigation are studies of interactions between two or a few individuals across a range of occupations and working arrangements. The review further focuses on studies into memberships in national, ethnic, and language groups as these have traditionally occupied the focal point of intercultural communication inquiry (Piller, 2012).

The data set comprises 110 empirical articles published in English in international peer-reviewed journals between January 1990 and August 2014 that were searched both in EBSCO Host Communication and Mass Media Complete database and manually. Articles included in the analysis were limited to those examining communication in real working life settings (as opposed to research based on student work or laboratory-type experiments), and in the context of face-to-face interactions.

The articles were classified with relation to their research themes and assumptions about intercultural communication. The analysis was interpretive and data-driven, and its goal was to build categories representing distinctive research perspectives on intercultural communication at work. These were developed through an iterative process of identifying, coding and organising categories in the data (e.g. Mayan, 2009).

The analysis rendered three research perspectives distinctive in their treatment of the relationship between culture, communication, and context:

- 1) *Cultural difference in workplace communication.* This research strand treats national and ethnic groups as confined systems of values, and perceptual and discursive patterns that are expressed through (national) language. Memberships in such cultural groups are assumed to influence people's communication in mostly unacknowledged ways. Moreover, people's essentially different perspectives, practices and communication styles are regarded to be incompatible. This, in turn, presents intercultural communication at work as inherently problematic and thwarted by misunderstandings, miscommunication, and conflicts. Scholarly investigations aim to identify and describe the core content of nation- and ethnicity-based cultures, examine the effects of cultural differences on intercultural interaction, or make predictions about the possible pitfalls should such interaction take place. The sub-themes within this group include: intercultural interaction, corporate management communication, cultural uniqueness, cultural variability, cultural awareness training, and language and culture.

- 2) *Intercultural negotiation in workplace communication.* Articles in this perspective examine how individuals understand and negotiate their workplace interactions as intercultural. Intercultural communication is viewed as a situated, dynamic, subjective and intersubjective process. Language is treated as a social tool rather than a neutral conduit for the underlying cultural membership. The goal of research is to develop understanding of such processes as cultural identification, meaning making, negotiation of shared culture, and of interactional practices that span linguistic and cultural boundaries. This group comprises the following sub-themes: cultural identification, understanding cultural diversity, shared culture, intercultural communication training, language and identification, language policies and practices in multilingual organisations, and creative language practices.

- 3) *Inequality in workplace communication.* Investigations within this perspective are suspicious of the view of workplace communication as harmonious and happening on a level playing field. They point to the social structures and ideologies that unequally position members of different groups. Intercultural communication at work is approached as suffused with power inequalities, struggles, and tensions. The special emphasis is on the challenges faced by culturally non-mainstream employees. The goal of research is to understand how power operates in workplace interactions, to give voice to marginalised organisational members, and to push for social change. The sub-themes within this perspective are as follows: challenges experienced by minority employees, contested workplace culture, language and inequality, and language training.

The literature analysed in the review uses a variety of methodologies to investigate a range of relational and task-oriented phenomena. In terms of ontological and epistemological assumptions, national, ethnic and linguistic memberships tend to be conceptualised in essentialist ways as encompassing a finite set of traits shared by all group members, exclusive with other such cultures, and revealed in communication.

Most studies in the first research perspective cultural difference in workplace communication employ the theoretical framework of information and decision-making that understands intercultural communication at work as either obstructed or enriched by cultural differences. It further resonates with the organisational ideology of diversity management. While these studies sensitise us about workplace communication being relative, they may run the danger of producing static cultural descriptions and ignore the socially constructed character of interculturality.

Studies in the intercultural negotiation perspective make a significant addition to intercultural workplace communication scholarship by emphasising the situated, subjective and intersubjective nature of interculturality. However, a number of investigations employ the framework of

social identity and categorisation (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1987) that sees national, ethnic and linguistic memberships as a “naturally” relevant and problematic aspect of intercultural workplace interactions. Alternatively, studies that approach interculturality from social constructionist and ethnomethodological perspectives as a process unfolding between participants challenge the dominant presupposition that people’s differing cultural identities will always be relevant in interaction. They argue that other situated roles, relationships and enactments may be more important at work. Studies in the second perspective also expand on the limited treatment of language in traditional intercultural communication research. Instead of seeing language as a neutral conduit for national and ethnic cultures, they look into issues of linguistic competence, identification, and creative linguistic practices in multilingual workplace interactions.

Investigations in the third perspective claim that the constructs of national, ethnic and linguistic difference matters at work. Their idea about how these constructs matter depends on the theoretical framework employed. A number of studies work with modern critical theorising (Baxter & Asbury, 2015) and focus on the collective experience of discrimination among members of predetermined cultural groups, a view that is in accordance with the organisational ideology of anti-discrimination. Working with a priori ideas about groups may be problematic as it underplays the complexity of individuals’ identities and workplace experiences. It may also be a form of othering (Holliday, 2011). Articles embracing postmodern critical theorising (Baxter & Asbury, 2015) do not deny their research participants agency. They articulate the interactional, emergent and situated view of struggles over meaning of linguistic and cultural privilege.

3.2.2 The development of intercultural relationships at work: Polish migrant workers in Finland

In this section a summary of the second article included in this study (Lahti & Valo, 2013) is presented. The article is situated against the backdrop of temporary migrant work where labour shortage in “3D (dirty, dangerous, dull)” jobs (Cook, Dwyer, & Waite, 2011) in Western countries attracts workers from poorer states to follow better paid though short-term work contracts (Castles, 2002). While hiring foreign migrants is increasing in popularity, we know relatively little about these person’s interpersonal relationships in their foreign workplace. Researchers have criticised temporary employment arrangements for exploiting productivity while disparaging the social aspect of work (e.g. Demireva, 2011). Literature into interpersonal interactions of labour migrants (e.g. Uy-Tioco, 2007) has focused on technology-mediated communication with intimates and members of the diaspora. The article examines interpersonal relationships in the circle of recruitment business in Finland, a form of labour migration industry (Castles, 2007) that tapped into the new possibilities enabled by the EU expansion onto Eastern European states in 2004 and 2007. The objective is to explore how temporary migrant workers from Poland and the persons they work with

in their foreign workplace in Finland perceive developing interpersonal relationships with each other.

Through an internship, I gained access to a Finnish-based agency that specialised in recruiting construction and metal industry professionals from the new EU states and hiring them out to Finnish companies. In 2007, I conducted 9 in-depth interviews with agency employees and Polish metal workers recruited by that agency and “rented out” to customer metal companies. These data were originally gathered for the purpose of an earlier thesis of mine that looked into informal intercultural learning in the workplace utilising a grounded theory approach (Zielinska, 2007). That study identified that informal learning was perceived as intertwined with relational development; it therefore seemed worthwhile to review the data from a relational development perspective.

The respondent group consisted of 5 employees of the recruitment agency (4 females and 1 male; 4 Finns and a Polish immigrant who had been living in Finland for 3 years) and 4 male recruited Polish workers. The participants were between 26 and 47 years of age. While the recruitment agents and the younger contracted workers knew English, the older contracted workers did not speak any foreign language. The respondents’ educational backgrounds ranged from vocational training to a university degree. Their occupations varied from welder, computer numerical control machine programmer and operator, through interpreter and recruitment consultant, to managing director. The recruited workers interviewed had been living in Finland for 3 to 6 months. They were not able to specify how long they would be staying in Finland as they were working on open demand-based job contracts.

The interviews were organised around a set of themes: expectations about interactions at work, interpersonal experiences at work and interest in one’s co-workers. The themes were developed from an interaction-centred perspective, but without any specific theoretical framework. Questions asked and topics discussed differed across interview situations as the participants were encouraged to freely articulate their interests and perceptions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 170). The Polish respondents were interviewed in Polish, and the Finnish respondents in Finnish. The first interview was carried out face-to-face, and the others over the phone or Skype™, and they were all recorded. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, altogether amounting to 11 hours of recording.

In the interview data, repeated talk about motives for and against developing intercultural workplace relationships beyond the basic information-level form, as well as descriptions of behaviours enacted to develop or not develop such relationships was identified. Several, also contradictory, motives and behaviours were discussed in each of the interviews. The motives and behaviours were chosen as the focus of the analysis, and they were grouped into the following larger themes: 1) managing the lack of a common language, 2) interpersonal network imbalance, 3) expectations of good workplace relationships, and 4) understanding the role of culture in intercultural relational development. The themes capture such aspects of relational development in the context of tempo-

rary migrant work as competence in a shared language, structural constraints brought on by temporary migrant work arrangements, shared workplace, and perceptions of others as different (Figure 1).

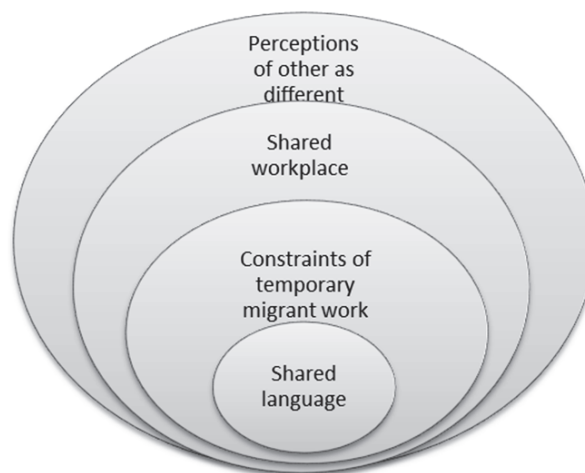


FIGURE 1 Aspects of relational development in the context of temporary migrant work

- 1) *Managing the lack of a common language.* Self-disclosure enabled through language was a pivotal feature of the respondents' observations about relational growth. Lack of competence in a shared language, experienced especially by older Polish migrants, was associated with limiting one's workplace interactions to task-related issues and withdrawal from informal exchanges. However, alternative non-linguistic ways of building closeness were also reported, for instance exchanging gifts, smiling or shaking hands. Polish migrants described indirect strategies of getting information about their foreign colleagues, such as through observation. The respondents also reported becoming involved in joint language learning activities. These supported relational growth as they brought people together in a shared activity. Moreover, learning a shared language gradually enabled the partners to self-disclose.
- 2) *Interpersonal network imbalance.* The Polish metal workers were lonely guests in a new environment who had followed well-paid yet short-term job contracts to a foreign country, leaving their families behind. Some expressed a view that frequent technology-mediated interactions with family and friends fulfilled their interpersonal needs. Also life in the closely-knit community of Polish recruits where Polish language was spoken and Polish media consumed undermined the motivation to get to know the people at work more closely. However, developing friendship with Finnish co-workers was considered important for adapting to the new envi-

ronment. Also the relationship with the Finnish recruitment agent emerged as prominent. As far as the recruitment agents were concerned, some discounted the interpersonal interests of the migrants or pointed to lack of time and physical distance as hindering informal interactions. Some saw that foreign recruits might be lonely and in need of interpersonal attention. Engaging them in informal conversations, and demonstrating concern for their psychological and physical wellbeing was regarded as important for keeping them satisfied with their working arrangements, but also as a way of earning their respect and validating their humanity.

- 3) *Expectations of good workplace relationships.* The respondents unanimously agreed that good workplace relationships were foundational to positive organisational experience. They were also united in a belief that a good workplace relationship entailed different levels of collegiality to Poles and Finns. The recruited metal workers talked about and were described as expecting more socialising at and outside work. They pointed to close ties with one's peer co-workers and supervisors as a prerequisite for developing trust. These perceptions could be associated with the migrants' loneliness and work-centred existence in the new environment. Many of them had worked in a variety of foreign places and contexts before, and they had either heard of or themselves fallen prey to dishonest employers. Limited possibilities for communication and unfamiliarity with the local legal system made them suspicious of offers or claims made by the recruitment agents. The latter respondent group complained about having their trustworthiness and professionalism under constant attack. Some had realised that they could only earn the migrants' trust, and therefore make their work easier, by developing closer relationships with them.

- 4) *Understanding the role of culture in intercultural relational development.* The last theme gathers accounts of culture and cultural difference that surfaced in the respondents' observations or explanations about relational development at work. Nationality and language were the key dimensions through which the respondents reified difference and commonality. Perceptions of others as "different strangers" triggered feelings of threat and dislike. However, learning about other "cultures" was seen by some as a vital aspect of developing relationships. The participants reported engaging in friendly exchanges at work and outside work where "Polish and Finnish cultures" were compared and Poles' adaptation to life in Finland discussed. Some embraced a view that through opening themselves to experiences of other ways of life and work, they were able to undergo deep personal change and growth.

The motives and behaviours associated with them are presented in more detail in Table 2. The respondents' accounts indicate that interpersonal relationships

were perceived as a salient aspect of one's working life experience. Self-disclosure enabled through language was understood as fundamental to relational development. The workplace relationships that the respondents described in the interviews were mostly collegial and located in small groups rather than dyads. Relational development often engaged the support of third parties, such as when Polish recruits worked in groups to integrate and interpret their observations about "the others."

The workplace context informed relational development in consequential ways. Relationships became closer between and among persons working side-by-side or completing shared tasks. The special character of the relationship between the migrant workers and the recruitment agent responsible for him also encouraged informal interaction.

Relational development beyond information level appeared to be driven by motives that were not only interpersonal but also instrumental, such as when recruitment agents tried to keep the migrants satisfied so that they could benefit financially from their contracts. By the same token, Finnish metal workers in customer companies may have appeared reluctant to develop ties as they felt threatened by the Poles who performed the same work for a smaller pay.

The interpersonal interactions at work explored in the study happened against the backdrop of social and economic injustice. Migrant workers were unfavourably positioned and objectified by the dynamics of international labour migration. Their reliance on the idea of "national culture" could be read as a way of reconstructing a positive group identity to regain a sense of self-worth. Some of the agents' exhibited awareness of this as they talked about wanting to make the migrants feel human.

TABLE 2 Perceptions of relational development at work: Themes, motives and behaviours

Themes	Motives	Behaviours
Managing the lack of a common language	Avoiding difficult and unnecessary interactions	Avoiding communication altogether; not communicating about abstract and personal matters
	Finding other ways of relating to each other	Using symbolic displays of liking and nonverbal communication to communicate affection, respect and emotional support; seeking information about the others <u>through group reflection and observation</u>
	Learning a foreign language	Engaging in joint language learning projects
	Discounting the others' relational interest	Exchanging work-related information only
	Structural obstacles	Exchanging work-related information only
	Cultural cliques	Developing closer ties only with other migrants from the same country
	Living one's interpersonal life in the home country	Using communication technologies to communicate frequently with intimates back home; avoiding interactions in the new environment

(continues)

TABLE 2 (cont.)

Interpersonal network imbalance	Keeping migrant workers satisfied	Engaging in more frequent informal interactions; showing interest in the other's physical and psychological wellbeing; giving emotional support
	Earning the other's respect, validating the other	Engaging in more frequent informal interactions; showing interest in the other's physical and psychological wellbeing; giving emotional support
	Liking each other	Meeting informally outside work; reciprocal disclosures on various topics; having fun; exchanging emotional support
	Supporting one's own adaptation to the new environment	Asking for & offering help in work tasks; nonverbal communication and affinity seeking strategies; small talk
Expectations of good workplace relationships	Creating a friendly atmosphere at work	Greeting and smiling; small talk; helping the other; reciprocating the other's friendly gestures
	Expecting to socialise at work	Initiating interactions with colleagues working nearby; trying to be around others
	Expecting workplace relationships to extend outside work	Inviting the other to one's place; sending holiday greetings
	Seeing trust as located in an interpersonal relationship	Getting to know the other better; frequent face-to-face interaction
	Seeing trust as inherent in a workplace relationship	Not engaging in relational development to gain trust
	Not expecting to socialise at work	Focusing on completing organisational tasks; passive reactivity
	Separating one's working and private lives	Not engaging in extra organisational activities with one's colleagues
Understanding the role of culture in intercultural relational development	Fear of the others	Seeing the others as a threat; seeing interaction as intergroup; avoiding interaction; using nonverbal communication/other interpersonal behaviours to communicate a desire to maintain distance; ethnocentric negative interpretations of the other's behaviour
	Dislike of the others	More accurate interpretations; being annoyed with the other; avoiding interactions
	Learning about the other's "culture"	Excitement about cultural differences; asking the other and comparing aspects of each other's ways of life or national facts; individual learning projects; consulting cultural experts; tendency to process new cultural information superficially
	Personal growth	Willingly engaging in exchanges with others; taking the other's perspective; opening oneself to change

3.2.3 Cultural identity in everyday interactions at work: Highly-skilled female Russian professionals in Finland

This section presents a summary of the third article included in this study (Lah-ti, 2013). The article is motivated by dissatisfaction with the dominant concep-tualisation of cultural identity the mainstream and critical management and organisational literature as static, monolithic, and universally shared.

The article's objective is to interrogate this view by integrating interpretive and critical interpersonal communication theorising (e.g. Collier, 2005; Hecht, 2015) to examine how culturally nonmainstream employees experience the formation of their cultural identities in their everyday workplace interactions.

The choice of participants, highly skilled female Russian professionals in Finland, was guided by a notion that their experiences of cultural identity for-mation in workplace interactions may be rich and nuanced. While they may enjoy a privileged position as highly educated knowledge workers, being a Russian woman in Finland may entail stigmatisation that operates at the inter-sections of ethnicity and gender (e.g. Säävälä, 2010).

In searching for respondents, I used my own contacts and approached Russian diaspora organisations. Two respondents were referred to me by one of the research participants. Altogether, 10 female immigrants in Finland who per-formed interaction-intense knowledge work, and who identified themselves as Russian, were interviewed. The participants had been living in Finland for 2 to 22 years. Their age ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s. They lived and worked in different areas of Finland: Eastern Finland, Central Finland, and the south of Finland, including the capital. They were employed in large-, medium- and small-size organisations in both public and private sector. Their occupations were: financial manager, researcher and lecturer, travel agent, practical nurse, international affairs co-ordinator, coordinator and information officer, sales and marketing manager, IT specialist, and arts teacher.

I conducted the interviews between May 2011 and December 2012. Infor-mation on the research project and confidentiality was given to the respondents in advance. As we exchanged emails before the interview, the respondents also had a chance to learn about my background as a female Polish immigrant in Finland. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face and the others utilised Skype™ video-calling. All the interviews were recorded. The research partici-pants were offered the choice of Finnish and English as the interview language. Eight interviews were carried out in Finnish and 2 in English. Nine of the par-ticipants were competent in Finnish and were able to express themselves with ease. My background as a speaker of Finnish as a second language contributed to eliminating concerns of self-presentation in Finnish. The interviews were be-tween 1 and 1.5 hour long, altogether yielding around 14 hours of recorded ma-terial.

The development of the interview guide was founded on communication theory of identity (e.g. Hecht, 2015). It included the following themes: one's sense of self as Russian, the salience and meaning of being Russian in specific workplace communication situations, interpersonal relationships, and in the

working community. The objective set for the interview situation was to construct accounts of how cultural identity mattered in specific workplace situations and events. The accounts were produced through the joint efforts of the interviewer and the respondent in recalling relevant experiences “from which they think, talk, act and interpret” (Mason 2002, p. 227).

In the analysis, four communication sites for distinct formations of cultural identity were identified: 1) expressing professionalism, 2) managing initial encounters, 3) facing stigma, and 4) facilitating intercultural learning. These communication sites represent critical workplace interaction formats and situations where distinct constructions of “Russianness” may be formed.

- 1) *Expressing professionalism.* Cultural identity was understood as related to expressions of professionalism in task-related interactions. It was conceptualised as a set of characteristics, values and attitudes that shaped one’s work ethic. Russian identity was fundamental to some respondents’ understanding of themselves as professionals. Russianness was experienced as highly salient and generalisable, and it was avowed or rejected to claim a positive professional identity. Some associated Russianness with outstanding values and characteristics permeating one’s work ethics, and they eagerly avowed it. This experience of cultural identity entailed making polarised comparisons between the unprofessionalism of one’s Finnish colleagues and one’s own Russian professional excellence. Russianness was also framed as a flawed mentality universally possessed by all Russians. This troublesome cultural identity was subsequently rejected to build a claim about one being “an exceptional Russian.” A contrasting understanding challenged the notion of “national character.” Attitudes, values, and expertise needed in expert knowledge work were understood as learnable through formal education and practicing one’s profession. Russianness was also understood as possession of organisationally valuable cultural knowledge and skills. Even if being Russian was not perceived as central to one’s sense of self, the expectation was that one’s valuable cultural expertise would be put to use at work. With relation to this commodification of cultural capital, some respondents recounted having experienced animosity and rivalry in workplace interactions with other speakers of Russian as a first language.
- 2) *Managing initial encounters.* Cultural identity was also associated with unusual biographic information that was revealed through salient identity markers such as speaking with a Russian accent or having a Russian sounding name. While such cues did not matter in the respondents’ established working communities and relationships, they made one’s different background visible in initial encounters with strangers at work, possibly triggering negotiations about the meaning and significance of one’s different cultural background. Explaining one’s background to strangers at work was thus a common experience that stirred a range of reactions. The

respondents exercised a degree of agency over the disclosure. The ability to decide whether and when to confirm or reveal one's background was related to one's competence in Finnish, and the type of work performed.

- 3) *Facing stigma.* Cultural identity also denoted a stigmatised group membership related to negative social and media representations of Russians. It surfaced in workplace interactions in the form of hurtful ascriptions. Many saw anti-Russian prejudice as a real social problem and claimed to have experienced it themselves at work in the form of being ignored, openly avoided, treated in a rude way, belittled, hearing sarcastic and racist comments. While some gave accounts of challenging interactions with peer co-workers and supervisors, persons frequently interacting with strangers, especially in contexts such as customer service, appeared to be at a higher risk of facing challenging situations. Many perceived their established workplace relationships and interactional norms as a buffer against the more extreme forms of prejudice rampant in the mainstream society. According to the respondents, in their workplaces the emphasis was placed on shared professional and organisational identities. Alternatively, the respondents described their workplaces as openly multicultural. A number of participants had never experienced prejudice. While some attributed this to the exceptional character of their work community, others criticised the very concept of systemic prejudice and argued that it was a discursive tool constructed and exploited by some immigrants and the media.
- 4) *Facilitating intercultural learning.* Cultural identity was also conceived of as knowledge of the meanings and practices of a different sociocultural system that was considered interesting, personally enriching, and not related to work. Possessors of this knowledge came to act as facilitators for the others' intercultural learning. Cultural identity emerged as talk or enactment of external cultural markers such as traditions, cuisine or arts. It was usual for many to enact their Russianness at work through telling amusing anecdotes about Russia or acting as a guide during a work trip to St. Petersburg. Some experienced themselves as fundamentally culturally different from their colleagues, and saw that through informal interaction they exposed the others to an experience of cultural difference, enabling their intercultural learning. Such learning could also take a more serious form as people at work discussed the social and political situation in Russia, or the difficult history between Finland and Russia. Some did not feel responsible for helping others develop more complex and nuanced ideas about Russia. They appreciated being able to act and be perceived as individuals and professionals in their own right rather than representatives of Russia. The very idea of neatly bound and distinctive national and ethnic cultures that affect people's attitudes and behaviour was also challenged.

Cultural identity constructions occurred in all the four locations with different degrees of salience, scope and intensity. The findings are integrated in Figure 2.

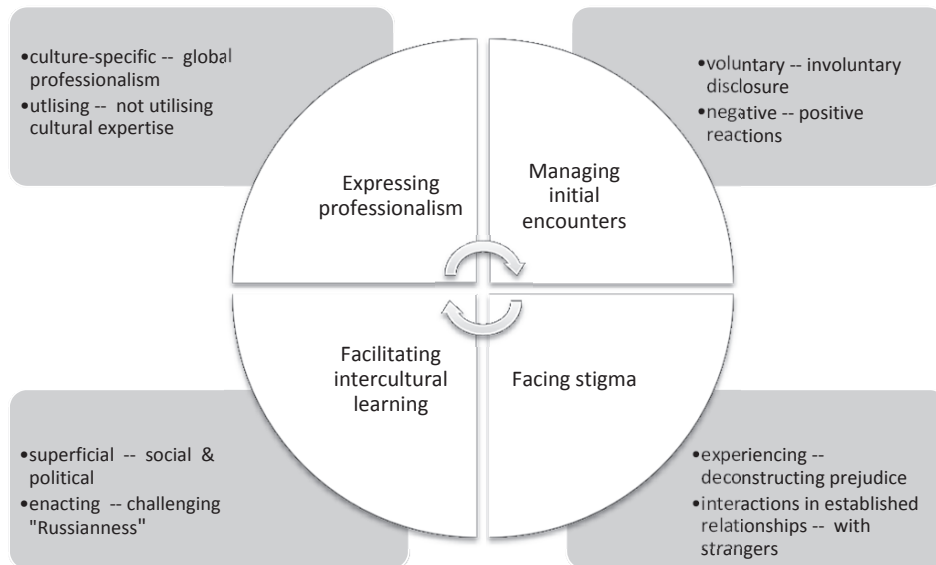


FIGURE 2 Communication sites for the formation of cultural identity at work

The findings problematise the view of cultural identities as monolithic, and universally shared. Each and every respondent experienced her own cultural identities through interactions between and among her sense of self, her enactments and relationships embedded in a specific work community. Negotiating one's cultural identity entailed not only negotiating its prominence, but also establishing the relevant meaning for it. While some understood their cultural identity as salient and permeating their professional lives, others saw their workplace interactions as a context where other identities are performed. Situations where cultural identities were seen as meaningful were intertwined with those where other identities emerged as prominent, and the interaction was not framed as intercultural. The respondents were occasionally reminded of being culturally different by the words and actions of others.

The findings problematize the dominant theoretical frameworks applied in intercultural workplace communication research: information and decision-making, social identity and categorisation, and discrimination. The information and decision-making perspective examines the organisational benefits of the diverse cultural expertise and worldviews of employees. None of my respondents described situations where their cultural identities would surface in task-

related interactions, contributing to synergistic decisions and solutions. Intercultural exchanges were perceived as personally enriching, and not concerned with task-related issues. Experiences of Russianness that were related to professionalism were associated with individual enactments of professionalism, or utilising practical knowledge and skills in interactions with Russian customers or business partners.

As far as the social identity and categorisation framework is concerned, some accounts support the assumption that workplace interactions could be experienced as intergroup rather than interpersonal. However, this framework does not explain the accounts of intraethnic conflict and competition in the data. The findings resonate with the discrimination perspective, indicating that cultural identity processes are dangerously unstable; one may unexpectedly find themselves “othered” by the words and actions of their partners in interaction. This was felt especially by those communicating with strangers at work on a daily basis. However, even for those respondents who had faced stigmatising ascriptions, their experiences of being Russian at work entailed all the four themes, with different degree of salience, scope and intensity. The findings also indicate that the respondents used the neo-liberal discourse of cultural capital to construct highly positive Russian identities for themselves. While mainstream intercultural communication research presumes that cultural difference always matters in interaction, the findings of the study point to a momentary character of cultural identity. There are workplace situations and relationships where cultural identity is not prominent to how people make sense of themselves and the interaction.

3.2.4 Sharing cultural knowledge at work: A study of chat interactions of an internationally dispersed team

This section presents a summary of the fourth article included in this study (Lahti, 2015). This article is set against the backdrop of the increasing use of internationally distributed teaming in modern organisations, where team members are located in different countries and rely primarily on communication technologies for interaction. As units that span physical locations and business environments, internationally dispersed teams have become the central sites for organisational knowledge sharing (e.g. Scott, 2013; Gibbs et al., 2008). The objective of this article is to examine how members of an internationally dispersed Finnish-Russian team share cultural knowledge in their Skype™ chat conversations. Cultural knowledge is understood here as any type of knowing (experiences, beliefs, interpretations, routines, skills, and information) related to location-specific group-based meanings, symbols and practices.

Collaboration in internationally dispersed teamwork that utilises the advances in modern communication technologies is a novel form of social interaction that calls for a revisiting of traditional notions of culture and language (Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2014). However, existing explorations into knowledge processes in technology-mediated internationally dispersed teamwork have tended to rely on post-positivistic theorising developed in the context of more tradi-

tional face-to-face culturally diverse groups and teams, adding virtuality as an additional variable. Cultural diversity among team members and a reliance on communication technologies for interaction are argued to combine to work as a “double-edged sword,” resulting in either hindered knowledge processes or in cultural innovation (for reviews, see e.g. Berry, 2011; Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007). Moreover, scholarly investigations have typically drawn on secondary data such as interviews, questionnaires, laboratory experiments or student project work, thus yielding only indirect insights into the processes in the real working life. I argue that for the value of a detailed inductive exploration of naturally occurring interactions of an ongoing working life team in producing novel insights into cultural knowledge processes.

This study draws on a data set I gained access to through my association with the Academy of Finland project Interpersonal Communication Competence in Virtual Teams. It consists of records of Skype™ chat conversations of a four-member team embedded in a Finnish organisation, and dispersed in Finland and Russia. The team’s main responsibility was to promote the internationalisation of Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises onto Russian markets. Sharing cultural knowledge was potentially salient in the team’s interactions. Two team members were co-located in the organisation’s central office in Finland, spoke Finnish as their first language, and Russian as a second language. The other two team members worked in the organisation’s representative office in Russia, and spoke Russian and Finnish as their first and second language respectively. In 2013 when the data were obtained, two team members had been working together for over 15 years, with the third member having joined 8 years, and the most recent one 3 years before. The team met face-to-face approximately once a month, and relied predominantly on technology for everyday interaction, mostly email, Skype™ chat and video-calling, and Google Drive™. Chatting appeared to be the default interaction channel employed for a range of everyday team interactions such as organising work and managing tasks, sharing information, giving support and feedback, informal socialising, or attending to problems with other communication channels. The chat conversations analysed spanned the period from March to September 2013, and consisted of 127 pages of single-spaced text. They entail conversations conducted between five pairs of user accounts (the two Russia-based members did not use chat to communicate with each other). Some of the chatting was conducted in Finnish, and some in both Finnish and Russian, where the participants used their respective mother tongues.

The article utilises the ethnomethodological framework of membership categorisation analysis (MCA; e.g. Lepper, 2000; Sacks, 1986). This method helped me identify the systematic and commonsensical ways in which the participants shared cultural knowledge in the chat interactions through mobilising categorisation as “cultural knower” and “not knower” for oneself and the other(s). The analysis consisted in sequential examination of developing chat conversations to trace how categorisation as “cultural knower” was mobilised and oriented to by the participants. I noticed patterns in who initiated the categori-

sation, how and why, and the ways it was oriented to by the other participant. This led me to the identification of four recurring ways of sharing cultural knowledge as the participants managed the distribution and completion of tasks, and attended to building mutual understanding in the unfolding interaction: 1) “consultation giver – recipient,” 2) “review giver – recipient,” 3) “interpretation giver – recipient,” and 4) “clarification giver – recipient.” As a tabulation of the category collections identified in the dataset illustrates (see Table 3), “consultation giver – recipient” was the most preponderant. Combined with “review giver – recipient,” these task-focused category collections were mobilised in 77% of all the interactional episodes in the data where cultural knowledge was shared.

TABLE 3 Category collections mobilised in sharing cultural knowledge

Category collection	Number	%
“Consultation giver – recipient”	63	71
“Review giver – recipient”	5	6
“Interpretation giver – recipient”	12	13
“Clarification giver – recipient”	9	10
<i>Total</i>	89	100

- 1) “*Consultation giver – recipient.*” This collection was initiated as one of the participants assumed the status of “cultural not knower” by seeking cultural consultation from the other through requesting help or information with relation to her specific cultural expertise and competencies. The consultation sought was presented as foundational for completing an organisational task, and cultural knowledge was thus instrumentalised. Having access to the relevant knowledge domain and being under the obligation to participate in resolving a task-related problem were predicates that indicated the other’s status as “cultural consultant.” In most cases, the other participant took steps to align herself with this description by issuing a response, or consultation, thus sharing cultural knowledge. It is significant that membership in the specific cultural group was not a prerequisite for a participant to become “cultural consultant.” I also identified instances that deviated from the general pattern. In the first type of variation, the participant who had initially categorised herself as “consultation recipient” revoked the categorisation by posting another turn where she cancelled the original request for help stating or demonstrating that she had been able to solve the problem herself. In the other type of variation, the participant categorised as “cultural consultant” displayed reluctance to issue a response acknowledging the limitations to her knowing, thus redefining the boundaries of her cultural expertise (see Table 4). These cases confirm the earlier observation that in this category collection it was not necessary for the cultural knower to be a member of the specific cultural group. One could claim epistemic rights to a body of cultural knowledge without having insider experience of the specific cultural group; conversely, being

member of the group did not automatically make one knowledgeable about all the aspects of the group's life.

TABLE 4 Variation within category collection "consultation giver - recipient"

Consultation giver - recipient	Number	%
Accepting categorisation	54	86
Revoking categorisation	7	11
Redefining categorisation	2	3
<i>Total</i>	63	100

- 2) *"Review giver - recipient."* This was the other category collection underlying the management of team activities, distribution of work, and performance of tasks. It was introduced as one participant assumed the status of "cultural knower," or "review giver," by critically reviewing a course of action just produced by the other participant through the lens of some vital cultural knowledge that only she had access to and that exposed the plan as in need of correction. Similar to the previous category collection, "review giver - recipient" did not presume membership of the cultural group to be a prerequisite for cultural knowing.
- 3) *"Interpretation giver - recipient."* This collection concerns establishing shared understanding in unfolding interaction. It was mobilised as one of the participants' "cultural knower" status was made prominent as she spontaneously offered or was asked for an interpretation of a currently discussed issue drawing on her cultural assumptions, experiences and expectations. This way of sharing cultural knowledge was casual, occasioned by some other interaction, and it was not presented as consequential for managing teamwork and completing tasks. It also had a more informal and personal tone; categorisation as "interpretation giver" implied one's first-hand experience as member of a particular cultural group. In this sense, this category pairing pivoted around imbuing situations faced by the team with personal experience from cultural groups. The surfacing of differences or making it explicit that one was embedded in a specific cultural context helped establish mutual knowledge of each other's reactions and interpretations of situations.
- 4) *"Clarification giver - recipient."* This collection was the other category collection invoked in establishing shared understanding in unfolding interaction. Unlike category pair "interpretation giver - recipient" where the sharing of cultural knowledge was casual and optional, clarification was necessitated by occasional breaks in immediate mutual understanding as the conversation developed. It pivoted on the mechanism of conversational repair (e.g. Silverman, 1998) through which a notion presented in one of the participant's turn was exposed as a novel culturally-signified item and its meaning was clarified to the other not knowing participant. This cate-

gory collection could be introduced by the participant who was currently producing a turn as she herself displayed a presumption that some item that she had just used could be considered as problematic by the other, and provided an explanation or clarification of it. Categorisation could also be mobilised by the other participant who assumed a not knowing position by issuing a request for clarification. The mobilisation of this category collection evidences that the participants monitored own and the other's turns for potential sources of non-understanding. Categorisation as "clarification giver" implied the given participant's personal experience in the specific cultural group. As the problem was attended to, the main activity was momentarily put on hold, and resumed once the item had been clarified.

The findings shed light on the dynamic, situational and collaborative nature of cultural knowledge sharing. Rather than a factor that obstructs or enhances collaboration, culture emerges an interactional accomplishment with fluid referents, boundaries and memberships. The findings of this article challenge the predominant accounts of internationally dispersed teams that, owing to their cultural diversity and technology-mediated collaboration, would either suffer from misunderstandings and divisions, or, alternatively, produce unparalleled synergistic decisions and solutions.

The way my participants mobilised category pairs "interpretation giver - recipient" and "clarification giver - recipient" illustrates that they exhibited interactional commitment and concern for monitoring mutual understanding. These collections were relatively scarce, which should be considered in the light of the fact that the team had a working history together; through mostly technology-mediated interaction, they had developed fairly close interpersonal relationships and a body of shared knowledge to rely on.

The most preponderant category pair "consultation giver - recipient" was invoked to routinely make use of the other's epistemic authority in addressing emergent work-related problems. I did not identify situations where the participants would make their respective knowledge bases relevant and combine their expertise to create new solutions to task-related problems, as the concept of innovation would have it (e.g. Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006). This finding suggests that the nature of knowledge work in internationally distributed teaming may be much less extraordinary than the popular theoretical viewpoints would suggest.

Existing research tends to assume a "natural" connection between one's cultural knowing and one's national, ethnic and linguistic background. The meanings and practices that my participants made relevant arouse at the intersections of linguistic, business, organisational, social, institutional, technological and economic contexts. Even more so, the team's constructions of cultural knowing allowed for permeable boundaries and joint access to epistemic domains. In the interactions of this team, one could be "cultural knower" without having a background in the specific cultural group; by the same token, one's

national or linguistic background was not taken as an indicator of absolute and exclusive cultural authority. The team members drew their knowing from their personal and educational trajectories, multiple associations, media consumption and their shared experience of internationalisation work.

The dominant viewpoint presumes that asymmetries in cultural and linguistic knowledge are a constant interactional characteristic in internationally dispersed teaming. My participants did not always orient to their interaction as intercultural and only occasionally made differences in their cultural knowing visible. Their orderly yet flexible accomplishments of cultural knowing demonstrate that they were able to produce their shared teaming reality through both “being similar” and “being different.” I consider this to be a profound form of the team’s shared communication competence.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Generalisability of findings

As Silverman (2011) remarks, while qualitative research does not generalise its findings from a case onto a population through statistical means, the explanations it produces should not be limited to the particular instances, and can be generalised theoretically. The making of such theoretical inferences depends on purposive sampling.

4.1.1 Theoretical sampling

My selection of cases under investigation was purposive in a way that I could further describe as theoretical. I selected cases and groups by virtue of their significance to my theoretical position, and their potential to develop my theoretical understanding of workplace interaction phenomena and processes that I wanted to investigate (Silverman, 2011).

In this study, I deliberately chose to examine cultural identities as related to national, ethnic and linguistic memberships. These have traditionally been at the core of intercultural communication inquiry (e.g. Piller, 2012). This does not mean that the purpose of my study was to catalogue cultures or document some distinctive, patterned ways in which members of different national and ethnic groups or speech communities would interpret the social world and communicate at work. When it comes to “culture,” the crux of the matter lies in how one understands the concept’s ontology and epistemology. My study is set against the backdrop of mainstream intercultural workplace communication scholarship that tends to treat national, ethnic and linguistic cultures as something people have, belong to and reveal in communication. I set out to problematise this view by examining these cultures as discursive constructs inhabiting the social spheres between and among people communicating at work.

This goal is most explicit in Article I (Lahti & Valo, 2015) that examines how people’s national, ethnic and linguistic identities at work have been treated

in the existing literature. In the empirical articles, my selection of cases was also related to my interest in specific interpersonal communication processes. The interview data set employed in Article II (Lahti & Valo, 2013) was originally gathered for another research project of mine (Zielinska, 2007). I chose to revisit it because I saw that the theme of relational development ran through the data corpus. For the purpose of Article III (Lahti, 2013), I decided to conduct interviews with highly-skilled female Russian professionals. This was guided by a conjecture that cultural identity processes may be particularly rich and nuanced for this “group” owing to the existence of ambiguous discourses about their professional, national and gender identities. I further aspired to account for the diversity of perceptions by constructing a possibly heterogeneous sample. In Article IV (Lahti, 2015), the chat conversations of the internationally dispersed internationalisation team that explicitly dealt in cultural exchange offered rich ground for an exploration of the process of cultural knowledge sharing.

4.1.2 Theoretical propositions

Purposive sampling enables three types of theoretical inference: deductive inference, comparative inference, and the emblematic case (Silverman, 2011). Deductive inference denotes analysis of a critical case to yield findings that refute traditionally accepted theorising. Comparative inference explores a wide range of instances or situations to capture the diversity of a population, therefore offering generalisations that are similar to statistical inferences but without making probability claims. The emblematic case entails single case studies that articulate core aspects of a process or phenomenon characteristic to a particular social group or unit.

My purposive selection of cases under investigation accommodates all these issues of generalisability. My findings are meaningful beyond the specific situated relationships and encounters studied. All of my articles yield insights that argue against mainstream theorising. In their investigation of interpersonal interaction phenomena related to the communication of interculturality, they point to the diversity and heterogeneous character of people’s perceptions about interculturality (Article II, Article III) and articulate the key features of a process through which interculturality is produced (Article IV). The findings of individual articles can be extrapolated to theoretical propositions that can, in turn, be applied to understand how interculturality may be communicated in the organisational experiences of immigrant and migrant employees, in workplace encounters, relationships and small groups, or in the processes of knowledge-intensive dispersed teams. The specific theoretical insights I would like to bring up concern the role of the nature of experiences and performances of cultural identities, the role of the workplace context and language.

- 1) *The communication of interculturality as fluid and multivalent.* My findings indicate that understandings and manifestations of interculturality are in constant motion. Cultural meanings can be resignified and manipulated, and the “natural” connection between culture and location can be troubled.

Since national, ethnic and linguistic identities may emerge as relevant in different ways, and may come to connote different things to different people in different situations, pinning their “content” down to a finite description of values and traits seems futile and, at best, unhelpful.

Interculturality is a social construct. However, it may have real consequences in people’s workplace interactions. Constructions of cultural memberships may serve as powerful resources for self-definition, and as frameworks for interpreting the workings of the social world and one’s place in it. Some of the constructions of interculturality in my data are imbued with culturalist ideologies, such as racist discourse, discourse about national superiority or the ideology of diversity management. National identities as social constructs may have material extensions, as when citizens of certain nation-states have their mobility constrained through visas, permits and limited rights (see also Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2012).

By the same token, the socially constructed character of interculturality means that it is only momentary and not a stable feature of communication. My study indicates that there are many workplace communication situations where interculturality is not perceived as relevant or made salient by the persons interacting. Personal trajectories, interpersonal relationships, professional identities, occupational roles and organisational memberships provide highly meaningful frameworks for people to orient themselves towards others at work.

- 2) *The workplace context as consequential for the communication of interculturality.* The demands and constraints of the working life provide important resources that inform ideas about self, roles, relationships, and actions. My findings indicate that interculturality may be communicated differently in knowledge-intensive and manual work, in established relationships with one’s colleagues and one-off encounters with strangers, or in temporary and long-term working arrangements. The working life context is imbued with broader structural forces. For instance, people’s actions and positioning can be affected by the dynamics of temporary migrant work or visa bureaucracy.

Meanings and performances of interculturality are unique to specific workplaces as constellations of interpersonal relationships revolving around shared tasks and goals. However, the underlying process through which workplace members develop shared norms, meanings and practices through joint everyday involvement in activities is universal (e.g. Holliday, 2013). The workplace matters as a “small culture” (Holliday, 1999) in which specific articulations of interculturality may emerge through shared histories, relationships, and commitments.

Perceptions of interculturality in communication at work are also enmeshed with images and storylines existing in the society. People’s language with which to structure and communicate their ideas about inter-

culturality in the workplace is influenced by the explanations that can be traced to the ideologies of anti-discrimination and diversity management.

- 3) *The role of language in the communication of interculturality.* Language is intertwined with the process of communicating interculturality in highly significant ways that extend beyond it being a conduit for communicative relativity. Language is a social tool in the workplace that may become relevant across a variety of interactions along the continuum from relationship development to task completion. Language and linguistic choices can be a powerful means for identification, and they may affect the patterns of interaction. Lack of proficiency in the dominant language may “give away” one’s different “cultural background” to others, while proficiency in that language may discount the experience of interculturality as irrelevant. Lack of a shared language may hinder the development of workplace relationships. It may also limit one’s ability to enact professionalism at work. At the same time, different linguistic competencies may bring people together through jointly developed language learning projects. The findings of Article IV (Lahti, 2015) also illustrate how bilingual individuals working together may develop own flexible linguistic practices that span the boundaries of speech communities.

Issues of language proficiency are not only an interactional matter but they are also intertwined with ideologies about what languages are perceived as expected and valued in the workplace (Hua, 2014). In the new globalised economy that increasingly relies on knowledge-intensive work and meritocratic ideals of diversity management, linguistic competencies have become an important commodity (Heller, 2010). The findings of Article III (Lahti, 2013) indicate that “native speaker” status may position one favourably on the job market, and may be drawn upon to define one’s professional identity and organisational worth.

These theoretical observations resonate with the core terms delineated in critical models for conceptualising intercultural communication competence (Dervin, 2010; Holliday, Hyde, & Kullman, 2004): identity, otherisation, and representation. These concepts can be approached as universal processes underlying the communication of interculturality. Cultural memberships may be invoked in interaction to negotiate one’s identity and relationship to others. The communication of interculturality may entail an intentional or unintentional employment of prejudices, interests and ideologies that frame the other as “different.” Understandings of the “other” may be influenced and justified by images perpetuated in institutions and in the media.

4.2 Research evaluation

4.2.1 Methodological limitations

Within the constructivist approach, the interview is seen as “focused interaction” in its own right, and not as an encounter that stands in the way of accessing the respondent’s “authentic” experiences (Silverman, 2011). Constructivist interviews are therefore approached as accounts that are an inherent part of the social reality that they describe (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

I acknowledge that the research interview is a social situation that is guided by a specific set of motives, expectations, and norms for interaction. The choice of topic and the shape of the questions asked are affected by the researcher’s theoretical interests. Research participants may feel motivated to provide “satisfactory” answers, just as they may also want to construct a relevant positive identity for themselves. For instance, my respondents were aware that I was interested in them as professionals. In the accounts produced in the interviews, cultural identities often figure as intertwined with issues of professionalism. The respondents both claim and resist cultural identities to build a positive professional identity for themselves. My interview data offer accounts of workplace interculturality fashioned in a research interview with me, and within the limits of available ways of packaging experience. This understanding is also prescribed by the critical aspect of critical constructivism, with its suspicion of any knowledge claims. The critical constructivist viewpoint sensitised me to manifestations of ideologies in the interview talk, undeniably with more success in the context of Article III (Lahti, 2013).

I agree with Silverman (2013) about the fallacy of the preponderant assumption that people’s perceptions and experiences are the most reliable source of data. However, I also think that considering the phenomena I was interested in, relational development and cultural identity processes, interviews did provide me with unique and important insights that other types of data arguably could not. They shed light onto the webs of social interpretations that people’s experiences of phenomena are embedded in.

There are, however, processes that are better accessed through other means than interviewing. Throughout the project, I have developed an interest in how language and ways of talking structure our ability to talk about phenomena and processes. This concern resonates with the already discussed claim by Breidenbach and Nyiri (2009) that the available discourses constrain the ways in which social actors can conceive of multiculturalism to either celebrating or pathologising cultural difference. In my work on Article IV (Lahti, 2015) I explore the process of cultural knowledge sharing in the interactions of an internationally dispersed team. My initial plan was to complement the records of naturally occurring team interactions with individual interviews with team members. As I was conducting the interviews, I identified a number of problems. I noticed that sharing cultural knowledge is a very challenging topic to

talk about and reflect upon as it occurs in the context of mundane daily activities that people do not consciously reflect upon. I was also perplexed to realise how limited my own ways of articulating the phenomenon were. In my interview questions, I reproduced the main research claims about cultural knowledge in intercultural teams, and these questions obviously influenced the accounts that were constructed. In the light of these challenges, I decided to abandon the interview data altogether and focus on what the participants were doing in their chat conversations.

The ethnomethodological method of membership categorisation analysis employed in Article IV stands in contrast to constructivist interviewing in that it takes an extreme empirical position on the study of the communication of interculturality as a public process routinely enacted between participants. The approach prescribes the bracketing of any kind of presuppositions and a priori concepts, and it investigates only what is made visible by the interactants themselves without attempting at theoretically deconstructing phenomena (Lynch, 2008). This results in an understanding of context as locally produced in interaction. Unlike in critical constructivism, the inquiry cuts the investigation, and the researcher's interpretations, off the larger contextual "features" such as ideologies or questions of power and privilege. These may be taken under the lens of inquiry only if they are visibly taken up and oriented to in the data. It needs to be acknowledged that through focusing on small data sets and the micro-level business of observable organisation of interaction, ethnomethodological inquiry offers insights into only a slice of the social world.

Bewailing the predominance of interview-based insights produced in social research, some critics (Piller, 2011; Silverman, 2006; 2011; 2013) have warned that accounts produced in a research interview bear an unstable relationship to people's actual actions in the social world (Piller, 2011; Silverman, 2006). I think that we should aim for balance in the types of data we use, and be aware of the types of knowledge (and limitations to that knowledge) that they allow us to produce. I understand interpersonal communication as entailing both the production of jointly enacted processes and the construction of socially embedded interpretations. I do not privilege either of the approaches but see them as complementary in that they give us different types of knowledge about the communication of interculturality at work. I believe that my exploration of the communication of interculturality at work benefitted from the integration of the two approaches.

4.2.2 Reliability and validity

Reliability denotes the extent to which research findings are unconstrained by the circumstances of their production (Silverman, 2011). I aimed at meeting the criterion of reliability in two ways discussed by Silverman (2011). I strived at making the research process transparent by providing detailed descriptions of data construction and analysis stages. I also made it explicit that the interpretations I constructed are related to my specific theoretical positioning.

A few issues should still be discussed with reference to the empirical articles included in this study. In the case of my work with interviews, I recorded and carefully transcribed the interviews myself. I can see how I could have made my interpretations more transparent to the readers of the research reports by presenting longer data extracts and including the questions that incited the answers presented as illustrations of my findings. However, this was not possible because of the manuscript length limits imposed by journals. As far as my work with the records of naturally occurring team interactions is concerned, reliability was improved by two issues. The data were records of chat conversations and therefore already “transcribed.” The other point is that I was able to gain access to conversations that had taken place before the research project began. This significantly reduced concerns of researcher intervention in the production of data.

The criterion of validity describes the degree to which a research account represents the social phenomena and practices that it investigates (Silverman, 2011). In order to overcome the dangers of anecdotalism, I drew on the techniques of constant comparative method, deviant-case analysis and comprehensive data treatment (Silverman, 2011). In my analytical work, applying the constant comparative method entailed an iterative reviewing and comparing of all the pieces of data within my data sets to produce insightful categories. The method prescribes searching for deviant or divergent cases that require further modifications in the emerging set of explanatory rules. I treated my data sets comprehensively by striving at developing interpretive schemes or descriptions that addressed all the relevant data fragments. This can be exemplified by my decision to switch from narrative analysis to interpretive description when working on Article III (Lahti, 2013). Motivated by similar concerns, I changed my research report in Article IV (Lahti, in press) to include tabulations that demonstrate how the patterns I describe run through the whole data corpus.

4.3 Practical implications

This study offers a number of insights that could inform the design of organisational policies and practices. My findings suggest that it is not helpful to assume that people who come from a different place feel different and want to be treated as such. While some persons may appreciate having their “differences” noticed, others may find it irrelevant or intolerable. It is vital to consider people’s personal histories and unique personal trajectories, their interpersonal network and social positioning. Rather than emphasising differences, it is beneficial to appreciate commonalities among people, and acknowledge that the workplace context may offer numerous resources for constructing such similarity. Organisational members develop their unique understandings and versions of interculturality in the context of workplace relationships, groups and teams. It is also important to consider the social role of language, and reflect on how people’s competency in the dominant language of the workplace affects their expres-

sions of professionalism and their enactments of self in informal interactions. Proficiency in the preferred language of the workplace may endow people with interactional power and control. I would also encourage practitioners to reflect critically on the popular talk about interculturality in their work community, and to question rather than reproduce it. Last but not least, organisations should acknowledge that some intercultural communication training formats disseminate culturalist descriptions and reduce the complexity of interactional issues to unhelpful simple step solutions.

There are no straightforward guidelines for “doing it right.” Competent communication of interculturality requires contextualised knowledge, ability to examine issues from different vantage points, attention to nuances, and acceptance of human interaction as emergent and dynamic. This message may not be as agreeable as “step lists” and “roadmaps to cultures,” whose intuitive appeal is documented. As Lavanchy, Gajardo and Dervin (2011) remark, “[e]ven if critical work on the ‘intercultural’ is not a new phenomenon, it is striking to note that criticism of the term is not as widespread as the word itself and does not hamper its success, particularly in the fields of public policy and socio-educative action” (p. 18). I would add the world of work as another social site where “interculturality” tends to be wielded uncritically.

The popularity of traditional views of the intercultural is at least partly caused by the mainstream scholarship. Doing research is a social practice of producing knowledge that has specific objectives. In this sense, another practical implication of my study is for intercultural communication researchers to acknowledge that it is in our social responsibility to produce accounts that are distinguishable from the “common sense” and that “challenge and transform preconceived ideas and unconvincing claims about the ‘Other’” (Dervin, 2011, p. 37-38). Research findings concerning culture-specific traits are misleading and counterproductive as they offer an illusion of predictability and reduce the complexity of real-life interactions. At worst, they may serve to maintain and sanction stereotypes that will affect how people perceive, interact with, and justify their actions towards others in intercultural contexts.

4.4 Suggestions for future research

I believe that research concerned with intercultural workplace communication should abandon the dual goals of documenting cultural differences and evidencing that culture always matters. In offering suggestions for future research, I would like to return to the literature review that is included in this study (Lahiti & Valo, 2015). The review concludes with thematic, theoretical and methodological suggestions inspired by both the critique of mainstream approaches and the growing body of literature that employs alternative framework to explore the communication of interculturality. These suggestions could inform future research to accommodate the view of culture and cultural memberships as fluid, situated and socially constructed:

- 1) *Moving beyond the polarised understanding of cultural difference by relinquishing the dominant theoretical frameworks of information and decision making, social identity and categorisation, and modern critical theory.* These frameworks offer only two exaggerated storylines about workplace interculturality as either a liability (a cause of misunderstandings, conflict, and discrimination) or an asset (triggering innovation and synergy). Moreover, these frameworks overemphasise difference at the expense of similarity. Future research should work with alternative communication- or interaction-centred frameworks (e.g. narrative methodologies, ethnographies), and acknowledge that the workplace is an important social site that provides people with a range of resources for people (e.g. roles, tasks, objectives) to engage in building shared realities.
- 2) *Focusing on actual intercultural interaction by working with records of actual workplace interactions.* An oversized proportion of research insights about interculturality at work are developed from indirect self-report data, such as large scale questionnaires and surveys, interviews and focus groups. While these data shed light onto people's perceptions and interpretations, they cannot be treated as reports of interactions at work. We know relatively little about how people "do" interculturality (Piller, 2011) at work. Working with observational data and records of naturally occurring interactions ties in with a social constructionist orientation (e.g. different types of discourse analysis). It helps problematise the "naturalness" of culture and cultural identities and fully commit the inquiry to treating culture as constructed rather than expressed in communication (e.g. Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002).
- 3) *Developing thick descriptions of "small cultures" instead of cataloguing national and ethnic cultures.* Denoting a shared set of practices developed by a small group of individuals through involvement in shared activities, "small culture" (Holliday, 1999) enables researchers to study how shared norms and interpretations are established over time in the context of companies, groups, teams, or workplace relationships. The concept of "small culture" resonates with "shared communication competence," "shared culture" and "interculture" (Schnurr & Zyats, 2013), or "third space" (Bhabha, 1994). These tools help trace the processes through which interculturality is produced in specific workplaces, with attention to nuances, complexities and ambiguities, and acknowledging the larger context the workplace is embedded in.

SUMMARY

Introduction

Within the globalising social landscape, the workplace has emerged as a critical site where persons who come from diverse locations and/or are speakers of different languages collaborate on shared tasks and develop relationships. Such workplace interactions are usually described as “intercultural,” and instances of “intercultural communication.” At the same time, the context of workplace informs people’s interactions and relationships in highly meaningful ways, imbuing them with considerations of professional and organisational identification, and with economic and political implications.

The theme of intercultural communication at work has encouraged intense scholarly interest. However, this scholarship has tended to paint a polarised image of workplace interculturality as either a challenge or an asset. I argue that this is because of reliance on limited theoretical frameworks that integrate the assumptions of mainstream intercultural communication scholarship with predominant organisational perspectives on cultural workplace diversity. The objective of my study is to provide novel insights into issues of intercultural communication at work through utilising alternative analytical tools and shifting the focus onto the very interpersonal communication processes through which interculturality may be communicated.

As critical investigations (e.g. Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009; Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002; Moon, 1996; Noma, 2009; Piller, 2011) point out, mainstream intercultural communication scholarship continues to be heavily influenced by the work of Edward Hall (e.g. 1990/1959; 1989/1976) and Geert Hofstede (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). These authors have established and consolidated an essentialist idea of culture (Holliday, 2011; Piller, 2011). Within this view, culture is seen as a stable and confined system of communicative traits and underlying cognitive patterns that is territorially bound to a nation-state or an ethnic group, and that is mutually exclusive with other such cultures. Culture is understood as a natural attribute carried by all the group members in mostly unrecognized ways and expressed through a national language. Intercultural communication is thus viewed as an arena where (irreconcilable) cultural differences are manifested, possibly leading to misunderstandings and conflicts.

Inquiries into intercultural workplace communication tend to combine these ontological assumptions about culture with the arguments and goals of the predominant organisational perspectives on cultural diversity - either anti-discrimination or diversity management - that originated in the US American context and that have been making inroads into workplaces around the world (Lahti & Valo, 2015). Anti-discrimination sees difference, with a focus on ethnicity, religion and gender, as a political and group-based issue (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Wrench, 2005). The approach builds on an ethical argument and a principle of sameness, positing that persons with similar abilities should be given similar opportunities in the working life (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Diversity ma-

nagement is a response to anti-discrimination's exclusive preoccupation with the plight of under-represented groups, offering an inclusive focus on the interests of all employees (Wrench, 2005). Diversity management draws on economic argumentation, positing that organisations can benefit from cultural differences possessed by their employees as these contribute to enhanced decision-making and innovation (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Wrench, 2005).

Although anti-discrimination and diversity management espouse radically different social and political ideals, both approaches place a pronounced emphasis on culturally distinctive qualities and experiences. They render themselves quite well to an integration with the predominant intercultural communication theorising as they assume that cultural identities remain the same in different contexts and interactions, consist of a confined set of meanings, practices and experiences, and are similar for all the members of the group. The effects of this integration are reflected in the popular theoretical frameworks in mainstream intercultural workplace communication research: information and decision-making, social identity and categorisation, and modern critical theorising (Lahti & Valo, 2015; see also Lauring, 2009; Mannix & Neale, 2005).

The information and decision-making framework examines how differences in individuals' culturally shaped interpretations, knowledge, and skills hinder or enhance workplace performance in terms of building mutual understanding, problem solving or innovation (see also Mannix & Neale, 2005). The social identity and categorisation framework (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1987) considers different cultural memberships as triggering the formation of subgroups that prevents individuals from developing relationships and sharing information with members of the perceived outgroup. The critical modern framework (Baxter & Asbury, 2015) uncovers the systemic oppression of culturally non-mainstream employees that undermines their wellbeing and efficiency.

When these frameworks are put together, one can see how intercultural workplace communication has been seen as a "double-edged sword" (e.g. Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010). Issues of intercultural communication at work have been approached in quite extreme and polarised ways, as either entailing misunderstandings, intergroup bias and discrimination (e.g. Ferguson & Porter, 2013; Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006; Mak & Chui, 2013), or then leading to enhanced decision-making, learning and synergy (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Méndez García & Pérez Cañado, 2011).

My study deepens our understanding of issues of intercultural communication at work by approaching them as situated, dynamic, subjective and intersubjective processes. I focus on the very interpersonal communication processes through which people's different cultural memberships may surface at work. I work with the concept of *interculturality*, viewing it as a process in which individuals involved in specific communication situations and relationships produce and interpret subjective and intersubjective constructions of cultural identities (e.g. Dervin & Liddicoat, 2013). I enter the field of inquiry through the door of interpersonal communication. *Interpersonal communication* will be understood here as a symbolic process where two or a few persons create and

negotiate meanings (Braithwaite, Schrodt, & Carr, 2015). It is at the level of interpersonal communication that interculturality may emerge as cultural memberships may (or may not) become relevant – be avowed, ascribed, reworked, or resisted. I aim to develop an understanding of how people may perceive interculturality and how they may perform interculturality across a variety of workplace arrangements and situations with their unique constellations of tasks, relationships and contexts – in menial and knowledge-intensive work, in face-to-face and technology-mediated interactions, in relationships with peer colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates, in groups and teams, or interactions with customers and partners.

Theoretical and methodological framework

Within the last two decades, several critical intercultural communication scholars (e.g. Dervin, 2011; Holliday, 2011; 2013; Hunsinger, 2006; Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002; Piller, 2011; 2012), as well as researchers working in the related fields of anthropology (e.g. Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009; Eriksen, 2001), applied linguistics (e.g. Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2014; Sarangi, 1994) or cross-cultural management (e.g. Angouri & Glynos, 2009; Sackmann & Phillips, 2004) have called upon intercultural communication researchers to reconsider the needs and goals for their work. The essentialist approach has been criticised for ignoring the social construction of cultural identities, offering misleading descriptions and predictions of the social world that flatten out human behavior by emphasising only certain differences, neglecting interactants' other individual and group identities, overlooking the social, political and historical context of human interaction, or the pluralisation of life forms enabled by globalisation.

My study comprises four articles that are informed by the anti-essentialist critique. The first article is a critical review of intercultural workplace communication scholarship that aims to determine what research approaches have been employed to deal with culture and cultural memberships in workplace interactions. The data set consists of 110 empirical articles published in English in international peer-reviewed journals between January 1990 and August 2014 that were searched both in EBSCO Host Communication and Mass Media Complete database and manually. Articles included in the analysis were limited to those examining communication in real working life settings (as opposed to research based on student work or laboratory-type experiments), and in the context of face-to-face interactions. The articles were classified with relation to their research themes and assumptions about intercultural communication. The analysis was interpretive and data-driven, and its goal was to build categories representing distinctive research perspectives on intercultural communication at work. These were developed through an iterative process of identifying, coding and organising categories in the data (e.g. Mayan, 2009).

The other three articles are empirical research reports. Their methodological frameworks are in line with some of the solutions to the challenges of essentialism as proposed by critical scholars. More specifically, the frameworks I have set for are critical constructivism and ethnomethodology. Owing to the

two perspectives employed in the empirical articles, my study acknowledges interculturality both as situated in people's interpretations and in people's actions.

Critical constructivism explores the emergent, nuanced, complex and fluid character of interculturality by constructing bracketed thick descriptions of particular social realities as experienced and discussed by social actors (e.g. Holliday, 2011). The viewpoint combines the relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology of constructivism (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Moses & Knutsen, 2012) with the critical postmodern bottom-up approach to examining how ideologies may enter interaction in multiple fragmented ways (Baxter & Asbury, 2015). Within Communication is given a constitutive role as individuals are seen as constructing experience through social interaction. The approach has focused my analysis in the first two empirical articles (Lahti & Valo, 2013; Lahti, 2013) onto the contextualised and emergent meanings and understandings that people may give to their workplace interactions as "intercultural."

Article II (Lahti & Valo, 2013) is based on open-ended interviews with employees of a Finnish recruitment agency and metal workers recruited from Poland (N=9) and it explores the processes of relational development. It is theoretically informed by an understanding of an interpersonal relationship as an ongoing process enacted through communication that entails repeated interaction and is never complete (e.g. Sias, Krone, Jablin, 2002; Sigman, 1995). The article builds insights through a theory-guided qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2006). The theoretical framework of social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) and Kram and Isabella's (1985) typology of workplace relationships were used as sensitising devices in developing interpretations of the interview data.

In Article III (Lahti, 2013) I work with open-ended interviews with female Russian immigrants in Finland performing interaction-intensive knowledge work (N=10) to explore cultural identity processes. I draw on communication theory of identity (CTI; e.g. Hecht, 2015) that acknowledges the complex and fluid nature of identity by articulating it as constituted in communication. I also acknowledge that the negotiation of cultural identities in interaction is suffused with power inequalities, access to sociocultural resources or culturalist ideologies (Collier, 2005; Piller, 2011). I utilise the method of interpretive description that aims to capture people's subjective understandings of the phenomenon to produce a coherent experiential account of that phenomenon applicable to informing practice (Thorne, 2008). As a strategy for organising, grouping and transforming the data, qualitative content analysis was used.

Another solution offered by anti-essentialist critics is to conceptualise culture as a purely discursive notion existing nowhere else but in communication (e.g. Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002; Piller, 2011). Full commitment to this focus calls for employing an interaction-centred approach to studying intercultural communication that is founded in the use of naturally occurring data. The data set used in Article IV (Lahti, 2015) consists of records of Skype™ chat conversations of an internationally dispersed team to analyse the process of cul-

tural knowledge sharing. For a methodological framework, I turn to ethnomethodology. Ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967) is a research approach in sociology that challenges the traditional treatment of social facts as pre-discursive and restricting the actions of individuals by proposing that such social facts are constituted in individuals' practical activities, or "members' methods" (Lynch, 2008; ten Have, 2004). Phenomena under investigation are not treated as analytically or theoretically problematic, and the task of the analyst is not to explain or deconstruct the phenomenon but to demonstrate its relevance in people's lived reality (Hester & Housley, 2002). Ethnomethodology treats communication as a publicly available interactional process unfolding between persons (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). The study specifically employs the ethnomethodological method of membership categorisation analysis (MCA; e.g. Sacks, 1986; see also e.g. Lepper, 2000; Silverman, 1998). MCA gave me the tools to systematically examine how the interactional identities of "cultural knower" and "not-knower" were talked into being by my research participants as they were chatting with one another.

Discussion of main findings

The findings of the three empirical articles can be extrapolated to theoretical propositions that problematise the claims made in mainstream intercultural workplace communication scholarship. These propositions can be applied to understand how interculturality may be communicated in the organisational experiences of immigrant and migrant employees, in workplace encounters, relationships and small groups, or in the processes of knowledge-intensive dispersed teams:

1. *The communication of interculturality as fluid and multivalent.* Cultural meanings are in constant motion; they can be resignified and manipulated, and the "natural" connection between culture and location can be troubled. Since national, ethnic and linguistic identities may emerge as relevant in different ways and may come to connote different things to different people in different situations, pinning their "content" down to a finite description of values and traits seems futile and unhelpful. Interculturality is a social construct that may be used as a powerful resource for self-definition and interpretation of the social world. Some of the constructions of interculturality in my data are imbued with culturalist ideologies (e.g. racist discourse, discourse about national superiority or the ideology of diversity management). National identities may have material extensions, as when citizens of certain nation-states have their mobility constrained through visas or permits (see also Drzewiecka & Steyn, 2012). As a social construct, interculturality is only momentary and not a stable feature of communication. My study indicates that there are many workplace communication situations where interculturality is not perceived as relevant or made salient by the persons interacting. Personal trajectories, interpersonal relationships, professional identities, occupa-

tional roles and organisational memberships provide highly meaningful frameworks for people to orient themselves towards others at work.

2. *The workplace context as consequential for the communication of interculturality.* The demands and constraints of the working life provide important resources that inform ideas about self, roles, relationships, and actions. Interculturality may be communicated differently in knowledge-intensive and manual work, in established relationships with one's colleagues and one-off encounters with strangers, or in temporary and long-term working arrangements. The working life context is imbued with broader structural forces. For instance, people's actions and positioning can be affected by the dynamics of temporary migrant work or visa bureaucracy. While meanings and performances of interculturality are unique to specific workplaces, the underlying process through which workplace members develop shared norms, meanings and practices through joint everyday involvement in activities is universal (e.g. Holliday, 2013). The workplace can thus be approached as a "small culture" (Holliday, 1999) where shared histories, relationships and commitments lead to specific articulations of interculturality. Perceptions of interculturality in communication at work are also enmeshed with popular images and storylines existing in the society, such as the ideologies of anti-discrimination and diversity management.
3. *The role of language in the communication of interculturality.* The role of language in processes of communicating interculturality extends beyond it being a conduit for communicative relativity. Lack of proficiency in the dominant language may limit one's ability to enact professionalism at work and "give away" one's different "cultural background" to others, while proficiency in that language may discount the experience of interculturality as irrelevant. Lack of a shared language may hinder the development of workplace relationships. At the same time, different linguistic competencies may bring people together through jointly developed language learning projects. Bilingual individuals working together may develop own flexible linguistic practices that span the boundaries of speech communities. Issues of language proficiency are not only an interactional matter but they are also intertwined with ideologies about what languages are perceived as expected and valued in the workplace (Hua, 2014). In the new globalised economy that increasingly relies on knowledge-intensive work and meritocratic ideals of diversity management, linguistic competencies have become an important commodity (Heller, 2010). Individuals' "native speaker" status may position them favourably on the job market, and it may be drawn upon to construct one's professional identity and organisational worth.

A major practical implication of my study is that competent communication of interculturality requires contextualised knowledge, ability to examine issues from different vantage points, attention to nuances, and acceptance of human interaction as emergent and dynamic. The intuitively appealing “step lists” offered in popular intercultural communication literature and trainings are, at best, misleading and counterproductive as they offer people an illusion of predictability and reduce the complexity of real-life interactions. At worst, they may serve to maintain and sanction stereotypes that will affect how people perceive, interact with, and justify their actions towards those they frame as “different.”

Drawing on the findings of Article I that is a critical review of intercultural workplace communication literature, I would also make the following suggestions that could inform future research in accommodating the view of culture and cultural memberships as fluid, situated and socially constructed:

1. *Moving beyond the polarised understanding of cultural difference by relinquishing the dominant theoretical frameworks of information and decision making, social identity and categorisation, and modern critical theory.* These frameworks offer only two exaggerated storylines about workplace interculturality as either a liability (a cause of misunderstandings, conflict, and discrimination) or an asset (triggering innovation and synergy). They overemphasise difference at the expense of similarity. Future research should work with alternative communication- or interaction-centred frameworks and acknowledge that the workplace is an important social site that provides people with a range of resources for people (e.g. roles, tasks, objectives) to engage in building shared realities.
2. *Focusing on actual intercultural interaction by working with records of actual workplace interactions.* An oversized proportion of research insights about interculturality at work are developed from indirect self-report data, such as large scale questionnaires and surveys, interviews and focus groups. While these data shed light onto people’s perceptions and interpretations, they cannot be treated as reports of interactions at work. Working with observational data and records of naturally occurring interactions ties in with a social constructionist orientation. It helps problematise the “naturalness” of culture and cultural identities and fully commit the inquiry to treating culture as constructed rather than expressed in communication (e.g. Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002).
3. *Developing thick descriptions of “small cultures” instead of cataloguing national and ethnic cultures.* Denoting a shared set of practices developed by a small group of individuals through involvement in shared activities, “small culture” (Holliday, 1999) enables researchers to study how shared norms and interpretations are established over time in the context of

companies, groups, teams, or workplace relationships. The concept of “small culture” resonates with “shared communication competence,” “shared culture” and “interculture” (Schnurr & Zyats, 2013), or “third space” (Bhabha, 1994). These tools help trace the processes through which interculturality is produced in specific workplaces, with attention to nuances, complexities and ambiguities, and acknowledging the larger context the workplace is embedded in.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

**THE WORKPLACE AS A SITE FOR INTERCULTURAL
COMMUNICATION: A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

by

M. Lahti & M. Valo

Manuscript submitted for publication

II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS AT WORK: POLISH MIGRANT WORKERS IN FINLAND

by

Lahti, M. & Valo, M. 2013

Journal of Intercultural Communication, 31

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The Development of Intercultural Relationships at Work: Polish Migrant Workers in Finland

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Abstract

This article offers an interpersonal communication perspective on relational processes in a workplace affected by the international flow of labor migration. We investigate how temporary migrant workers and their foreign colleagues perceive developing interpersonal relationships with each other through an analysis of in-depth interviews with employees of a Finnish recruitment agency and Polish metal workers it has recruited. The recruitment agents talk about their relationships with the recruited Polish workers; the Polish workers also describe their relationships with their Finnish colleagues at the customer company. The context under investigation emerges as rich in relational processes. The development of intercultural workplace relationships is analyzed in terms of motives for and against engaging in relational growth, as well as behaviors enacted to develop or not develop relationships.

Keywords: *intercultural relational development, intercultural workplace relationships, interpersonal workplace relationships, migrants in Finland, Polish migrant workers, relational development motives, relational behaviors*

Introduction

The contemporary workplace is becoming increasingly characterized by nonstandard forms of employment (Ballard and Gossett 2007), which may affect the ways organizational members initiate and develop interpersonal relationships. One such nontraditional work arrangement is that of a foreign migrant worker, its occurrence fuelled by the growing labor shortage in low-status employment sectors experienced by Western states (Castles 2002). In the European context, work-related migration increased considerably when mobility and employment restrictions were lifted for citizens of several East European states upon the EU expansion in 2004 and 2007 (Demireva 2011).

Although hiring foreign migrants to do the so-called '3D (dirty, dangerous and dull) jobs' (Cook, Dwyer and Waite 2011) in industry, construction, low-skilled services or care-giving has become common practice, surprisingly little is known about these people's interpersonal relationships at work. Research into different forms of employment that overlap with that of foreign temporary labor either questions whether migrants form interpersonal workplace relationships at all or presents these ties as dysfunctional. In his discussion on temporary agency work, Tanskanen (2007) comments that the trend objectifies persons by capitalizing

on their productivity. The temporary character of employment encourages the use of short-term value communicative strategies, such as engaging in conflict and abusing the other (Ballard and Gossett 2007). Migrants may themselves have few interpersonal interests vested in their foreign workplace since they perceive their stay as temporary (Demireva 2011). The image suggests someone who works hard in the host country but pretends to be living their interpersonal life in their home country, maintaining constant contact with family and friends. Indeed, the growing body of literature on communication practices of migrant workers (e.g. Uy-Tioco 2007) is mostly preoccupied with migrants' use of communication technologies to stay in touch with their intimates and stand up against their subjection in the country of employment.

We believe that the theme of relationship building in a workplace with temporary foreign employees warrants a scientific inquiry. In this article, we want to fill the apparent research gap by offering an interpersonal communication perspective on relational processes in a workplace affected by the international flow of labor migration. Our goal is to investigate how temporary migrant workers and the persons they work with in their foreign workplace perceive developing interpersonal relationships with each other.

Theoretical background

Relational development

We adopt Sigman's (1995) definition of an interpersonal relationship as an ongoing behavioral process enacted through communication. Interpersonal relationships involve repeated interaction (Sias et al. 2002) and are always in the state of becoming (Step and Finucane 2002).

Questions of how and why interpersonal relationships change over time have preoccupied researchers since the 1970s (Mongeau and Miller Henningsen 2008). Several scholars have attempted to describe and explain how relationships are formed, developed, maintained and dissolved (e.g. Altman and Taylor 1973; Knapp and Vangelisti 2005). Characteristic of this line of research is the idea that communication is critical for relational development. Not only are relationships constituted in communication but also features and development of relationships are manifested in interpersonal communication between the partners (e.g. Burgoon and Hale 1984).

Insights into the process of relational growth can be found in one of the pioneering relationship development theories, Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration. The major premise of the theory is that changes in interpersonal communication are inherent in relational development. Social penetration denotes an array of interpersonal behaviors (verbal, nonverbal, and environmentally oriented behaviors) that take place in a developing relationship. A behavior pivotal to the process is that of self-disclosure, or revealing of information about oneself. Self-disclosure can be gauged along the dimension of the amount of exchanged information (breadth) and the intimacy level of information exchange (depth). With gradual, systematic and reciprocal self-disclosure between the partners, the relationship progresses towards greater intimacy. Although the theory renders relational development as linear, the authors acknowledge that '[t]he process ebbs and flows, does not follow a linear

course, cycles and recycles through levels of exchange' (Altman and Taylor 1973, pp. 135-136).

Relational growth is influenced by various factors such as personality characteristics, the environmental context or the perceived relational rewards and costs (Taylor and Altman 1975). Borrowing on social exchange theory (Kelley and Thibaut 1978) it is predicted that the calculated ratio between relational rewards and costs points to how successful the interaction has been in fulfilling people's needs, and what course relational maintenance will take in the future.

From colleagues to friends

Workplace relationships are interpersonal relationships that individuals engage in when doing their job, such as peer co-worker, subordinate-supervisor or customer-client relationships (Sias 2009). These relationships are usually imposed; we cannot choose our supervisor, nor can we avoid interactions with a co-worker that we dislike. However, workplace relationships may evolve, as they often do, into forms that go beyond the minimum required to complete organizational tasks.

Kram and Isabella (1985) proposed a typology of peer workplace relationships that includes three primary relationship stages: information, collegial and special. Information relationships entail sharing organization- and work-related information while providing little emotional support, and are characterized by low levels of self-disclosure and trust. Persons in a collegial relationship enjoy moderate levels of trust and self-disclosure. They exchange not only work-related information, but also job-related feedback, and support each other on work and family issues. They are more likely to receive confirmation and validation of self-worth. The special relationship denotes friendship, with profound self-disclosure and self-expression. The partners provide each other with personal feedback, self-affirmation and a sense of an emotional connection. Special and collegial peers are more likely to use affinity-seeking strategies, i.e. the use of communication to bring about liking and the creation of positive feelings (Gordon and Hartman 2009).

The workplace context, rather than being a 'container' for friendships, plays a crucial role in the developmental process (Sias and Cahill 1998). Acquaintances develop into friendships due to the persons working side by side and sharing tasks. Friendships become close usually because of personal or work-related problems, but the development is also supported by extra organizational socializing and perceptions of similarity.

Methodology

Research context

We want to gain insights into the dynamics of relational development in the workplace that has become culturally diverse due to the arrival of foreign migrant workers. The article reports on the findings of interviews with employees of a Finnish recruitment agency and Polish workers recruited by that agency.

One needs social capital to migrate abroad safely and cheaply (Castles 2002). Migrants often rely on connections with their fellow nationals in the target country who have already established how to solve bureaucratic problems, find work and accommodation (Elrick and Lewandowska 2008). The recruitment agency business has tapped into the needs of persons without such networks, becoming a prospering form of the 'migration industry' (Castles 2007).

When the data for this study were gathered in 2007, the Finnish recruitment agency had just begun hiring steel and building industry professionals from new EU-member countries in Eastern Europe, including Poland. Foreign workers were employed by the agency and then 'rented out' to Finnish customer organizations. The responsibilities of the agency staff were not limited to matching the person with the job. Each recruitment agent had a number of his or her 'own' workers that they were regularly in touch with both face-to-face and over the phone and that they would provide assistance to on work-, accommodation-, health-, and travel-related matters. Needless to say, the relationship between the agent and the foreign migrant was a prominent workplace relationship.

The recruits' workplace interactions were not limited to those with the agent. Every day at work in the customer organization they would meet their Finnish peer co-workers and supervisors. While guest workers tend to end up performing jobs alongside other migrants or ethnic minority members (Cook et al. 2011), our respondents entered workplaces that were predominantly Finnish. They were employed in metal companies located in small towns in Northern Ostrobothnia, a region sparsely populated and viewed as a stronghold of mainstream Finnish culture. In many cases, the Polish recruits were the first foreign employees in the given workplace, if not the first foreigners for their Finnish colleagues to meet.

Respondents and data collection

The data were originally gathered by the first author for another research project that focused on informal intercultural learning in the workplace. In that study (2007), it emerged that informal intercultural learning was perceived as learning about one's culturally different colleagues with the goal of developing relationships with them. It was clearly worthwhile to revisit the data from a relational development angle.

The first author interviewed people involved in intercultural encounters in the workplace. 14 potential respondents were contacted, 9 of which agreed to participate. The respondent group included 4 male recruited Polish workers and 5 employees of the recruitment agency (4 females and 1 male; 4 Finns and a Polish immigrant who had been living in Finland for 3 years). The participants were 26 - 47 years old. Their educational backgrounds varied from vocational training to a university degree, and their professions - from managing director and recruitment consultant, through interpreter, to computer numerical control machine programmer and operator, and welder. While the recruitment agents and the younger contracted workers knew English, the older contracted workers did not speak any foreign language. The recruited workers interviewed had been living in Finland for 3 to 6 months. The length of their job contract was not specified. They signed an open contract with the agency that guaranteed them work for as long as there was demand. Job insecurity and prospects of having to move between different Finnish metal companies were an inherent part of their working experience.

The interviews were qualitative and could be described after Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 170) as ‘events in which one person (the interviewer) encourages others to freely articulate their interests and experiences.’ The interviews were based on a set of themes that included: expectations about interactions at work, interpersonal experiences at work and interest in one’s co-workers. The first interview was conducted face-to-face, while the others over the phone or Skype, and they were all recorded. The Finnish respondents were interviewed in Finnish, and the Polish respondents in Polish. The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, with the overall data comprising 11 hours of recording.

Research framework

We approach the phenomenon of relational development through the perceptions of our respondents. People’s understandings of their actions may differ from what they actually do. This issue is reflected in the problematic matter of locating an interpersonal relationship itself. Is the relationship situated between the persons, or is it in their individual perceptions of their relationship? According to Baxter and Bullis (1986), although a relationship is an entity jointly constructed by the partners, each partner perceives the construction process in his or her own unique way. Working within the interpretive paradigm, we believe that studying people’s interpretations of their experiences contributes to building scientific understanding because people’s actions are constituted through the meanings that they give to them (Schwandt 2000).

We aim at developing an interpretation of the participants’ interpretations of intercultural relational dynamics at work. In doing this, we also lean on social constructionism by acknowledging that people’s subjective understandings are shaped in interactions with others, and through historical and cultural norms (Creswell 2009). The research process is constructed in the exchange between the researcher and the participant, and further shaped by the researcher’s own values and dispositions (Constantino 2008).

Data analysis and interpretation

The research method in this study was qualitative content analysis. The interview transcripts were read several times to identify sections where the respondents talk about issues related to intercultural workplace relationships – reasons, explanations, functions, expectations, actions, behaviors, processes, etc. Because workplace relationships in their basic form are imposed on the organizational members, we employed Kram and Isabella’s (1985) typology of workplace relationships and searched for descriptions that pointed to relational development beyond the information level.

The fragments of data were coded to generate lowest level concepts, and then linkages (commonalities, differences, patterns and structures) between the concepts were identified (Seidel and Kelle 1995). The coding process was a mixture of data reduction and complication in that it was employed to break the data up into manageable chunks as well as to interrogate, expand and theorize about the data (Seidel and Kelle 1995).

While our ideas arose from the data, we did not apply a purely grounded theory approach; our theorizing was abductive or theory bound (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2006). We focused on individuals' perceptions of their intercultural relational experiences at work. The respondents talked a lot about different reasons or explanations related to developing or not developing intercultural relationships at work. They also gave numerous examples of their relational activities. We therefore chose to look at the data in terms of motives for and against engaging in relational development, and behaviors enacted to develop or not develop relationships. The different motives and behaviors emerging from the data were then reflected against Kram and Isabella's (1985) typology of workplace relationships and Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory.

Findings

The recruitment agents discuss their relationships with the recruited Polish workers. The Polish workers describe their relationships with the recruitment agents, as well as with their co-workers and supervisors at the customer company.

The motives for and against developing workplace relationships are not experienced in isolation. The respondents manage several, often conflicting motives related to developing intercultural ties. Similarly, individuals enact a range of behaviors that may support but also contradict one another.

The findings are grouped into larger themes that unite, organize and explain them: *managing the lack of a common language, interpersonal network imbalance, expectations of good workplace relationships, and understanding the role of culture in intercultural relational development*. When presenting the findings, we try to show the connections between the different motives and relational behaviors.

English translations of interview excerpts presented in the text were provided by the first author.

Managing the lack of a common language

While the agency provides interpreting services to its foreign employees in administrative matters, the task of managing the language barrier in everyday informal interactions is left up to the workers themselves. Within this theme, the following motives emerged: *avoiding difficult and unnecessary interactions, finding other ways of relating to each other, and learning a foreign language*.

The respondents perceive self-disclosure as pivotal to relational development. Not sharing a common language to exchange personal information in is identified as the greatest obstacle in developing intercultural relationships at work. These contracted Polish workers who do not speak any English report *avoiding difficult and unnecessary interactions* with their Finnish colleagues. Potential interactions are seen as a source of stress and embarrassment. A Polish respondent describes how imitates his Finnish colleagues so as not to be conspicuous and avoid being approached by anyone. The inability to engage in more abstract exchanges is

often met with frustration. This is how another Polish respondent explains why he has not developed a closer relationship with a Finnish colleague working beside him:

Let's say I invited him for coffee, he came over and then what? At work you can... communicate, use sign language to find out about things, but otherwise use sign language to talk?

Those respondents who do speak English say that the range of topics they talk about with their foreign co-workers is still limited. These findings correspond with the communicative practice of *thin communication* identified by Tange and Lauring (2009) in their study of social interaction in a multilingual workplace that had adopted a common corporate language. Faced with the discomfort of having to communicate in a second language, employees limit their interactions to work-related issues and withdraw from informal exchanges.

People are, nevertheless, motivated to *find other ways of relating to each other*. Symbolic displays of liking and nonverbal communication are employed to convey affection, respect and emotional support. A Polish participant recounts how touched he felt when on the last day at work before Christmas holiday, the Finnish supervisor came to give the Polish employees Christmas greetings in broken Polish that he must have put a lot of effort into practicing. A Finnish recruitment agent marvels at how polite some Polish contracted workers are as 'they shake hands with their supervisor every day when they come to work and when they're leaving.' Such generous use of handshakes is hardly a Polish workplace custom; a more accurate interpretation would be that the men lack the words to communicate liking and respect to their supervisor, so they do it with nonverbal communication. Facial expressions and gestures are also employed to give emotional support, as in this quote where a Polish man describes the stressful situation of having a difficult welding job examined by a controller:

As soon as we'd passed the test, the Finnish colleague I had done the job with came over with a huge grin on his face showing me that everything was okay. [...] It made me feel appreciated and uplifted.

This example also supports the notion that bonding between colleagues can be accelerated by experiencing organizational problems or going through difficult situations together (Sias and Cahill 1998).

Not being able to obtain information from their foreign co-workers themselves due to limited linguistic skills, the participants turn to their fellow nationals for help. Both the employees of the Finnish agency and the Polish guest workers report engaging in group reflection where they retell their intercultural experiences and together produce explanations for the others' behavior.

The Polish contracted workers have amassed quite a body of information about their Finnish colleagues through observation. The following excerpt is an account of one such 'ethnographic' project:

We ventured out to see where they go [in their free time] – we're not able to ask them. We saw a line of people walking [cross-country skiing] on the frozen sea, on their way to Sweden? [laughs]. We followed them for a while, saw how they disappeared into the distance, and then we turned back.

The respondents also become involved in joint language learning projects. *Learning a foreign language* supports relational growth as it is an extra-organizational activity that the partners engage in together. Moreover, learning a shared language gradually enables the partners to

self-disclose. The recruitment agents and migrant workers exchange Polish and Finnish language learning materials. A Polish respondent says that he and his Finnish colleague have established a fixed time during the workday when they learn some of each other's language. Some interviewees perceive being in an intercultural relationship as a means of improving their linguistic skills, which confirms the findings of intercultural friendship research (e.g. Lee 2006; Sias et al. 2008).

Interpersonal network imbalance

The employees of the recruitment agency and the Finnish metal workers are at home in Finland, embedded in their interpersonal support systems. The Polish recruits left all their relationships behind when they came to Finland. Most of their interpersonal interactions take place in the workplace as they work long hours, often six days a week. Within this theme, the following motives were found: *discounting the others' relational interest, structural obstacles, cultural cliques, living one's interpersonal life in the home country, keeping the other satisfied, earning the other's respect, validating the other and supporting one's adaptation to the new environment.*

Some recruitment agents say that they have been developing closer relationships with Polish migrants while others say they have not. Those who limit their contacts with the guest workers to taking care of organizational matters *discount the others' relational interest.* They point out that the recruits are in Finland for economic opportunistic reasons, and not to socialize.

Another reason given for not getting involved with the recruited foreign workers is *structural obstacles* - the character of one's job as an intermediary with no leadership responsibility, lack of time and incompatible timetables when '[f]inding time to meet just to take care of their things can be demanding.'

Migrant workers may not feel inclined to develop closer ties with host culture members either, one reason for that being the formation of *cultural cliques*. There usually are a few Poles working at the same Finnish metal company; these people often share accommodation. They spend their free time together recreating the illusion of the home country and providing one another with all the comfort, assistance and self-validation that they need.

Another motive that holds some Polish respondents from developing interpersonal relationships in their Finnish workplace is that they *live their interpersonal life in the home country*. These people maintain frequent contact with their family and friends to ease the pain of separation, and limit their interactions in the new environment to the minimum, be that with their fellow nationals or Finnish co-workers. When asked for advice on how to adapt to life in Finland, a Polish respondent says: 'Be active or else homesickness will hit you even harder. Go out for a walk or a swim, go to sauna, then time will run faster.' All the activities mentioned are done alone, and their purpose is to help pass the time till the next trip home.

When we, however, consider the ties with host culture members that guest workers may have, the relationship with the Finnish recruitment agent is likely to be a prominent one. The agency staff have, in fact, recognized that many foreign recruits rely on them interpersonally and feel abandoned if the relationship remains on the information level. *Keeping the other*

satisfied emerges as a motive that prompts recruitment agents to engage in more frequent and informal interactions with foreign workers:

When a foreign worker comes to Finland, we take care of his things here, and through this we develop a closer relationship with him. Of course, you need to ask Finnish recruits, too, about how they're doing and such, but with foreign workers you have to be in touch more just to keep them satisfied.

This motive is linked to yet another reason for developing closer relationships with migrant workers – *earning the other's respect*. The respect of contracted workers is gained by acknowledging their loneliness and demonstrating more personal interest in them: engaging in informal conversations where topics other than work are discussed, exhibiting increased concern for their psychological and physical wellbeing, giving them favors such as lifts or help in everyday matters. 'If you simply bring them to work in Finland and leave them on their own, they probably won't respect you either,' sums up a Finnish respondent.

Some recruitment agents feel a moral responsibility for upholding the self-esteem of the foreign workers, and it is the need to *validate the other* that encourages relational growth. A Finnish participant describes how through informal interactions with the Polish workers she helps them feel human: 'I find it important to ask about their families and whether they've worked abroad before. I think they appreciate being treated like human beings and not like machines.'

The Polish recruits believe that developing closer ties with their Finnish co-workers could *support their adaptation to the new environment*. They see the open communication, trust, intimacy, and a sense of inclusion associated with friendship as contributing to psychological comfort. 'If I knew the language, I would soon find a friendly soul, someone easy to talk to, someone who would want to talk to me. And then I'd be fine,' says an interviewed Pole. Potential friends are searched among the persons met at work, usually colleagues occupying neighboring workstations or the contracted worker's 'own' recruitment agent. Such ways of initiating and developing ties have been reported as asking for and offering help with work-related tasks, employing nonverbal communication to communicate liking, using affinity seeking strategies, engaging in small talk and joking.

Expectations of good workplace relationships

Perceptions of relational development are also related to the need to have good workplace relationships. According to our respondents, however, a good workplace relationship denotes different levels of collegiality to Poles and Finns. Within this theme, the following motives were found: *expecting to socialize at work, expecting workplace relationships to extend outside work, not expecting to socialize at work, separating one's working and private lives, seeing trust as located in an interpersonal relationship, and seeing trust as inherent in a workplace relationship*.

The contracted workers describe the interpersonal climate at their Finnish workplace as good. It appears, however, that they have developed collegial ties with only a few members of the Finnish staff and that they would *expect to socialize at work* more. The Poles talk about initiating interactions with the Finns working beside them. They use work-related issues as a

pretext, and try to be around others, for example by following their Finnish colleagues for coffee breaks.

The Poles express surprise at the apparent lack of social interaction among the Finnish employees: 'They don't even chat with one another, you don't see them sitting around together talking.' It is concluded that the Finns do *not expect to socialize at work*. This observation is supported by a Finnish respondent reflecting on what he thinks characterizes Finnish working style: 'We don't talk much but do the job. [...] And when a livelier more talkative person [...] joins in, Finns are perplexed.'

Relationships initiated at work remain bound to the workplace. Participating in extra organizational activities with one's foreign colleagues is unusual. The Finns are perceived as quiet and private persons who *separate their working and private lives*. 'Our contacts are limited to the workplace, we don't meet after work. Every now and then you bump into someone downtown, he'll greet you and walk his way,' describes a Polish respondent disappointedly.

The Finnish respondents have noticed that the Poles put more effort into maintaining their ties with their co-workers, and that they *expect workplace relationships to extend outside work*. The recruitment agents have been subjected to various affinity seeking strategies themselves. The Poles invite the agents to their place and even prepare traditional national dishes for them. A Finnish interviewee talks with appreciation about Valentine's Day greetings and holiday postcards that Polish workers send her. Another Finnish respondent describes how, following her traffic accident, the Poles flooded her with cards and text messages:

They see these relationships as more personal. If you're on sick leave, they don't just look for another person who is filling in, but they're in touch with you all the time. I got lots of messages asking how I was doing and wishing me to get well. [...] It brought us closer together.

The respondents agree that trust is the cornerstone of a good workplace relationship. However, understandings of where trust is located differ. The Polish interviewees *see trust as located in an interpersonal relationship*, and therefore earned through developing interpersonal closeness: 'To trust someone means to know someone well, and here at work we don't even know one another's names.' Due to a relative lack of relational closeness, the Polish respondents perceive the situation at work as lacking in mutual trust, which in turn creates anxiety.

The Finnish respondents *see trust as inherent in the workplace relationship*. The very fact that two persons are bound by a common organizational membership or a business relationship is enough for them to trust each other. From the point of view of building trust, developing interpersonal relationships is perceived as not necessary. The Finnish respondents complain that the recruited workers unfairly challenge their trustworthiness: 'They're suspicious of absolutely everything. You need to repeat things many times and support your words with documents, preferably adorned with official stamps.' Some of the Finnish respondents have realized that they can only earn the Poles' trust, and therefore make their work easier, by developing relational closeness, and, willy-nilly, they meet them more often. 'It's so much easier to co-operate with the contracted workers I meet frequently,' one of the agents admits.

Understanding the role of culture in intercultural relationship development

The role of culture emerges as another theme in people's perceptions of their intercultural relationships at work. The motives identified within this theme are: *fear of cultural differences, dislike of the others, learning about the other's culture and personal growth.*

Relational development is hindered by *fear of cultural differences*. Interaction is often seen in terms of intergroup rather than interpersonal, and the concept of nation is invoked. When faced with the other's ambiguous behavior, individuals make negative interpretations and conclude that the other is intentionally unfriendly due to their different nationality. The Polish respondents perceive that most of their Finnish colleagues are distant or even hostile towards them, and this is attributed to ignorance and negative stereotypes about Poland. The following incident recounted by a Polish respondent is an example of how an environmentally oriented behavior of refusing to share an object (Altman and Taylor 1973) serves to demarcate the borderline between 'us' and 'them' that is not to be crossed:

During a break, our Polish friends used a coffee maker that belonged to their Finnish colleagues. They'd brought their own coffee powder, filters, and sugar; they only borrowed the appliance. Their Finnish colleagues didn't like that because they went to the shift supervisor to complain. The man very politely explained it to the guys that they weren't allowed to use the coffee maker. No harm done, but you can tell that they don't like us.

The ability to make more accurate interpretations of the other's behavior and, therefore, the acceptance of the equal sophistication of his or her cultural reality, does not equate with having the motivation to interact with that person (see also Bennett 1993). *Dislike of the others* emerges as a motive that is holding some recruitment agents from developing closer ties with the Polish metal workers. They list behaviors that they dislike about the Poles: they communicate aggressively, insist on contacting the agency in the most trivial matters, always come to complain in large groups, and challenge the trustworthiness of the agency staff. The same respondents provide fairly sophisticated explanations for the Poles' behavior, but they still perceive the guest workers as irritating, and relationships with them - as a cumbersome necessity.

Cultural differences may also encourage interaction. The motive of *learning about the other's culture* emerges from the interviews with the Polish contracted workers and the employees of the Finnish agency alike. Being able to learn about different beliefs and behaviors is constructed as enriching one's working life. One of the interviewees says: 'I've always enjoyed being around people from different cultures [...]. It's much more rewarding than working with Finns only.' A Polish respondent states that despite the anguish of being separated from his family, he feels so excited about working with Finns that he would not be ready to leave home just yet. The participants talk about engaging in friendly exchanges at work where each other's national cultures are on the agenda. The recruitment agents and the recruited workers meet informally after work and discuss issues such as Polish and Finnish culture or adaptation to life in Finland.

Intercultural relationship development gives rise to, and is supported by, individual intercultural learning activities, such as learning the other's language or following the media for information related to the other's country. A Finnish respondent describes her learning projects: 'I study Polish whenever I have the time, and then anything on TV, documentaries

and such, or if there's an article in a newspaper, I'll read it. I didn't use to pay attention to those Polish things, but these days I do.'

The respondents also use the assistance of persons that they regard as cultural experts, such as immigrants or the agency interpreters, in processing cultural information about the others. The Polish interpreter working at the agency reports being frequently approached by both her Finnish colleagues and the recruited Poles for cultural etiquette advice.

What is problematic about the motive of *learning about the other's culture* is that new cultural information is processed from the individuals' own cultural perspective. Some testimonials, however, reveal that intercultural relationship development promotes *personal growth*. Individuals who embrace the motive acknowledge the equal sophistication of different cultural realities, are highly motivated to interact with culturally different others and see these interactions as an opportunity to challenge and reconfigure one's own worldview. As a Finnish respondent states: 'You always get influences from the new people you meet, and in the long run you change yourself; this is something fruitful.'

Discussion

Although our respondents work in the recruitment industry where persons are seen as 'labor,' or are employed on the shop floor of a metal plant where work is mostly individual and manual, and although they know that their intercultural interactions are only temporary, intercultural relationships still emerge as a prominent aspect of their working lives.

The intercultural workplace relationships that our respondents have developed are mostly collegial and located within small groups formed by a Finnish agent and a few Polish workers, or a few Polish and Finnish workers. Relational processes involve even more persons as the help of fellow nationals and cultural experts is enlisted. The importance of social support in the development of intercultural relationships has also been confirmed by intercultural marriage and friendship research (Chen 2002).

As predicted by social exchange theory (Altman and Taylor 1973), self-disclosure emerges as pivotal to relational growth. The lack of a common language hinders the development of closer ties as it severely limits the breadth and depth of exchanges. Intercultural workplace relationships demand more effort to develop because they imply the need for a variety of other relational behaviors that are not as efficient in exchanging personal information.

Our study demonstrates that the workplace context plays a crucial role in relational development, thus confirming earlier research (Sias and Cahill 1998). Closer ties develop between persons working on neighboring machines or sharing tasks. The character of the relationship between the recruitment agent and his or her recruited workers also encourages informal interaction. Work-related matters often serve as a pretext for initiating interaction. These findings carry practical implications for companies hiring foreign temporary workers. Providing culturally dissimilar employees with opportunities to work on joint projects, interact informally and learn each other's language would be rewarding for everyone involved.

The fact that individuals perceive their relational experiences in terms of motives supports social exchange theory (Kelley and Thibaut 1978). Having motives implies experiencing needs; whether these are fulfilled or not may decide about the future course of relational maintenance. Different motives are experienced simultaneously; some respondents may lack the language to communicate and yet have a strong need to socialize in the workplace, some may dislike the culturally different others and yet feel the need to earn their respect. The evaluation of the different motives is not a straightforward process, which accounts for the process ‘ebbing and flowing’ as Altman and Taylor (1973) described. These contradictions could be examined further within the framework of relational dialectics (e.g. Baxter and Montgomery 1996).

The development of interpersonal workplace relationships is not driven by purely interpersonal reasons. A number of motives are instrumental, such as learning a foreign language or gaining the other’s trust to improve co-operation. There may be other instrumental incentives that the respondents did not disclose. The agents may want to be on good terms with the migrants because their salary is affected by the number of workers they have been able to recruit and retain in employment. The Poles may want to use their connections with the agents to increase their negotiating power and secure good job contracts.

Experiences of intercultural relationship dynamics at work are affected by perceptions of the role of culture. Our findings are consistent with social identity and categorization theories (e.g. Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1991), according to which individuals classify themselves and others into groups basing on readily available features. Nationality and language are the key dimensions through which our respondents reify difference and commonality. This further ties in with the principle of homophily, or the idea that we tend to be attracted to and develop relationships with persons that we perceive to be similar to us (e.g. Duck 1994).

Perception of difference may lead to hostility. The Polish respondents complain that many of their Finnish colleagues are prejudiced against them. This is corroborated by a Finnish recruitment agent who describes how many Finnish companies refuse to hire Eastern European workers. Indeed, studies of Finns’ attitudes to immigrants (e.g. Jaakkola 2005) indicate that Finns tend to have more negative opinions about newcomers from poorer post-communist economies.

Interpretations of the others’ relational behaviors are also affected by cultural misunderstanding. The Polish respondents remark, for example, that their Finnish colleagues pretend not to notice them. The practice of ‘not noticing the other’ could be a feature of the traditional Finnish speech culture that values social tact and discretion (e.g. Carbaugh 2009). The Poles consider it rude not to acknowledge the other’s presence and read this behavior as an act of snubbing. These observations could be reflected against Hall’s (1976) concepts of *high-context communication* that relies on information in the physical context and *low-context communication* where most of the information is in explicit messages. The communication behavior of our Polish respondents appears to be more low-context, with a preference for openly showing one’s reactions and verbally clearing out misunderstandings.

Cultural ideas about what constitutes appropriate and effective communication do evolve. Finnish speech culture has been, for example, changing quite rapidly due to the processes of modernization and urbanization (Wilkins and Isotalus 2009). This could explain the Poles’ observation that their younger Finnish colleagues are much more open and sociable.

While cultural tendencies exist, individual and contextual factors of the interaction should not be neglected. Interestingly enough, our respondents exhibit a tendency to rely on national stereotypes to describe and explain their own communication behavior, disregarding other contextual factors or personal preferences. The Polish respondents want to present themselves as more sociable than Finns, not acknowledging that their preoccupation with developing ties is also related to them being lonely guests in a host environment. The Finnish respondents emphasize that they are a ‘silent nation,’ although many of them appear to be quite extroverted.

Even when attraction to cultural differences is professed, new cultural information may still be processed superficially, with ethnocentric judgments made and national stereotypes amassed. This is exacerbated by the fact that many persons rely on limited interactions with members of the other culture, and gather information about them through observation, discussions with fellow nationals, and advice received from not always competent informants. Such strategies may produce incomplete or distorted knowledge about the other (Knobloch 2008).

These findings could be reflected against Bennett’s (1986, 1993, 2004) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity that organizes individuals’ increasingly complex experience of cultural difference into six stages (*denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration*). The first three stages are ethnocentric as one examines the social world through the lens of his or her own culture. Underlying the move from *minimization* to *acceptance* is a shift to an ethnorelativist point of view in that one comes to experience their own culture in the context of other cultures. Our findings point to *defense* as the predominant orientation, marked by the tendency to polarize into ‘us and them’ and glorify one’s culture while belittling others. Some respondents are at the next stage of *minimization* that entails de-emphasizing the differences by highlighting the universal character of all human behavior. We can also find examples of *acceptance*, whereby other cultures are experienced as equally sophisticated as one’s own. As the motive of *dislike of the others* shows, accepting the fact that there are culturally different ways of organizing human experience does not imply agreement or liking. The motive of *personal growth* with the ability to shift frames of reference indicates a further development towards the stage of *adaptation*.

Since most of our respondents appear to embrace an ethnocentric worldview, one could ask whether intercultural relationship development will ever proceed for them. Or is it through developing closeness that negative and simplified perceptions of the other’s culture can be elaborated? This is an issue that calls for further investigation, preferably with a longitudinal study design. Our findings yield only limited insights into the matter. One of our Polish respondents describes how he has developed a friendship with his Finnish colleague that pivots on their shared experience of being parents. Research on intercultural friendship (e.g. Gudykunst 1985) indicates that friends see each other as individuals rather than cultural beings, basing their union on deep commonality rather than superficial demographic features. However, the above mentioned respondent does not show any evidence of having generalized the effects of his intercultural friendship onto his whole worldview. Those interviewees who do experience culture from an ethnorelativist stance seem to have brought this worldview into the workplace rather than have developed it through their intercultural workplace interactions.

It would be naïve to divorce our findings from their social and political context. In her pamphlet ‘Näkymätön Kylä’ [‘Invisible Village,’ own translation], Anna Kontula (2010)

reports on the field study that she conducted in a settlement established for foreign migrants employed in the construction of the nuclear plant in Olkiluoto in Finland. Kontula spent a month in the improvised village hidden into the forest, sharing metal barrack accommodation with Polish builders. According to Kontula, the negative attitudes of Finns towards foreign migrants should be examined as an outcome of institutional racism in Finland that sanctions and perpetuates a physical, linguistic, legal and economic divide between guest workers and the mainstream society.

The relational activities that our respondents told us about do not happen on a level playing field; they are characterized by a sense of social and economic injustice, attempts at agency and maintaining humanity in a situation that objectifies people. Within this light, some of the findings require a new reading. The migrant workers' reliance on the concept of national culture could be a strategy to build a positive group identity, to regain continuity and a sense of self-worth (see also Mendoza 2005). The Finnish metal workers may show reservation towards migrants because they feel threatened in a situation where foreign professionals are brought in to do the same work for a smaller pay.

It is notable, however, that people in our study have been developing interpersonal relationships. The Finnish recruitment agents who embrace the motives of *earning the other's respect* and *validating the other* may even be taking a stand against the predominant discourse where migrants are rendered as any raw material needed in production (e.g. Viitala and Mäkipelkola 2005). Kontula's (2010) representation of the relations between migrant workers, their employers and members of the mainstream society is a radical one. Our study conducted from an interpersonal communication perspective reveals that these relationships are more complex and nuanced.

A year after the data for the project were gathered, the world plunged into an economic downturn and the demand for foreign workers in the construction and industry sectors in Finland decreased. Many of our Polish respondents returned home. Since 2010, foreign labor migration has been recovering in Europe, and is expected to continue to grow in the coming decades (Appave and Laczko 2011).

Research Evaluation

According to Guba and Lincoln (1989) the relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology of qualitative research renders the positivist/postpositivist concepts of validity and reliability incongruent. Instead, they propose that the inquiry should be judged as successful if it fulfills the standards of credibility, transferability, transparency, and authenticity. A major limitation of our study is that the Finnish metal workers interacting with the Poles were not interviewed. However, the abductive method of inquiry, with its preoccupation with apparently anomalous phenomena and repeatedly inspected interpretations, was helpful in constructing a balanced presentation and avoiding anecdotalism. We strived at providing a thick description of the social phenomenon (Geertz 1973) that passes the criterion of credibility. The readers can transfer this interpretation to other settings and assess its usefulness.

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III

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS AT WORK: HIGHLY- SKILLED FEMALE RUSSIAN PROFESSIONALS IN FINLAND

by

Lahti, M. 2013

Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies, 3(4), 21-43

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Cultural Identity in Everyday Interactions at Work: Highly Skilled Female Russian Professionals in Finland

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ABSTRACT

The dominant research strands into social interaction in culturally diverse workplaces have focused on issues of organizational efficiency and discrimination, and they have treated cultural identity as static, monolithic, and universally shared. This study aims to problematize this view. It is argued that our understanding of cultural workplace diversity could be extended through the integration of interpretive and critical interpersonal communication theorizing on cultural identity as dynamic and processual, constructed between and among people in everyday workplace interactions and in relation to larger social, political, and historical forces. This argument is illustrated by an analysis of in-depth interviews with 10 female Russian immigrants in Finland who performed interaction-intensive knowledge work. The women talked about their everyday workplace interactions and how they thought Russian identity mattered in them. These data were analyzed with the inductive method of interpretive description designed to provide a systematic description of the phenomenon delineating its characteristic themes and accounting for individual variations within it. The analysis led to the identification of four communication sites for distinct formations of Russian identity: expressing professionalism, managing initial encounters, facing stigma, and facilitating intercultural learning. The findings offer novel insights into social interaction in culturally diverse workplaces with implications for both employee well-being and organizational processes.

KEY WORDS

Cultural identity / cultural workplace diversity / highly skilled immigrants / interpersonal communication / workplace interactions

Introduction

Most examinations of social interaction in culturally diverse workplaces have been conducted from mainstream and critical management/organizational perspectives, and they have examined phenomena related to either organizational efficiency or discrimination (e.g., Richardson and Taylor 2009, van der Zee et al. 2009). To that purpose, both strands have employed conceptualizations of cultural identity as static, monolithic, and universally shared. The aim of this article is to problematize this view and argue that our understanding of cultural workplace diversity could be extended through the integration of interpretive and critical interpersonal communication theorizing on cultural identity. More specifically, this study looks into how culturally nonmainstream employees experience the formation of their cultural identities in their everyday workplace interactions.

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Workplace diversity scholarship has been strongly influenced by the polemics surrounding the neoliberal diversity management ideology and the antidiscrimination movement in the United States (e.g., Holvino and Kamp 2009, Mannix and Neale 2005). Owing to their distinctive philosophical and political origins, studies of social interaction in culturally diverse workplaces can be broadly divided into those that relate the effective management of staff in culturally diverse teams and corporations to organizational efficiency, and those that investigate discrimination experienced by ethnic minority employees in mainstream culture organizations (Lahti and Valo 2012).

These examinations have taken discrete approaches to treating cultural identities (see also Luring 2009). The organizational efficiency perspective sees cultural identities as sets of values, schemes for perception and conduct, and the accompanying psychological states that are situated inside individuals and revealed in interaction. Issues of organizational efficiency have been investigated from the theoretical perspectives of information and decision making, and social identity and categorization (e.g., van Knippenberg et al. 2013). The information and decision making approach examines how cultural differences associated with employees' culturally shaped values, knowledge, skills and perspectives hinder or enhance organizational performance in terms of, for example, information processing, problem solving, or innovation (e.g., Peltokorpi 2007, Stevens et al. 2008). The social identity and categorization perspective considers diversity of cultural memberships as triggering the formation of cultural subgroupings that interferes with organizational functioning as it encourages out-group bias and tensions, weakened team and organizational identification, or impeded information sharing (e.g., Ferguson and Porter 2013, van der Zee et al. 2009).

The discrimination tradition, in turn, approaches cultural identity as a subjugating categorization imposed onto individuals by outside macro-level structures or ideologies. The framework has relied on critical theories of power and intergroup relations to uncover how organizational power inequalities subject representatives of minority identity groups through sanctioning mistreatment and exerting pressures to conform to the mainstream organizational culture (e.g., Hopson and Orbe 2007, Richardson and Taylor 2009).

In both research strands, cultural identities are assumed to remain the same throughout different contexts and interactions (as static), comprise a finite set of meanings and experiences (as monolithic), and be the same for all the members of the group (as universally shared). Recently criticism has been voiced as to the need for approaches that would acknowledge the nuanced, dynamic, processual, and emergent character of cultural workplace diversity (e.g., Luring 2009, Piller 2011). As a few researchers have now demonstrated (e.g., Luring 2011, Ryoo 2005, Tanaka 2006), organizational experiences of ethnic minority employees extend beyond oppression; similarly, intercultural interactions in international corporate contexts do not occur in a social, political, and historical void. In addition, the few existing studies exploring cultural diversity as a subjective and intersubjective construct cocreated and negotiated in organizational members' interactions with one another (e.g., Barinaga 2007, Ely and Thomas 2001) have demonstrated that cultural diversity may be given multiple, creative, and even contradictory interpretations that inform organizational members' practices in significant ways.

In this article, it is argued that examining identity processes as a means in itself could offer valuable knowledge about cultural workplace diversity. An interpretive interpersonal communication perspective could yield insights into how individuals come

to understand their cultural identities in their everyday interpersonal interactions at work. To strengthen the validity of knowledge claims, such an investigation should further be informed by a critical perspective sensitive to the role of power and privilege in the construction of cultural identities in interaction (Collier 1998). The present study applies integrated interpretive and critical interpersonal communication theorizing to examine how highly skilled female Russian professionals in Finland experience their cultural identities as they are formed across workplace conversations and relationships.

Cultural identity processes in everyday interactions at work

Cultural identity is defined here as a contextually situated unfolding process of coming to know who one is in terms of group-based histories, symbols, meanings, and practices in relation to one's peer coworkers, subordinates, supervisors, customers, and business partners. Cultural identities are historical, relational, and contextual constructs that have both permanent and fluid components (Collier and Thomas 1988). Their enduring characteristics entail shared symbols, names, labels, and norms that are passed on to new group members and drawn upon to distinguish between insiders and outsiders (Collier 1998). Identities also have dynamic aspects. Rather than situated inside individuals and revealed in interaction, cultural identities are formed (experienced, enacted, and negotiated) between and among persons in specific interpersonal communication situations: in conversations, relationships, and interactions with members of other groups, and in the context of social and historical developments (Collier 1998). Moreover, cultural identities are multifaceted and heterogeneous as individuals are members in a variety of cultural groups such as ethnic, linguistic, religious, national, or political (Collier 1998).

Vital aspects of the process of identity formation include avowal and ascription that refer to, respectively, enacted presentation of self and identities one is attributed by others (Collier and Thomas 1988). Hecht et al. (1993) further elaborated on cultural identity processes in communication theory of identity that conceptualizes identity as consisting of four layers or frames: the personal, enacted, relational, and communal frames. The personal frame refers to one's self-concept and sense of well-being; the enacted frame examines how identities are expressed in conversations; the relational frame pertains to how one's identities are formed in one's relationships with others; the communal frame focuses on the identity shared by a group of people (Hecht et al. 1993). To illustrate how these frames operate, an individual could consider her specific membership in a cultural group as an important source of meanings, perceptions, and motivations in her daily working life (personal frame); she could express her cultural identity by enacting specific cultural practices or through talk about her background in everyday conversations with her colleagues (enacted frame); she could be perceived as culturally different by her coworkers who would have specific expectations of her related to her cultural background (relational frame); and she could be affected by the images of her cultural group circulating in the mainstream society, for example, in the media (communal frame).

Identity formation is a communicative process that involves negotiations between and among the individual, the enactment, the relationship, and the community (Hecht and Faulkner 2000, Golden et al. 2002). The negotiations are geared toward achieving a match between identity frames; however, the frames are not always reconcilable and there may be discrepancies or identity gaps between them (Jung and Hecht 2004).



For instance, persons may experience, and therefore need to manage, tensions between their self-concept and the identity ascribed to them by others. An individual may not experience herself as culturally different at work, yet be perceived as “other” by her colleagues. There may also be an identity gap between an individual’s self-view and what she expresses in interactions. A person who is a member of a group stigmatized in the given society may value her background and experience it as central to her sense of self, yet choose to closet it when meeting new business partners for fear of facing hurtful or threatening reactions and ascriptions. Despite such inconsistencies and tensions, the frames nevertheless coexist shaping an individual’s identity (Jung and Hecht 2004).

It is important to emphasize that our sense of self comprises multiple personal and group-based identities stemming from our unique qualities and experiences, as well as our numerous group memberships and roles (Collier and Thomas 1988, Spreckles and Kotthoff 2009). Cultural identity is therefore not only multifaceted and multilayered, but also only one among many other identities through which persons may define and orient themselves toward others in different communication situations. Hence, identities are best described as emergent and potential. Among the properties of cultural identities, Collier and Thomas (1988) list salience (how visible they are in a specific situational context), scope (how widely held and generalizable they are in that context), and intensity (how strongly the participants in interaction feel about them). The salience, scope, and intensity of particular cultural identities will vary depending on the situation, context, topic, and relationship. In any communication situation, the participants will draw on aspects of their identities that they perceive to be of relevance for the given encounter, and they will further negotiate their salience, scope, and intensity with the other interactants. Not only will some identities emerge as more prominent than others, but the degree to which the interactants perceive them as important or generalizable may change throughout the conversation. Cultural identity may not always be a relevant frame for individuals to make sense of who they are in social interaction, the workplace context included. In fact, the workplace context should be considered as potentially highly consequential for people’s cultural identity processes as it limits and enables specific experiences of self, roles, relationships, exchanges, activities, shared symbols, values, and goals. Spreckles and Kotthoff (2009, p. 415) illustrate this point with the example of an Italian and Swedish surgeon performing an operation together at a Zurich hospital. In this particular situation, their professional identities, including expertise in particular surgical procedures, as well as their communication competence in the professional jargon of the shared language will most likely emerge as relevant. Their ethnic, national, or even linguistic identities will not necessarily be of importance.

At the same time, it would be naïve to consider persons in interaction as equal agents who unproblematically express and get others to agree upon their desired identities as perceived appropriate for the given context; the negotiation of cultural identities is inherently infused with hierarchy and power inequalities (Collier 2005, Piller 2011). The concept of agency is useful here to describe the individual’s “ability to choose and enact a range of actions” (Collier 2005, p. 244). One’s agency in identity negotiations in interactions with others at work may be enabled and constrained by factors such as access to cultural and linguistic resources, roles and positions in the organization, or sociostructural factors (see also Piller 2011). In other words, a person’s ability to claim her desired identities will be affected by issues such as her proficiency in the organizational language, her position in the interaction as a subordinate or supervisor, or the prestige of

her cultural group. Collier (1998, 2005) reminds us that the process of forming cultural identities in interaction may be infused with power, privilege, history, and ideology, an issue that ties in with the concept of communal identity frame discussed earlier. Employees from marginalized or stigmatized groups may, in some situations, have little agency in negotiating subjugating cultural categorizations ascribed to them by others in interactions as they face prejudice or discrimination. By the same token, an avowal of a specific cultural identity may be a risky and politically signified act.

This study focuses on the experiences of highly skilled female Russian professionals in Finland. Underlying this choice of participants is a conjecture that their experiences of cultural identity formation processes in workplace interactions may be particularly rich and nuanced as they are knowledge workers who simultaneously hold possibly problematic cultural group memberships.

Highly skilled female Russian professionals in Finland

Russians are the second largest immigrant group in Finland after Estonians. In 2012, there were 30,183 Russian citizens living in Finland, and slightly over 57% of them were women (Official Statistics of Finland 2013). This number does not represent all the persons with a Russian background as some of them are Finnish citizens.

Studies of Finns' attitudes toward immigrants indicate that, despite their ethnic proximity to Finns, Russians continue to be one of the least liked immigrant groups alongside the visibly different immigrants from Somalia and Arab countries (Jaakkola 2005, 2009). These negative attitudes have been attributed to the history of difficult political and social relations between Finland and Russia, as well as Russia's lower status as a poor postcommunist economy (e.g., Forsander 2001, Jaakkola 2005).

Researchers have further suggested that being a Russian woman in Finland may entail a unique set of experiences. Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2002), for instance, found that while male immigrants across different ethnic groups in Finland generally seemed to be more likely victims of prejudice and discrimination, Russian women reported facing discriminatory acts more than any other group. This may seem surprising since female Russian immigrants bear a significant resemblance to women in the Nordic states: they also are "white," well educated, and used to combining work with family life (Saarinen 2007). However, Russian women in the "female-friendly" Nordic states may face degrading social categorizing brought on by the deterioration of women's social and economic position following the collapse of the socialist rule (Saarinen 2007). In the Finnish social reality, the implication of this has been that female Russian immigrants may be confronted with prostitution-related ascriptions and harassment, and having to develop coping strategies such as closeting one's background (Kyntäjä 2005, Saarinen 2007, Säävälä 2010).

At the same time, the Finnish working life has been undergoing deep transformations. The trend toward knowledge work has been increasingly pronounced, adding an extra emphasis on educational background, professional expertise, and skills (e.g., Kasvio et al. 2010, Pyöriä 2006). Also the neoliberal ideology of diversity management that promotes individualism and meritocracy based on individuals' unique combinations of competencies, therefore rendering cultural diversity among employees as of value for the organization (e.g., Holvino and Kamp 2009), has made inroads into the Finnish



workplace and into the social discourse on multiculturalism in Finland. Bodies such as the Ministry of Labor have continuously emphasized that Finland needs foreign highly educated innovative professionals (Jaakkola 2009). It is noteworthy that Russians are one of the best educated immigrant groups in Finland (Sutela 2005). When examined against the spectrum of different ethnic minority groups, Russians have fared quite well on the Finnish labor market, making it to the second best group according to employment level with a 40–50% employment rate (Joronen 2005).

Highly skilled female Russian professionals are not exceptional in Finnish workplaces. Little is known, however, about their lived experiences in organizational contexts. It appears that being a female Russian professional may entail nuances and paradoxes as one navigates among a number of contradictory themes, perspectives, and expectations where the privilege of being a “white,” independent, and highly educated expert is intertwined with stigmatization operating at the intersection of gender and ethnicity. Valuable insights into cultural workplace diversity could be gained by exploring how these women experience their cultural identity as formed in their workplace conversations and in relationships with their coworkers, customers, and business partners. The traditional perspectives taken in cultural workplace diversity research would fail to recognize the complexity inherent in cultural identity processes. Instead, treating cultural identities as fluid and emergent, residing between and among people and in relation to the larger context offers a way of teasing out patterns of meaning that can, in turn, expand our understanding of social interaction in culturally diverse workplaces, especially concerning employee well-being and organizational processes. This study extends cultural workplace diversity research by taking an integrated interpretive and critical interpersonal communication perspective on cultural identity to answer the following questions:

- RQ1: How does Russian identity matter to highly skilled female Russian professionals as they make meanings about their workplace interactions?
- RQ2: How do they perceive the unfolding of Russian identity formation processes in specific contexts at work?
- RQ3: What general patterns in their experiences can be identified?

Methodology

Method

The purpose of this study is to develop knowledge about cultural identity processes in everyday workplace interactions that is founded in the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved, and that would be applicable to informing practical understanding. To fit this research imperative, the method of interpretive description was adopted.

Interpretive description was developed in qualitative health research out of concern that the established qualitative methods such as ethnography, phenomenology, or grounded theory produced insights incompatible with the field’s context-bound and practice-oriented questions (Thorne 2008). Interpretive description is an inductive analytic approach designed to capture themes and patterns within the subjective perceptions to generate an understanding of the phenomenon that yields pragmatic implications (Thorne et al. 2004). The method embraces an interpretive ontology that acknowledges

the subjective view of reality and the constructed and contextual nature of human experience (Thorne 2008). Studies employing the method draw on small data samples gathered through such data collection strategies as interviews, participant observation, or document analysis to build a coherent account of the experiential knowledge of the phenomenon (Thorne et al. 2004). The product of an interpretive description is a systematic conceptual description of the phenomenon that both delineates its characteristic themes and patterns, and considers the inevitable individual variations within it (Thorne et al. 2004).

Respondents and data collection

The study is based on thematic interviews with first-generation female immigrants who identified themselves as Russian and performed interaction-intense knowledge jobs. The sampling was guided by the desire to obtain a broad variety of views on the experience of being a highly skilled female Russian professional in Finland. The respondents were searched through organizations that brought together Russian immigrants and the researcher's own contacts. Two respondents were referred to the researcher by one of the participants. Information about the research project, such as phenomena under investigation, confidentiality issues, and the researcher's own background as a female Polish immigrant in Finland, was given to the respondents in advance.

Ten female Russian immigrants participated in this study. The respondents' age ranged from the mid-20s to mid-50s, and their time of stay in Finland from 2 to 22 years. The women lived in different regions of the country: Eastern Finland, Central Finland, and the south of Finland, including Helsinki. Their occupations were financial manager, researcher and lecturer, travel agent, practical nurse, international affairs coordinator, coordinator and information officer, sales and marketing manager, IT specialist, and arts teacher.

The interviews were conducted between May 2011 and December 2012. Three interviews were done face-to-face and the others through Skype video-calling. All the interviews were digitally recorded. The choice of the interview language (Finnish or English) was left to the respondents; 8 interviews were done in Finnish and 2 in English. Out of 10 participants, 9 had a good knowledge of Finnish (with some of them being fluent in Finnish) that enabled them to express themselves with ease. The fact that the researcher is not a native speaker of Finnish helped eliminate issues related to self-presentation in a second language. The interviews lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours, yielding around 14 hours of recording.

The project did not aim at cataloguing Russianness. Defining Russian cultural identity was left to the respondents themselves. The researcher used an interview guide that consisted of the following themes: one's sense of self as a Russian at work, the salience and meaning of being Russian in specific workplace communication situations, interpersonal relationships, and in the working community. Data acquisition was guided by the idea that the way people make sense of the social world is grounded in their everyday experiences (Mason 2002). The goal of the interviews was to construct meaningful knowledge about how cultural identity related to specific situations, practices, experiences, and perceptions. The respondents were asked specific questions about working life situations and events in which cultural identity was possibly visible. The interviews



were in the shape of “conversation with a purpose” (Burgess 1984) whereby the respondent and the interviewer actively engaged in discussing relevant events, issues, and opinions. The interview was approached as a site of knowledge construction since the knowledge produced resulted from the joint efforts of the interviewer and the respondent in recalling relevant experiences “from which they think, talk, act and interpret” (Mason 2002, p. 227).

Data analysis

The respondents described a range of workplace communication situations that included interactions with peer coworkers, supervisors, subordinates, clients, and business partners and in work-related service encounters where they were customers. Across these accounts, there was variability in meanings given to Russian identity and in the degree to which it was perceived as salient, intense, and generalizable in interactions.

The method of interpretive description required a strategy for data analysis that would enable a delineation of main patterns in the data but allow for the variability within these patterns to show. For that purpose, qualitative content analysis, which is an iterative and reflexive process of identifying, coding, and categorizing patterns in the data, was adopted (e.g., Mayan 2009). To elaborate on the relationship between interpretive description and qualitative content analysis in this study, the former one is a method that entails a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as prescriptions about the final product of the analysis. The latter is treated as a set of guidelines and procedures for organizing, grouping, and transforming the data.

The interviews were transcribed and parts of the transcripts where the respondents talked about cultural identity issues in workplace interactions were identified. The initial coding of these items was influenced by the theoretical framework of the study regarding aspects of identity processes such as identity frames and interaction between them, identity salience, intensity, and scope. As the analysis progressed, it transpired that this initially evident conceptual organization did not match the richness of the data. A framing emphasizing specific meanings accorded to manifestations of Russian identity was recognized as a better alternative. The items were grouped and sorted into patterns, and relationships between the items were searched to build categories, such as “Cultural expertise,” “Salient identity markers,” or “Russian customs and traditions.” Items within each category were read through again and subcategories within the categories were developed recognizing the situation, topic of interaction, context, and relationship (“Cultural expertise: Being asked to interpret for Russian customers,” “Salient identity markers: Customers asking about one’s background,” or “Russian customs and traditions: Bringing Russian dishes for colleagues to try”). Attention was paid to exceptional instances and contrary cases; in the course of the analytic process, conceptual linkages were expanded to include instances of cultural identity not being formed as an important aspect of the researched phenomenon. Rather than happening in a sequence, the process was circular and entailed simultaneous collection and analysis of data that mutually informed each other (Sandelowski 2000).

Methodological prescriptions as to the final product of an interpretive description influenced many of the choices in the construction of findings and were especially influential in the stage of weaving the categories into final themes and making the

final inferences. The goal of interpretive description does not involve generating a completely new truth about the phenomenon (Thorne et al. 2004). Rather, the data are structured and sequenced to produce a “tentative truth claim” about what is common or shared within people’s experiences of the phenomenon (Thorne et al. 2004, p. 4). The particular choice of thematic concepts serves to reveal patterns within the data that would have been obscured through some other presentation framework (Thorne 2008). A number of options for plotting the categories into themes were considered along the dimensions of types of interactions (from interactions in established work communities to interactions with customers and business partners), topic (from work-related to informal interactions), and scope and intensity (from deterministic to fluid understandings of cultural identity). The final conceptualization structuring the data illuminates specific types and aspects of workplace interactions as contexts for distinct formations of Russian identity. This structuring and sequencing was decided on as the most effective and applicable device for rendering new knowledge about the phenomenon.

Possible sites for Russian identity formation

The following four themes denote specific types and aspects of workplace interactions as critical communication locations or sites where Russian identity may be formed with distinct meanings: *expressing professionalism*, *managing initial encounters*, *facing stigma*, and *facilitating intercultural learning*.

Expressing professionalism

Russian identity was associated with expressions of professionalism in the context of interacting with and relating to others in work-related situations. Russianness was conceptualized as a set of values and qualities that shaped one’s work ethics and therefore one’s behavior at work, as well as possession of culture-specific knowledge and skills that were organizationally valuable resources.

Russian identity appeared as central to how some respondents defined their sense of self and enactments as professionals. In these experiences Russianness emerged as highly salient, important, and widely generalizable as it was either invoked or rejected to claim a positive professional identity. Russianness was associated by some respondents with supreme values and qualities that shaped one’s work ethics, such as ambition, perfectionism, efficiency, solidarity, wholehearted commitment, and even obsession with work. It was eagerly avowed and presented as a vital source of motivations and enactments, a permanent aspect of how one communicated at work, and a prominent aspect of one’s relationships with coworkers and clients. Not surprisingly, this experience of cultural identity was further related to making polarized comparisons between own Russian professional excellence and the unprofessionalism of Finns as exemplified in the attitudes and actions of one’s colleagues. To illustrate, one of the respondents who worked as a practical nurse at an old people’s home noted that she was popular with her patients because of her Russianness. She described herself as a reliable, trustworthy, and attentive caregiver, and attributed these qualities



to her Russian background. She further contrasted her working style with that of her forgetful and inconsiderate Finnish workmates:

I've never heard anyone say: "I don't want you to take care of me because you're a foreigner." A lot of our patients like me precisely because I'm Russian. There are a few granies who know that I'm Russian and they always say: "It's so good that you're here." They remember that if I've made a promise, I'll keep my word. Other nurses most likely forget. Each of our patients has an alarm and sometimes they'll ring it ten or even twenty times to get attention, but when I'm working the shift, they know it's enough to ring once and I'll be there.

Drawing on the concept of superior Russian work ethics could be related to the experience of being a member of a negatively stereotyped group and the resulting urge to improve the group's image (Collier 1998). It appears, however, that some participants who shared the highly positive perception of "Russians as superior workers" did not make a point of enacting these culturally signified qualities and experienced their professional identity as firmly situated in the Finnish working life context. One needed to adopt "Finnish values" and "Finnish communication style" to succeed at work, while Russianness could be engaged in one's private life.

Russian identity was also given a negative interpretation as a flawed mentality universally shared by all Russians that was characterized by a lack of commitment, laziness, dishonesty, greed, and a stifling preoccupation with power and status. This undesirable cultural membership was subsequently renounced to build an argument about one being an exceptional Russian, a competent employee despite one's Russian background. Constructing a positive professional identity through rejection of Russianness could stem from the internalization of negative stereotypes about one's group and the subsequent need to quit the problematic membership (see also Barinaga 2007).

A contrasting view also emerged that deemed the notion of "national character" as redundant in describing one's experiences as a professional. The demands, characteristics, and content of expert knowledge work were seen as shaped by culture-neutral universal or global norms and guidelines that erased issues of cultural memberships and gave prominence to individualized self-made postmodern identities. Other learnable qualities and skills, such as universal professional competencies or communication competence in the organizational language, were perceived as more significant and prominent in one's self-experience, enactments, and relationships in task-related interactions. Fluency in Finnish emerged as a denominator of social power in workplace interactions that dissolved the concern of, what some felt to be excessively discussed, prejudice and discrimination toward certain cultural groups in Finland. As one respondent commented, no matter how "prestigious" one's nationality, one could easily be left out of important workplace conversations if one had not made the effort to learn the language. "As long as you know Finnish, it really doesn't matter where you're from," she stated.

Apart from denoting values and qualities imbuing members of a cultural group with specific characteristics, Russianness also emerged in relation to professionalism as possession of culture-specific knowledge and skills. The recent years have seen an intensification of business relations between Russia and Finland, and an inflow of affluent Russian tourists and investors. Priority given to providing quality service to Russian customers and partners was evident in the data as the respondents' Russian identities were

used by their employers to that end. Those women who were employed in organizations that had Russian customers or business partners were reminded of their background when their knowledge of the Russian market, business culture, or language was invoked by others. Even though their job description did not specifically include interpreting and translation, many were sporadically asked for help by their colleagues or supervisors in handling Russian documents; assisting Russian customers, guests, and business partners; handing out advice on Russian business etiquette. Even if being Russian was not otherwise central to their sense of self, the respondents did not mind or even expected to have their valuable cultural expertise invoked by others. Many expressed views that if not utilized, these resources would go to waste. Some persons performing jobs where they could not apply their Russian language skills and cultural knowledge talked about considering changing employment for one where the asset of being Russian would be more prominent. This experience of Russianness bore traces of the individualized and meritocratic discourse of diversity management. It appeared to be less problematic than the construction of the “superior Russian employee” as it comprised very specific, demonstrable, and applicable knowledge and skills that had an obvious market value and could be exercised at one’s own will without aligning oneself with a specific cultural group membership.

This construction of Russianness was further related to intraethnic bias and conflict. The data contain accounts of how being Russian could acquire a discrete flavor of acrimoniousness, antagonism, and competitiveness in relation to another Russian or ethnically close colleague. To illustrate, one of the respondents told the story of a difficult relationship she had had with a fellow Ukrainian coworker that resulted in that person getting fired:

In [that workplace] there was a Ukrainian lady that was giving me a lot of trouble. She was the only Russian-speaking [staff member] and then I appeared. My boss gave me a lot of duties to try, and everything she gave me she was satisfied with. So half of [the Ukrainian woman’s] duties became mine, which she didn’t like. She realized that she could lose her place—she never would because we were doing different things. But she started to openly say different things, not to speak to me. So we had conversations with her [...] and then she started to behave just uncontrollably and she was fired. I’ve never had problems with Finns but always with Russians. It’s a really strange thing, I think it’s competition.

The respondent associated her colleague’s openly aggressive behavior toward her with feelings of threat as she also was fluent in Russian and began to take over the woman’s unique responsibilities. Such experiences of intraethnic bias and conflict are not easily explained with the traditional theoretical perspective of social identification and categorization. According to this approach, members of a disadvantaged group will help one another to improve the group’s status; however, insights could be drawn from the alternative framework of positioning theory (Taylor et al. 2008). The theory encourages us to consider how individuals may use their minority status in the workplace as a source of personal gain. By claiming specific cultural expertise, one may enjoy the position of a cultural expert that further makes one unique and indispensable in the organization. The arrival of another group member possessing similar resources, much as it may improve the status of the group as such, weakens the critical value of one’s cultural resources and undermines one’s expert position.



Managing initial encounters

Russianness also denoted unusual biographic information. Interactions with strangers at work were a communication context critical for the surfacing of Russian identity since they entailed negotiations about the meaning and significance of one's visibly different background.

A strong majority of the respondents felt that Russian identity was easily ascribable and therefore not closetable due to salient identity markers such as speaking with a Russian accent or having a Russian-sounding name. These involuntary cues made information about one's Russian background easily available to others. While the women had already negotiated their preferred identities in their established relationships in the working communities, initial interactions with newly met customers, colleagues, or business partners were critical situations where the meaning and significance of one's cultural background would possibly need to be negotiated anew. Indeed, the intricacies of explaining one's background to strangers were described with great detail: people asking with different degrees of directness, sometimes only after a longer involvement, and sometimes not at all. Being asked stirred contradictory emotions that were related to how salient and intense the respondents wanted their cultural identities to be in the given situation. Some welcomed the interest, some did not care whether and when they would be asked; others considered their cultural identity to be private and being ascribed Russianness through requests to discuss it with complete strangers in a work-related situation was, to them, an imposition. This was especially the case in one-off customer service interactions. In this sense, revealing information about one's cultural background was associated with relational development. It was the sort of information one would reveal only after a longer involvement or when more interactions with the specific person were expected.

It also appeared that the respondents were, to some degree, in control of the disclosure, choosing whether and when to reveal or confirm their cultural background. Ideas about disclosing one's identity differed depending on how central Russianness was to one's sense of self at work. Those who saw their professional behavior as infused with Russianness made a point of telling others about their background straight away. One of the participants, for instance, described: "I'm proud that I'm Russian, that I have a strong educational background and expertise. So yeah, I tell everyone that I'm Russian straight away, definitely." It was acknowledged that some Russians may want to closet their identity for fear of negative repercussions. A few respondents reported closeting their background when their customers made provocative insulting comments about Russians. The decision concerning the disclosure also depended on one's judgment of the relevance of cultural identity to the relationship, task, and interaction at hand. Some respondents emphasized that they did not consider their cultural background to be important at work. They were careful about not imposing the disclosure and informed others about their Russianness only when it was deemed "suitable," for instance, when one expected more interactions with a certain person or when one had valuable insights to share in an ongoing conversation concerning Russia.

The persons interviewed for this study were highly educated middle-class professionals who inhabited very special social spheres. There were inequalities also within this group. Access to sociocultural resources made it easier for some to enact their preferred identities (Collier 1998). For instance, those who spoke Finnish without a discernible

Russian accent enjoyed more agency in disclosing or closeting their background. Also the type of work one performed and therefore the people one met at work resulted in different responses to having one's background "found out." Those employed in business and educational contexts, for instance, emphasized that the persons they met at work tended to be open-minded, tolerant, and multicultural, and "did not make a fuss" about someone's diverse background. As one person said, the cosmopolitan business culture embraced in her work community diminished the importance of her Russian-ness. When learning about her being Russian, people would usually make brief positive comments and move on to other more relevant issues:

When I meet people they definitely hear my terrible accent in Finnish, so they usually ask where I'm from. I tell them that I'm Russian and, I don't know, maybe the business people I meet, for example I meet a lot of people at trade fairs, maybe the business culture makes them polite or maybe they've already changed the way they think. They never ask questions in a way: "When will you go back home?" It's always more about: "How long have you been living in Finland?" or: "You speak Finnish so well." That's what I usually hear. And then we switch to other topics.

However, respondents performing customer service work and therefore meeting members of the general public could not rely on such assumptions and occasionally faced negative or threatening reactions. The problem was further compounded by power inequalities inherent in customer service work where priority is given to pleasing the customer. A particularly striking account was given by a woman performing help desk work. She described how some customers, already upset about a faulty product or service, became even more irritated upon discovering that she was not Finnish and possibly Russian. The woman described situations where she had faced offensive ascriptions including racist slander. She struggled with feelings of anxiety in her daily encounters with customers as she was not able to predict how the other may react upon learning about her Russianness.

Facing stigma

Russian identity also designated a stigmatized group membership. It emerged in workplace interactions in terms of hurtful ascriptions based on the negative representations of Russians, and Russian women, circulating in social and media spheres in Finland.

Anti-Russian prejudice was experienced by many as a real social problem that occasionally surfaced in their workplace interactions. Persons working on organizational frontlines, such as in customer service, who frequently interacted with strangers, appeared to be at a higher risk of facing expressions of prejudice. This said, challenging interactions and relationships with coworkers and supervisors were also described. The expressions of negative attitudes included ignoring, openly avoiding, or belittling the other, making supposedly funny comments about Russians, becoming irritated and rude, making racist remarks, or slandering the other.

Some of the accounts subtly represented the effects of the stigma attached to being a Russian woman in Finland. They described facing negative ascriptions that emphasized one's sexuality, such as insinuations that one's relationship with a male colleague had



erotic undertones or that Russian women came to Finland primarily to find a husband. One respondent described the difficult situation she found herself in when the organization where she had just received a permanent employment contract went bankrupt. If she lost her job, her visa application would be denied. She gave an account of an interaction with her female Finnish boss to whom she turned for help:

I [told her]: “You know, I have no idea what to do because I got this contract and my visa is now in the process and if I get fired, I’ll have to go back [to Russia].” And then my boss she tried to joke, I guess, so she said: “Why don’t you get married like all Russians do?” So they do have this stereotype and she was surprised that I hadn’t been thinking about this option! [] And I was really surprised that she said it out loud, and she was surprised at my reaction, that it insulted me in a way. I said: “No, I’ll go back and then I’ll be looking for a job in Russia again.” And she said she hadn’t heard of this kind of, you know, that women would come to Finland “just for work” and that they’re not looking for anything more.

The supposedly tongue-in-cheek advice to marry a Finn in order to avoid problems with the immigration authorities insulted the respondent deeply. Her supervisor insinuated that Russian women came to Finland to find a husband and enjoy all the benefits this would entail, drawing on stigmatizing representations of Russian women. The respondent rejected the hurtful ascription by stating that there were other scripts available for her and, subsequently, that being a single Russian woman in Finland did not imply being on a prowl for a Finnish marriage partner. This account of coming to experience oneself as Russian also has a political dimension. Unlike the other participants, the respondent in question did not have a Finnish citizenship or a permanent resident status in Finland. Recent work in critical intercultural communication has discussed how stigmatized cultural identities are materially sanctioned and reproduced, as when immigrants with “second-class” nationalities face bureaucratic impediments designed to limit their freedom of movement and getting into employment (e.g., Drzewiecka and Steyn 2012). The respondent’s experience of Russianness was also that of limited rights of movement and general bureaucratic constraints that infiltrated her working life and workplace interactions in very concrete ways. As the processing of her visa application was tied to her job contract, her position as an employee was quite powerless. When examined in this light, her rejection of the subjugating identity ascribed to her by her supervisor appears as a risky and ideologically loaded act.

Encountering stigma in interactions stirred feelings of confusion, apprehension, anger, and humiliation. These were managed in a number of ways, such as openly engaging with the abuser and rejecting or correcting hurtful ascriptions, ignoring offensive comments, or avoiding the abuser. Threatening encounters were also trivialized by presenting them as exceptional, influenced by contextual factors such as the other’s personality or bad mood, and not limited to Russians in Finland. Comparisons between own fairly “safe” position and blatant discrimination faced by members of visibly different ethnic groups in Finland were also made.

Although the boundaries of the workplace were not impermeable to prejudice and one sometimes had to interact with persons who espoused negative views about Russians, it seemed that the workplace as a network of established interpersonal relationships and a system of shared norms protected one from more extreme manifestations of prejudice possibly existing in the mainstream society. It is noteworthy that the

respondents unanimously talked about generally feeling authentic and comfortable in their working communities. The analysis revealed that the respondents' organizations treated diverse identities in two ways, neither of which was associated with ignoring or putting excessive emphasis on the issue of prejudice. One approach was to highlight shared professional and organizational identities, and it was perceived as personally and professionally validating. The respondents did not wish to receive special treatment at work on account of their "problematic" cultural background and wanted to be approached as individuals and experts in their own right. Alternatively, the respondents described their workplaces as openly and intentionally multicultural in terms of attitudes and policies.

The experience of having faced anti-Russian prejudice was not shared by all the respondents. Some views reflected that the respondents recognized their privileged position as highly educated professionals. One's workplace was presented as an exceptional safe community embedded in the more unpredictable society. An alternative opinion also emerged that de-emphasized issues of systemic oppression and handed responsibility for constructing the problem of discrimination to the media and immigrants themselves. Oversensitive to the issue of discrimination, immigrants expected to be discriminated against and interpreted their interactions accordingly. These ostensibly sensational and newsworthy experiences were exploited by the media, which exaggerated the problem and intensified immigrants' negative expectations even further. A related perception was that immigrants may draw on the concept of discrimination to mask or reject their individual responsibility for failures and unwillingness to develop as a human being.

Facilitating intercultural learning

Russian identity also emerged as interesting, personally enriching, and not work-related knowledge of the meanings and symbols of a different sociocultural system. It was invoked in workplace interactions where the respondents acted as facilitators for their colleagues' and customers' intercultural learning.

Some interactions took the form of boutique multiculturalism (Fish 1997) and entailed engaging with somewhat superficial constructions of Russianness in terms of external cultural markers such as cuisine, arts, customs, or traditions. These were considered as intriguing and enjoyable. The respondents described participating in informal conversations about Russian culture and society that they initiated themselves or that were prompted by their colleagues or customers. Enactments of Russian identity also included performances of cultural customs as when Russian foods were brought to work for one's colleagues to taste or people prepared Russian dishes or celebrated Russian festivals together. One participant described how her explanation that Women's Day was a bank holiday in Russia prompted her all-male coworkers to organize a small Women's Day celebration for her:

We have this Women's Day and we couldn't work with Russia on that day, we couldn't send emails, and I said: "Well, yeah, it's a big deal, we have a day off [in Russia]." I started telling a little bit—so they brought me sweets on that day. It was really nice, you know, we had a little coffee break all together.



These activities were also extended outside work when colleagues were invited home to celebrate one's name day "the Russian way" or coworkers left for a mini-break to St. Petersburg together. It appeared that being a cultural entertainer who had funny anecdotes to share and could act as a guide during a trip to Russia was, to many, an integral part of how they were perceived by others at work.

Facilitating others' intercultural learning was also conducted through enacting cultural differences: "being Russian" and "communicating like a Russian." To some respondents it was obvious that their communication behavior was shaped by their cultural background. They felt "other" and believed that their colleagues saw them as such: more emotional, spontaneous, creative, collectivistic, and hierarchical. Through informal interaction one exposed one's colleagues to an experience of cultural difference that could impact upon their learning. Some believed that their colleagues had learnt about and adapted to their "Russian communication style" and had developed certain expectations of them related to their background.

Despite the intended positive character of these constructions, there were indications of tensions between avowed and ascribed identities. Some saw their cultural heritage as a vital part of who they were and wished that their colleagues would exhibit more active interest in it. They acknowledged, however, the legitimacy of the salience of professional identities in workplace interactions that designated cultural identities as more private and engaged in outside work. Conversely, those who did not consider Russianness as central to their self-concept did not feel the need to introduce Russian culture in conversations. Colleagues' and customers' expectations that one observed Russian traditions, followed the Russian media, or often visited Russia—and the resulting questions about Russian culture and society—stirred feelings of annoyance. They were perceived as identity ascriptions that one did not acknowledge or agree with, an imposition that collided with or diminished one's other identities as an individual and as a professional.

The enactments of Russian identity also took a more serious social and political form. No matter how central being Russian was to one's self-concept, many nevertheless saw themselves as agents for social change responsible for helping others develop more complex ideas about Russia. This was accomplished through workplace conversations about the social and political situation in Russia or the difficult history between Finland and Russia. One of the respondents told about how she and her colleagues engaged in joint reflection about how issues related to Russia and Finland were represented in the other country's media. These interactions point to how the workplace may become an arena for joint critical political activity.

It is notable that these interactions were understood to be not work-related but something extra occurring during coffee breaks when time permitted. Intercultural learning took the form of activities that were perceived as personally enriching but disconnected from organizational functioning. None of the respondents described a situation where she would contribute valuable culture-shaped perspectives and worldviews in work-related discussions that would encourage joint organizational learning and change, resounding Ely and Thomas' (2001) integration-and-learning perspective on diversity.

Furthermore, some voices reflected disinterest about such intercultural learning. Relational development emerged as diminishing or even eradicating the need to distribute knowledge about Russian culture or dismantle negative stereotypes about Russians. Many were content with having come to be perceived as individuals judged on the merits of their

personality and professional expertise and not as representatives of Russia. Some had discussed their “cultural otherness” with their colleagues, and it emerged that their colleagues did not perceive them as “Russians,” “foreigners,” or “outsiders.” It was further posited that one’s cosmopolitan and knowledgeable colleagues did not require attitude work.

Also, some views suggested a rejection of the very concept of the supposed cultural distinctiveness of national and ethnic groups, and the possibility of distilling manifestations associated with one’s cultural background. The taken-for-granted meanings accorded to “Russian culture” were critically reflected upon. Some did not perceive, and refused to define their specific enactments as expressions of cultural identity. It was, for example, pointed out that wearing feminine clothes or bringing souvenirs for one’s colleagues do not necessarily symbolize Russian cultural identity but could be manifestations of one’s personality or identification with a specific organizational culture. Popularly held national stereotypes were also jointly exposed in the work community. Some respondents, for instance, talked about their colleagues joking about how they were “more Finnish than Finns themselves,” where it was the very representations of “Finns” and “Russians” that were being poked fun at.

Discussion

The goal of this article was to problematize the view of cultural identities as static, monolithic, and universally shared in the context of social interaction at work. An integrated interpretive and critical interpersonal perspective was adopted to analyze the respondents’ experiences of coming to understand oneself as Russian in everyday workplace interactions. The findings identified four themes as possible sites for Russian identity formation: *expressing professionalism*, *managing initial encounters*, *facing stigma*, and *facilitating intercultural learning*.

In response to the first research question, the findings illustrate that cultural identity mattered to the respondents in unique ways. Each and every participant experienced her own Russian identity through interactions among her self-view, enactments, and relationships in a specific work community. While some respondents accorded greater salience, scope, and intensity to their cultural identity and saw their working life as an important context for being Russian or proving that one is not like “other Russians”, others treated the working community as a site for other identities to be performed. Cultural identities are dynamic and constructed between and among people. Experiences of cultural identity as meaningful in interactions were interspersed with those communication situations where cultural identity did not emerge as prominent and the interaction was not framed as intercultural. By the same token, cultural identities were occasionally made visible and significant to the respondents by the words and actions of others. In response to the second research question, the themes *expressing professionalism*, *managing initial encounters*, *facing stigma*, and *facilitating intercultural learning* encompass the range of potential Russian identities residing in the respondents’ workplaces that could become relevant with a different intensity in different settings. Therefore, negotiating one’s cultural identity involved not only negotiating its salience as such in the interaction but also settling on the relevant meaning of Russianness. While the respondents had already agreed upon their preferred identities in their established workplace relationships, these had to be negotiated anew in initial interactions with newly met



colleagues, customers, and business partners. This appeared to be especially challenging for persons working on organizational frontlines. At the same time, the context of expert knowledge work, with specific duties, responsibilities, types of tasks, interactions, relationships, and work community enabled and constrained cultural identity processes in significant ways. As work-related experiences, qualities, and skills were prioritized, individuals were given the possibility of being released from their cultural memberships. This provided them with an argument to counter possible negative cultural ascriptions. The context further empowered the respondents to avow positive Russian identity as a cultural expert, an entertainer, or an agent for social change when the moment was right. In response to the third research question, the themes within the data signify that there are a number of shared pivotal communication locations that serve as critical signposts for individuals coming to experience their cultural identity in workplace interactions. These locations help us understand contexts for the specific formations of cultural identity as residing in distinct topics, situations, relationships, and interactions. The themes of *expressing professionalism*, *managing initial encounters*, *facing stigma*, and *facilitating intercultural learning* embody the shared experience of how persons may orient themselves to cultural identities in workplace settings.

The different meanings accorded to Russian identity and the processes of their formation have implications for both organizational functioning and employee well-being. When examined in the light of previous research, the four themes carry traces of ideas developed in the organizational efficiency and discrimination strands. However, it appears that an interpersonal communication perspective taken in the study, together with the focus on identity processes per se, has revealed novel interpretations and experiences concerning the role of cultural identities in the organizational context.

The strand of organizational efficiency research that takes the information and decision-making perspective has been preoccupied with examining the organizational benefits of utilizing the diverse knowledge and perspectives of employees as promised by the discourse of diversity management. The findings of this study indicate that people differentiated between cultural identity as facilitating learning and as related to expressions of professionalism. Intercultural learning was perceived as personally enriching but disconnected from organizational functioning. Constructions of Russianness related to professionalism, in turn, pertained to individual enactments of work ethics or practical knowledge and skills applied solely in interactions with Russian customers or business partners. None of the respondents described a situation where her culture-shaped knowledge and worldviews would be applied with a view to enhancing general organizational-level knowledge construction or innovation. Perhaps the respondents' organizations were unaware of such learning possibilities or these issues were simply too difficult to grasp and relate in an interview. However, this finding does prompt a number of questions that deserve further investigation. Could the organizational value of culturally diverse perspectives and worldviews be overrated? How to distill experiences, knowledge, and skills associated with individuals' cultural identity from those related to their other identities? What is the process and content of intercultural learning among employees of culturally diverse organizations?

The argument of cultural synergy where different culture-shaped values and attitudes are forged to improve organizational functioning is further undermined by the apparent lack of agreement in the data about the purported shared contents of Russianness. Russianness was given distinct meanings (as represented in the four themes), but

there is also evidence of a critical examination of meanings and expressions popularly associated with Russian identity and disjoining one's ostensibly cultural enactments from the cultural. These findings support the argument that issues of cultural identity and cultural diversity should better be approached as emergent and socially constructed rather than through applications of sets of a priori facts about psychological and behavioral characteristics of specific cultural groups (Lauring 2011). The interviews could further be approached as naturally occurring data and examined with a discourse analytical approach. Shifting attention onto how the respondents "do" cultural identities in their talk with the researcher could help interrogate meanings attributed to cultural identity that are otherwise assumed to be "normal" and "natural," therefore fulfilling the claim that cultural identities are constructed rather than expressed in communication (Mendoza et al. 2002).

With relation to the traditional social identity and categorization perspective, some of the accounts confirmed the assumption that workplace interactions could be experienced in terms of intergroup encounters. These accounts documented the highly emotional character of one's enactments at work as one struggled to disprove negative stereotypes about one's group or demonstrate that one was different from the other members of the group. However, this theoretical framework holds little explanatory power in the case of experiences of intraethnic competition that are also evident in the data. The findings of this study confirm the view that the prototypical intergroup situation where employees who are members of the disadvantaged minority group experience prejudice at the hands of the advantaged group is not the only possible scenario in culturally diverse organizational contexts (Taylor et al. 2008). Also in relationships with culturally close colleagues, cultural identities may surface as problematic, stirring feelings of threat and leading to biased reactions that impair both organizational functioning and employee well-being.

The findings tie in with the discrimination perspective in a number of ways. Russian identity construction is a problematic event as negative stereotypical and racist images of Russians and Russian women may enter the conversation in terms of subjugating ascriptions. The consequences of the social construction of cultural identities were of special significance for persons working on organizational frontlines and meeting strangers on a daily basis. These respondents' experiences of coming to be Russian were often at the mercy of others as they were required to explain or even negotiate the meaning of their background. Cultural identities are fluid and, in this sense, also dangerously fragile; those who do not experience themselves as different may unexpectedly become "othered" as the situational, social, political, and economic contexts change (Waldram 2009).

However, it should be considered that formations of Russian identity entailed all four themes (any of the four distinct meanings was possible) and that Russianness emerged with different degrees of salience, scope, and intensity. While some of the interviewees had faced stigma related to their ethnicity and gender, they did not wish to be defined as victims of prejudice and emphasized that those were only some among the many other ways that Russianness was formed in their workplace interactions. While nonmainstream employees' experiences of stigmatization should not be underestimated, we should also acknowledge other organizational experiences that people have. Obviously, the participants were middle-class independent "white" experts, which allowed them to put their professionalism and individuality front stage. This does not mean that their experiences should be underrated. It seems unfair that the social discussion



of Russians (and other immigrant groups) in Finland pivots around the theme of prejudice and discrimination. Needless to say, these have been the dominant perspectives in Finnish research on Russian immigrants (e.g., Honkatukia 2005, Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002, Kytäjä 2005, Liebkind et al. 2004, Pohjanpää et al. 2003).

Also with relation to the paradigm of antidiscrimination, the findings give evidence to novel empowering interpretations of the discourse of diversity management. While this ideology has been much criticized for dissolving the basis for arguments about group-based systemic discrimination, it enabled the respondents to claim positive constructions of the identity that had been historically marked by stigma. By using arguments of possessing valuable cultural resources, the respondents improved their status as professionals and employees. This application of the discourse of diversity management is firmly situated within the recent changes in economic and social climate in Finland that have not yet been documented by research. Jaakkola's (2009) latest data on Finns' attitudes toward immigrants are from 2007; the inflow of Russian capital in recent years and the impact this has had on views about interacting with Russians is evident in the data. Certain constructions of Russianness in working life contexts are ascribed high value and prestige.

The findings further reveal tensions between cultural and other identifications. While some saw their workplace as an important site to enact Russianness, others treated the working community as a space where they could perform other identities. This finding challenges the dominant assumption that employees with different cultural backgrounds always experience themselves as culturally different and want to be treated respectively. There has been a tendency in research literature to express disapproval of organizational approaches that do not explicitly attend to minority employees' cultural backgrounds (e.g., Trux 2005). What if these employees are satisfied with their self-expressions, relationships, interactions, and possibilities for development? This argument could further be related to criticism of the field of intercultural communication as focusing on cultural differences, misunderstandings, and conflict (e.g., Ryoo 2005). Cultural workplace diversity scholarship and practice could benefit from acknowledging that interpersonal interactions among employees with diverse backgrounds are first and foremost interpersonal interactions. There may be working life situations where cultural identity is not a valid frame for individuals to define themselves and make sense of the social world.

Acknowledgments

The present article is part of the author's doctoral dissertation under preparation supervised by Professor Maarit Valo at the Department of Communication, University of Jyväskylä. The study received funding from the Finnish Work Environment Fund (project no. 112326).

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**SHARING CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE AT WORK:
A STUDY OF CHAT INTERACTIONS OF AN
INTERNATIONALLY DISPERSED TEAM**

by

Lahti, M. (2015)

Language and Intercultural Communication, 15(4), 513-532

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Lahti, M. (2015). Sharing cultural knowledge at work: A study of chat interactions of an internationally dispersed team. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 15(4), 513-532. doi: 10.1080/14708477.2015.1031673

Sharing cultural knowledge at work: A study of chat interactions of an internationally dispersed team

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Abstract

In this study the ethnomethodological method of membership categorisation analysis is applied to examine how members of an internationally dispersed team share cultural knowledge in their Skype™ chat conversations through mobilising categorisation as ‘cultural knower’ and ‘not knower’ for oneself and the others. Four recurring ways of sharing cultural knowledge were identified as the participants managed the distribution and completion of tasks, and attended to building mutual understanding in the unfolding interaction. The findings illustrate that cultural knowledge sharing is dynamic, situational and collaborative. Rather than hindering or enhancing interaction, culture is an interactional accomplishment with fluid referents, boundaries and membership. These observations problematise the predominant accounts of internationally dispersed teaming as either fraught with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict, or brimming with innovation and synergy.

Keywords

cultural knowledge sharing, internationally dispersed teams, membership categorisation analysis, workplace interactions

Introduction

Organisations have entered a new era characterised by the intensification of such trends as globalisation of the marketplace, corporate restructuring, flexible work arrangements and proliferation of advanced communication technologies (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, & Nishii, 2013; Gibbs, Nekrassova, Grushina, & Wahab, 2008). These transformations have led to the rise of internationally dispersed teams whose members, rather than sharing a geographical site and working face-to-face, are located in different countries and collaborate primarily in technology-mediated ways (e.g. Scott, 2013). As critical operating units in increasingly complex and interconnected business environments, internationally distributed teams have been considered central nodes for knowledge sharing in organisations (Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, & Wagner, 2004).

This article focuses on the sharing of knowledge pertaining to location-specific group-based meanings, symbols and practices, or cultural knowledge (see also Collier & Thomas, 1988), which may be especially relevant in the context of internationally dispersed collaboration. Internationally dispersed teamwork creates spaces where individuals from

different cultural backgrounds come into contact with one another to share tasks and goals (Gibbs et al., 2008). Team members may have different information, expectations, preferences and constraints resulting from their embeddedness in diverse contexts (Cramton & Hinds, 2005). To collaborate successfully, they need to establish shared frames of reference that ensure similar interpretations of situations they face as a team (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). Moreover, internationally dispersed teams may explicitly rely on cultural knowledge sharing as they are often formed with a view to enhancing the organisational understanding of local markets and encouraging innovation (Scott, 2013). Although these themes have inspired intense research interest, the burgeoning literature has tended to take a post-positivistic approach that focuses on mapping the antecedents and outcomes of team processes, and conceptualises culture and communication as variables (see also Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007; Gibbs et al., 2008). In the light of this, the very process of cultural knowledge sharing that team members engage in as their everyday interactions unfold has remained largely unexplored.

In this article, I argue that our understanding of how cultural knowledge is shared in internationally dispersed teamwork can be deepened by a detailed inductive exploration of naturally occurring interactions of an ongoing working life team. This study draws on records of Skype™ chat conversations of a Finnish-Russian team whose members were located in Finland and Russia, were native speakers of either Finnish or Russian respectively, and who dealt in the internationalisation of Finnish companies onto Russian markets. Utilising the ethnomethodological framework of membership categorisation analysis (MCA) (e.g. Lepper, 2000; Sacks, 1986), this study seeks to identify and describe the systematic and commonsensical ways in which the participants share cultural knowledge in interaction through mobilising categorisation as ‘cultural knower’ and ‘not knower’ for oneself and the other(s).

Cultural knowledge sharing in internationally dispersed teamwork

Technology-mediated teamwork that spans national boundaries is a unique contemporary phenomenon enabled by fairly recent economic, technological, cultural and political developments associated with globalisation. To unravel the complexities of internationally dispersed teamwork, researchers have mostly relied on post-positivistic theorising developed in the context of more traditional face-to-face culturally diverse groups and teams, adding virtuality as an additional variable.

Within the post-positivistic perspective, culture is approached as an objectively existing fact tied to a nation-state or ethnicity (in some cases, also ‘race’ has been used an apparent substitute for ethnicity) that affects team processes. To explain and predict the influence of culture, researchers have relied on the theoretical frameworks of information and decision-making, and social identity and categorisation (see also Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010 for a review). The information and decision-making perspective examines how differences associated with individual members’ culturally shaped values, knowledge, skills and perspectives hinder or enhance team performance in terms of achieving shared understanding, problem solving or innovation. The social identity and categorisation framework considers different cultural memberships as triggering the formation of subgroups that prevents individuals from developing relationships and sharing information with members of the perceived outgroup. These tendencies are seen as intensified with virtuality added to the picture (see e.g. Berry, 2011; Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007 for reviews). As the argument goes, cultural diversity among team members and a high degree of dependence on communication technologies for interaction combine to work as a ‘double-edged sword’, leading to either impaired knowledge processing or innovation.

The joint negative effects of virtuality and unacknowledged and unshared cultural knowledge on team efficiency have received ample attention. As was found in a study utilising data from teams of undergraduate students from the US and Thailand collaborating on a project, virtuality may aggravate problems related to divergent national preferences for social interaction and poor language skills in the lingua franca (Sarker, 2005). The constraints of technology-mediated interaction may also result in undermined sharing of tacit contextual knowledge about local ways of work and life, resulting in misinterpretations of one's remote colleagues' motives and conduct (Cramton, 2001; Zakaria, Amelinckx, & Wilemon, 2004). In their theoretical discussion of internationally distributed team dynamics, Cramton and Hinds (2005) proposed that such teams are prone to the formation of subgroups along the cultural and geographic faultlines, encouraging ethnocentric perceptions of outgroup members. Indeed, a survey- and interview-based comparative study conducted in a multinational organisation that had both dispersed and traditional teams found that dispersed teams experienced more conflict (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005).

Conversely, scholars have also looked into factors promoting processes that entail cultural knowledge actually being shared and that have been associated with the purported benefits of cultural team diversity, such as intercultural learning or innovation. For instance, Cramton and Hinds (2005) suggested that an attitude of 'positive mutual distinctiveness' could be a mediating variable encouraging ethnorelativistic learning where subgroups learn from and about one another's culture and local situation, enabling the team to capitalise on intergroup differences. This claim received support from a large-scale interview study by Gibson and Gibbs (2006) that identified a positive relationship between supportive communicative climate, a perception of national team diversity as an asset, and innovation. It has also been suggested that the negative effects of social categorisation processes may be mitigated by communication technologies. Building on data from undergraduate student project work, Berg (2012) argued that the reduced social context cues in technology-mediated interactions alleviated stereotyping and intergroup bias common to face-to-face intercultural interactions, encouraging the sharing of deep-seated cultural resources.

Although existing literature has offered some important insights into the conditions and outcomes of the sharing (or not sharing) of cultural knowledge, it suffers from a number of limitations. Adherence to the 'double-edged sword' theorising reduces our understanding of internationally dispersed teaming to only two scenarios where it is framed as either an organisational asset or a hindrance (see also Stahl et al., 2010). In empirical investigations, this is coupled with excessive reliance on induced data gathered through interviews, surveys and experiments that often utilise student subjects or artificial zero-history teams. Such research designs yield only indirect insights into the actual patterns of team interaction in real working life. The very dynamics of knowledge work, often referred to as the 'black box' of team processes, have remained largely unexplored (Erhardt & Gibbs, 2008). Most importantly, research tends to draw on a limited conceptualisation of the relationship between culture and communication (see also Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007; Gibbs et al., 2008). Culture is relegated to the position of a finite, static and distinctive set of experiences, perceptions, values, behaviours and skills that is a natural property of a national or ethnic group. This system of traits is seen as unproblematically shared by all group members, determining what they know and how they communicate. Interactions of internationally distributed teams are therefore treated as either ridden with intercultural misunderstandings and conflict, or brimming with cultural innovation and learning, simply by virtue of team members' different national/ethnic backgrounds.

The post-positivistic conceptualisation of culture has recently received intense criticism in fields such as intercultural communication, anthropology or sociolinguistics for

oversimplifying and decontextualising human interaction, offering distorted explanations and predictions about the workings of the social world, sanctioning stereotypes about groups, and ignoring the processes triggered by globalisation (e.g. Breidenbach & Nyíri, 2009; Dervin, 2014; Holliday, 2011; Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2014). As Breidenbach and Nyíri (2009) have remarked, the predominant understanding of culture has led to the development of two contradictory discourses where cultural difference is either uncritically celebrated or pathologised. They argue that such images do not correspond with people's lived realities. Nation and ethnicity are too large to be real groups and it is more adequate to treat them as imagined communities (Piller, 2011). Both cultural identity and culture are open-ended and fluid; individuals do not exist within the tight confines of some immutable homogeneous communities but dynamically construe their ways of life, aspirations and knowledge of the social world through interactions with myriad different groups and ideas enabled, for instance, by travel or access to media and technologies (Hunsinger, 2006). The intensification of cultural interconnectedness brought on by globalisation has undermined the tie between culture and physical place, giving rise to new forms of social interaction that necessitate a rethinking of traditional scientific concepts and methods of inquiry (Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2014). Rather than mapping cultural traits possessed and passively inherited by members of national or ethnic groups, researchers should be asking when and why culture may be made relevant by social actors (Piller, 2011). The relationship between culture and communication should therefore be reconceptualised to appreciate culture as an open-ended discursive notion dynamically constituted, rather than expressed, in interaction (Mendoza, Halualani, & Drzewiecka, 2002; Piller, 2011).

Ethnomethodological perspective on sharing cultural knowledge

The ethnomethodological stance (e.g. Garfinkel, 1984) taken in this study challenges the traditional treatment of concepts such as culture and knowledge associated with it as variables or social facts that shape people's communication by proposing that it is in and through communication that people collaboratively produce culture and cultural knowing. Communication is understood here as a publicly available interactional process unfolding between persons (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). A fundamental assumption is that communication is action, i.e. when someone says something they are actually enacting social life rather than merely transmitting information or making meaning (Mandelbaum, 2008). Communication is structured in that action consists of stable, routine-like and orderly practices. This methodical character of interactional practices is the central mechanism for the accomplishment of social order (ten Have, 2004). Furthermore, communication is seen as locally organised, with attention paid to the situated and demonstrably relevant interactional steps that participants take at the particular moment of their encounter thus producing and enacting the context (Francis & Hester, 2004).

Cultural knowledge is taken here to denote experiences, beliefs, interpretations, routines, skills and information related to location-specific group-based meanings, symbols and practices (see also Collier & Thomas, 1988). In accordance with the ethnomethodological perspective, I refrain from theoretically problematising the concept of culture and instead approach it empirically as a members' phenomenon. I explore how any kind of knowing about local group-based meanings, symbols and practices is made relevant, and therefore 'done' in interaction by the participants themselves.

Interest in cultural knowledge as made visible in the unfolding interactional process ties in with the idea of exploring knowledge as it is shared – recognised, accessed and distributed – rather than possessed or experienced as an internal cognitive construct. Knowledge sharing occurs in situations where there is a knowledge gap, i.e. one of the participants comes to be categorised as more knowledgeable at the given moment of the

unfolding conversation, and his or her specific knowledge is identified and accessed to address an issue that has emerged in interaction (Sole & Edmondson, 2002). Cultural knowledge sharing can thus be systematically explored by analysing interactional episodes where the participants make visible their assumptions about the asymmetries in their cultural knowing through introducing categorisation as ‘cultural knower’ and ‘not knower’ for each other.

Such categorisation process can be approached with the tools of MCA (e.g. Sacks, 1986; see also e.g. Lepper, 2000; Silverman, 1998). As a form of ethnomethodological inquiry, MCA is dedicated to explicating the ordinary, practical and commonsensical reasoning that people apply as they categorise themselves and others as different kinds of members of society, and how they use this categorisation in mutually recognisable ways as an interactional resource. MCA starts with a premise that persons can be classified with a number of different labels, termed membership categories, rendering them as being of some kind. Membership categories are inference-rich because there are specific normative expectations about their characteristics, or predicates, attached to them. These predicates entail behaviours (or category-bound activities), rights, responsibilities, values, social ties and distinct knowledge. ‘Cultural knower’ is a membership category describing someone who has specific cultural and linguistic expertise and competences. An incumbent of this category could be assumed to speak the language fluently or be expected to help out in situations when knowledge of some ‘basic cultural facts’ is needed.

As the interaction develops, the participants may select and make salient specific membership categories for themselves and the others. One way of introducing categorisation is through naming of the category. Categorisation may also be accomplished by an inference drawn from a reference to, or performance of, the category’s predicate (Busch, 2010), such as when a participant is asked to or offers to act as a translator. There are multiple correct membership categories that persons in interaction can use to describe one another. Contrary to mainstream intercultural communication research that treats cultural difference as a constant interactional feature in encounters between persons with different cultural backgrounds, researchers working from ethnomethodological perspectives have been able to demonstrate that interactants may only sometimes categorise each other as culturally different, thus making their interaction momentarily intercultural (e.g. Bolden, 2014).

In specific interactional situations some membership categories may be used and heard as commonsensically ‘going together’ to form larger collections, called membership categorisation devices. These can take the shape of standardised relational pairs which are pairs of categories whose complementary predicates bind them together with mutual rights and obligations. ‘Cultural knower – not knower’ is such a category collection built around the unequal distribution of cultural knowledge. It is talked into being as the potential asymmetry in the participants’ cultural knowledge is made visible and consequential for the interaction. Since ‘cultural knower – not knower’ belong together as a standardised relational pair, deployment of either category in the unfolding interaction makes the other one discursively relevant. By way of illustration, when one of the participants enacts her lack of expertise vis-à-vis the other by requesting help to resolve a language-based problem, she assumes the membership category of ‘cultural not knower’ simultaneously nominating the other as ‘cultural knower’, thereby mobilising the standardised relational pair ‘cultural knower – not knower’.

This study is guided by the following *research question*: How do the team members share cultural knowledge in their unfolding chat conversations through mobilising category collections ‘cultural knower – not knower’?

Research setting

Participants

This study draws on records of interactions of a four-member team embedded in a Finnish organisation, and dispersed in Finland and Russia. The team's main responsibility was to promote the internationalisation of Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises onto Russian markets. Once approached by a Finnish client company, they worked with them to prepare and guide them as they entered Russia. This entailed such activities as conducting market research, translating promotional materials, approaching possible Russian partners, organising and facilitating business negotiations between the two parties (anything from handling travel arrangements, through booking locations, to interpreting). The team also organised and participated in other networking events and projects that brought together Finnish and Russian businesses and other stakeholders. Needless to say, sharing cultural knowledge was potentially highly relevant in the team's interactions.

'Anu' and 'Elina' were co-located in the organisation's central office in Finland. They were native speakers of Finnish and speakers of Russian as a second language. 'Irina' and 'Galina' worked in the organisation's representative office in Russia, and spoke Russian as their first language and Finnish as their second language. Towards the end of the data gathering period, Anu joined Irina and Galina in the Russian office. The team was significantly stable; in 2013, two team members had been working together for over 15 years, with the third member having joined 8 years, and the most recent one – 3 years before. Anu, Elina, Irina and Galina met face-to-face approximately once a month and relied predominantly on technology for everyday interaction, mostly email, Skype™ chat and video-calling, and Google Drive™.

Data

The data used in this study consist of log files of the team's Skype™ chat conversations. Chatting appeared to be employed for a range of everyday team interactions such as managing and debriefing tasks, relaying information to and from other team members, other colleagues in the organisation, partners and clients, giving support and feedback, non-work related conversations, attending to problems with other communication channels and coordinating availability for interaction. The chat conversations analysed spanned approximately 6 months, from March to September 2013, and consisted of 127 pages of single-spaced text. Access was gained to interactions that had taken place months before the participants became aware of the research project, which significantly reduced concerns of researcher intervention and strengthened data reliability (Silverman, 2011). Conversations conducted between five pairs of user accounts were obtained (the two Russia-based members did not use chat to communicate with each other). Some of the chatting was conducted in Finnish (Anu – Elina, Anu – Galina, Elina – Galina), and some in both Finnish and Russian, where the participants used their respective mother tongues (Anu – Irina, Elina – Irina). For the purpose of analysis, the Russian turns were translated into Finnish by a professional translator. The English translations of the excerpts presented in this article were provided by the author.

Data analysis

MCA analysis extends beyond content analysis-style listing of categories employed in the data. It builds on a sequential analysis of situated talk to demonstrate that the activities of categorisation are seen as intelligible and consequential by the participants themselves (see

also Schegloff, 2007; Stokoe, 2012). I first went through the data to identify interactional episodes where the team members mobilised the category collection ‘cultural knower – not knower’ by making one of the participants’ knowledge about some location-specific group-based meanings, symbols and practices visible and situationally relevant. The participants did not directly name these membership categories; categorisation was accomplished through references to category predicates and performances of category-bound activities (e.g. ‘not knowers’ seeking cultural knowledge through posing questions, ‘cultural knowers’ providing explanations or comments drawing on their cultural knowledge). The participants made salient knowledge related to language, organisational, institutional, social and national practices, preferences, symbols and interpretations.

In the second stage of the analysis, I paid attention to how the categorisation of ‘cultural knower – not knower’ was introduced, oriented to and followed upon in interaction. I noticed patterns in performances of category-bound activities (who initiated the categorisation, how and why; how it was oriented to by the other participant) as well as in references to other category predicates (concerning ‘cultural knower’s’ responsibility to share knowledge and her implied relationship to the cultural group about which she was being knowledgeable). It appeared that the category collection ‘cultural knower – not knower’ was accomplished in different systematic ways. I identified four recurring collections deployed in sharing cultural knowledge: (1) ‘consultation giver – recipient’, (2) ‘review giver – recipient’, (3) ‘interpretation giver – recipient’, and (4) ‘clarification giver – recipient’. I also identified deviant cases that I investigated to refine and strengthen the analysis (Silverman, 2011).

Findings

The category collections (1) ‘consultation giver – recipient’, (2) ‘review giver – recipient’, (3) ‘interpretation giver – recipient’ and (4) ‘clarification giver – recipient’ embodied different ways of cultural knowledge sharing. The first two collections were mobilised to share cultural knowledge with relation to managing team activities, distributing work and completing tasks. The other two were introduced as the participants attended to building shared understanding in the unfolding interaction. Table 1 presents a tabulation of the identified category collections to illustrate how frequent they were in the data corpus. ‘Consultation giver – recipient’ was by far the most preponderant; together with ‘review giver – recipient’, these task-centred category pairs were invoked to frame 77% of all interactional episodes in the data corpus where cultural knowledge was shared.

Table 1 Category collections mobilised in sharing cultural knowledge

Category collection	Number	%
‘Consultation giver – recipient’	63	71
‘Review giver – recipient’	5	6
‘Interpretation giver – recipient’	12	13
‘Clarification giver – recipient’	9	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>100</i>

‘Consultation giver – recipient’

This most frequently mobilised collection was introduced as one of the participants assumed the status of ‘cultural not knower’ by seeking cultural consultation from the other through issuing a request for information, advice, guidance or a favour utilising her specific cultural expertise and competencies. In such exchanges, cultural knowledge was instrumentalised as

the consultation sought was presented as consequential for completing an organisational task. Having access to the relevant knowledge domain and being under the obligation to help resolve a task-related problem was a predicate that implicated the other's category membership as 'cultural consultant'. In the majority of cases, the other participant took steps to align herself with this description by issuing a response, or consultation, thus sharing cultural knowledge. It is noteworthy that within this category collection membership in the specific cultural group was not required for a participant to become 'cultural consultant'.

Category collection 'consultation giver – recipient' was often introduced with fairly straightforward requests to which short responses were provided. I describe these instances of knowledge sharing as exploitative in the sense that their aim was to quickly access the other's knowledge base to address a practical problem rather than develop new applications or create new solutions (see also Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006), as in the following extract:

Excerpt 1

- [9:07:28] Elina: Huomenta!
'Good morning!'
- [9:09:23] Elina: Mikä voisi olla otsikko [venäläisen asiakkaan] kirjeessä?
'What could be the subject line in the email to [the Russian client]?''
- [9:10:09] Elina: Приглашения и просьба?
'Invitation and request?'
- [9:11:54] Galina: Huomenta, minusta tutuntuu että pyynnöstä ei tarvitse mainita. Kirjoita vaan [событие]
'Good morning, I don't think you need to mention the request. Just write [the event]'
- [9:12:38] Elina: ОК.
'OK.'

In this example, Elina initiates interaction with Galina and seeks her opinion on a suitable subject line in an email she is writing in Russian to a Russian client. She thus introduces the categorisation 'consultation recipient' for herself and 'consultation giver' for Galina, recognising her colleague's expertise in the Russian language and Russian business correspondence. Elina takes one more turn where she offers her own idea for a possible subject line for Galina to comment on. While she maintains the 'consultation recipient – consultation giver' categorisation, she also displays that she is not completely novice but has some access to the relevant knowledge domain as she uses Russian as her second language at work. In what follows, Galina aligns herself with membership category 'cultural consultant' by providing a reply where she dismisses Elina's suggestion and provides one of her own. In her brief follow up turn, Elina accepts the recommendation reconfirming Galina's superior knower position.

Also more exploratory knowledge sharing took place within this category pairing where the participant categorised as 'consultation giver' was asked more complex and often open-ended questions that prompted her to develop on her knowledge base to create new applications (see also Gupta et al., 2006). The conversation presented below took place after Anu had left Finland to work in the Russian office. Although the log file shows the interaction as taking place between Elina and Anu, it transpires from Anu's turns that Galina and Irina are in the same room with her and are actively participating in the conversation.

Excerpt 2

- [14:09:34] Anu: Galina ja Irina tekevät huomiseksi esitystä naisyrityksille ja nyt kysyivät keitä venäläisiä naisia suomalaiset tuntevat????
‘Galina and Irina are preparing tomorrow’s presentation for women entrepreneurs and they’ve just asked which famous Russian women Finns know?????’
- [14:09:57] Elina: alla bugatseva
‘alla bugatseva’
- [14:10:06] Anu: mulle ei tullut mieleen, kuin Alla Pugatsova, se tennispelaaja en edes muista nimiä
‘I couldn’t think of anyone else but Alla Pugatsova, that tennis player I don’t even remember her name’
- [14:10:21] Elina: niin se tennispelaaja...tai miehet tietää sen :)
‘oh yes the tennis player... well, men will probably know her :)’
- [14:10:26] Anu: Anna Ahmattova
‘Anna Ahmattova’
- [14:10:34] Elina: oisko presidentin vaimot
‘what about presidential wives’
- [14:10:46] Elina: tuota ahmatovaa ei tiedä muut ku venäjän opiskelijat
‘only students of Russian know ahmattova’
- [14:10:55] Elina: ja se tapettu lehdistön edustaja
‘and that assassinated reporter’
- [14:11:28] Elina: ja se lesbo tyttöbändi
‘and that lesbian girlband’
- [14:11:34] Anu: joo tuosta innostuivat
‘yeah they liked that one’
- [14:13:25] Elina: yleensäkin naisurheilijat tiedetään
‘female athletes are usually recognised’
- [14:13:58] Anu: saivat jo tarpeeksi.
‘they’ve got enough already.’

In the opening turn, Anu gives an account of what is happening in the Russian office: Galina and Irina are preparing a presentation that they are going to give at an event for female Russian entrepreneurs. They need information about which famous Russian women are recognised in Finland. Their request is made visible as Anu reports it to Elina. By issuing the request, Irina and Galina enact their co-membership in category ‘consultation recipient’ and invoke a collectivity of ‘consultation givers’ for Anu and Elina. The request is quite complex as it requires Anu and Elina to produce knowledge about Finns’ knowledge about Russian politics, history, popular events, arts etc. Indeed, Anu provides a comment on the difficulty of the task as she finishes her turn with five question marks. In what follows, Elina and Anu align themselves along the expertise lines by offering names of famous Russian women potentially known to the Finnish public. Their turns are only seconds apart, which implies that they are working on their contributions simultaneously. As celebrities are listed, Anu relays them to Galina and Irina, and reports back on their reaction. It is notable that Elina narrows down the category-bound activity of knowing the Russian female celebrities whose names are mentioned in this brainstorming session to specific subcategories of category ‘Finns’ (‘oh yes the tennis player... well, men will probably know her :), ‘only students of Russian know ahmattova’). She therefore reflects her and Anu’s knowledge of female Russian celebrities against her knowledge about what different sub-groups of the Finnish society might know. This is an example of an exploratory knowledge developing activity. It also illustrates how the national category ‘Finns’ initially introduced by Irina and Galina is challenged for being too broad. Also of notice in this excerpt is that there is no straightforward relationship between incumbency of ‘cultural consultant’ category and membership of the specific cultural group. Through displaying her knowledge about

subgroups she is not member of (as in ‘Finnish men’), Elina positions herself as an outside expert on the different segments of the Finnish society.

Revoking and redefining categorisation

In the vast majority of cases, category collection ‘consultation giver – recipient’ was routinely deployed. A request that recognised the other’s cultural expertise triggered self-categorisation as ‘consultation recipient’ and implied its pair membership category ‘consultation giver’ that was promptly aligned with by the other participant(s). However, I also identified instances of variation in how the category collection was deployed. The first type of variation occurred when the participant who had initially categorised herself as ‘consultation recipient’ revoked the categorisation by posting another turn where she cancelled the original request for help stating or demonstrating that she had been able to solve the problem herself. In the other type of variation, the participant categorised as ‘cultural consultant’ displayed reluctance to issue a response acknowledging the limitations to her knowing, thus redefining the boundaries of her cultural expertise (see Table 2 for tabulation). These cases confirm the earlier observation that in this category collection it was not necessary for the cultural knower to be a member of the specific cultural group. Although the sharing of cultural knowledge was constructed as instrumental and the status of ‘consultation giver’ entailed the responsibility to share knowledge, there was a degree of openness, and leeway for negotiation, about one’s access to a specific knowledge domain. One could claim epistemic rights to a body of cultural knowledge without having insider experience of the specific cultural group; conversely, being member of the group did not automatically make one knowledgeable about all the aspects of the group’s life.

Table 2 Variation within category collection ‘consultation giver – recipient’

Consultation giver – recipient	Number	%
Accepting categorisation	54	86
Revoking categorisation	7	11
Redefining categorisation	2	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>63</i>	<i>100</i>

The following excerpt illustrates how categorisation is both revoked and redefined. It comes after an eight-turn sequence in which categorisation ‘consultation giver – recipient’ is routinely accomplished as Elina asks questions and Galina provides responses concerning a Russian text received from a client that Elina is translating into Finnish. A hitch occurs as Elina produces another question, this time about the meaning of an abbreviation (‘OY’) in the Russian text:

Excerpt 3

- [10:28:32] Elina: kohta Какие контролирующие органы могут проводить проверки в ОУ и на каких основаниях?
‘section Какие контролирующие органы могут проводить проверки в ОУ и на каких основаниях?’
- [10:28:49] Elina: mitä tuo OY tässä kohtaa tarkoittaa?
‘what does this OY mean here?’
- [10:33:58] Galina: Kysyn [tekstin kirjoittajalta]
‘I’ll ask [the author of the text]’

- [10:34:44] Elina: kiitos :)
‘thank you :)’
- [10:35:33] Elina: voisiko se olla образовательное учреждение?
‘could it be образовательное учреждение [educational institution]?’
- [10:36:09] Galina: Se voi olla, minäkin ajattelin että se on se.
‘It could, I thought of it too.’
- [10:36:31] Elina: Ю(
‘Ю(‘
- [10:36:39] Elina: siis :)
‘I meant :)’
- [10:37:23] Galina: Ehdin jo lähettää kysymyksen [tekstin kirjoittajalle]. Tarkistetaan omaa älykyyttä
‘I’ve already sent the question to [the author of the text]. Let’s test our intelligence.’
- [10:39:45] Elina: hyvä
‘good’

Instead of providing an answer consistently with the preceding turns, Galina responds by saying that she will turn for help to the author of the text. By refraining from issuing an answer and indicating someone else as a more expert knower, Galina acknowledges the limitations to her knowing position and redefines the boundaries of her cultural expertise. This redefinition is accepted by Elina (‘thank you:’). Although Galina is a native speaker of Russian, she is not expected to know the meaning of the abbreviation in this specific context of use. Interestingly enough, Elina takes one more turn where she herself tentatively provides an answer to her question (‘could it be [...]?’). She thus revokes the earlier categorisation of herself as ‘consultation recipient’ by demonstrating that she, too, has access to cultural knowledge as a speaker of Russian as a second language and as someone familiar with Russian institutions, possibly due to her work experience. Her new membership category is accepted by Galina who confirms the plausibility of the solution just contributed. Moreover, Galina goes on to redefine the boundaries of her cultural expertise again by saying that she thought of the same answer. Elina and Galina have thus repositioned themselves as co-members in membership category ‘cultural knower.’ The new alignment is confirmed as they concur on the idea of having their mutual knowledge tested by reflecting it against the text author’s forthcoming response.

‘Review giver – recipient’

This was the other category collection underlying the management of team activities, distribution of work, and performance of tasks. It was introduced as one participant assumed the status of ‘cultural knower’, or ‘review giver’, by critically reviewing a course of action just produced by the other participant through the lens of some vital cultural knowledge that only she had access to and that exposed the plan as in need of correction. Similar to the previous category collection, ‘review giver – recipient’ did not presume membership of the cultural group to be a prerequisite for cultural knowing.

In the following extract, Galina claims ‘cultural knower’ status to challenge the plans that Elina has made for her:

Excerpt 4

- [10:01:51] Elina: Onko sinulle kalenterissa vapaata 12.-13.6?
‘Are you busy on 12.-13.6?’
- [10:03:13] Galina: 13.6 on joku tilaisuus klo 17.00 [toimistotalolla], muuta ei ole.
‘On 13.6 at 17.00 there’s an event [in the office building], nothing else.’
- [10:03:43] Elina: ok, [henkilön nimi] tuo sinne yrityksiä ja minä ehdotan, jos sinä liityt mukaan

- porukkaan...
‘ok, [person’s name] is coming over with a business delegation and I’m going to offer that you join them...’
- [10:04:15] Galina: Ei... 12.6 on vapaa Venäjällä, kaikki on suljettu!
‘No... 12.6 is a bank holiday in Russia, everything’s closed!’
- [10:04:30] Elina: mikä juhla?
‘what holiday?’
- [10:04:50] Galina: VENÄJÄN ITSENÄISYYSPÄIVÄ!
‘RUSSIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY!’
- [10:05:09] Galina: Se on vapaa päivä
‘It’s a bank holiday’
- [10:05:35] Elina: ilmeisesti venäläinen osapuoli on kuitenkin tulossa paikalle... eli kuvaajakaan ei voisi osallistua?
‘apparently the Russian party is coming... so the photographer couldn’t participate either?’
- [10:06:36] Galina: Kuvaaja voi, mutta pitää täsmentää mikä ohjelma ja muistavatko venäläiset sen
‘The photographer could, but this schedule needs to be specified and confirmed with the Russians’
- [10:06:46] Elina: voitko kysyä vielä kuvaajalta? ettei tule yllätyksiä
‘could you confirm it with the photographer? so that there’s no surprises’
- [10:10:52] Galina: Ei vastaa nyt, luulen että hän on valmis, mutta täsmennän vielä. Tarvittaessa minäkin voin olla heidän kanssa mutta mikä ohjelma heillä on? Voi olla ongelmia muiden venäläisten kanssa.
‘[The photographer] is not answering, I think [s]he is ready to come but I’ll make sure. I could take care of them if needed but what plans do they have? There may be problems with other Russians.’

This exchange begins as Elina informs Galina that she has made plans for her to participate in hosting a business delegation from Finland. Categorisation ‘review giver – recipient’ is introduced as Galina shares an insight that compromises Elina’s plan. The visit has been scheduled for 12 June that happens to be Russian Independence Day and a bank holiday in Russia, which is something Elina apparently did not take into consideration when planning the event. Galina appears to be upset, as evidenced in her use of punctuation (‘No...,’ ‘everything’s closed!’), and capitalisation (‘RUSSIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY!’). Having had the plan critically reviewed, Elina issues questions about the implications of the overlap on people’s ability to participate in the event, thus aligning herself with the status of a not knowing ‘review recipient’. Galina produces two more critical comments that shed additional doubt on the feasibility of the plan (‘this schedule needs to be specified and confirmed with the Russians’, ‘There may be problems with other Russians’). It is notable that in the last turn Galina differentiates between categories ‘I’ and ‘other Russians’. While ‘other Russians’ are characterised by the predicate of possibly not being able to work on a Russian bank holiday, Galina reluctantly offers her availability. In this way, she problematises her own category membership as ‘Russian’, positioning herself as an unusual boundary spanning group member.



‘Interpretation giver – recipient’

This category collection concerns establishing shared understanding in unfolding interaction. It was mobilised as one of the participants’ ‘cultural knower’ status was made prominent as she spontaneously offered or was asked for an interpretation of a currently discussed issue drawing on her cultural assumptions, experiences and expectations. This way of sharing cultural knowledge was casual, occasioned by some other interaction, and it was not presented as consequential for managing teamwork and completing tasks. It also had a more informal and personal tone; categorisation as ‘interpretation giver’ implied one’s first-hand

experience as member of a particular cultural group. In this sense, this category pairing pivoted around imbuing situations faced by the team with personal experience from cultural groups. The surfacing of differences or making it explicit that one was embedded in a specific cultural context helped establish mutual knowledge of each other's reactions and interpretations of situations.

The following excerpt starts with categorisation 'consultation giver – recipient' as Elina asks Irina for an abridged version of a sentence in a Russian text about technology use practices in public sector organisations in Russia that Irina has authored. It is notable that although Elina and Irina are chatting in their respective mother tongues, this initial turn is the only brief moment where the bilingual character of the interaction is made salient:

Excerpt 5

- [13:41:02] Elina: mitä tarkoitat Здравоохранение, наука и образование – рынки, находящиеся в самом начале информатизации
'what do you mean in Здравоохранение, наука и образование – рынки, находящиеся в самом начале информатизации'
- [13:41:06] Elina: ?
'?'
- [13:50:20] Irina: Это значит, что пока что врачи, учителя работают без компьютеров. Они делают записи руками, на бумаге. У них почти нет компьютеров и они не умеют на них работать.
'It means that doctors and teachers still work without computers. They take notes by hand. They don't really have computers, nor do they know how to use them.'
- [13:50:58] Elina: huh huh...ja meillä on jo käytössä sähköiset reseptit :)
'wow...and we already use electronic prescriptions here :)'
- [13:52:03] Irina: Спроси Ану. Она сама была свидетель, как врач все долго писал в карточку, потом выписывал рецепт. Компьютерами и не пахнет! Но кое-где уже есть, все-таки!
'Ask Anu. She witnessed herself how a doctor took a while writing things by hand in a chart, and then wrote out a prescription. No computers within sight! But they've got to be somewhere!'
- [13:52:46] Elina: 

- [13:53:18] Elina: meillä vitsaillaan, että lääkärit eivät ehdi auttaa potilaita, kun heidän pitää käyttää tietokonetta :)
'we joke that doctors don't have enough time to treat patients as they have to use computers :)'

After Irina has confirmed her categorisation as 'consultation giver' by rendering the sentence in simpler terms, Elina claims membership in 'interpretation giver' category by producing a phatic and personal comment on the subject matter ('wow...and we already use electronic prescriptions here :)'). The way she begins her turn ('wow...and [...]') suggests that a contrasting perspective will be offered. Contrary to the previous two category collections, being categorised as 'cultural interpreter' implied one's membership or personal experience in the specific cultural group. This is evident in Elina's turn as she uses the pronouns 'we' and 'here'. Pronouns are indexicals or expressions whose meaning is in part dependent upon the features of the context of utterance (Lepper, 2000). Indexicals implicate categorisation work. Elina produces her turn as a commentary on the sentence about practices in Russian public sector organisations; it can therefore be inferred that 'we here' refers to people in

Finland, with Elina herself incumbent of this category. By sharing a comment about practices in Finland, she reveals her interpretation and reaction to the text: coming from Finland, she is surprised by the presented practices in Russian educational and health care institutions. In reaction to this, Irina points to and recounts Anu's first-hand experience of seeing a doctor in Russia where the doctor took notes and wrote the prescription out by hand, 'no computers within sight'. Relating the generalised statement to the personal experience of someone they both know supports the credibility of Irina's text and consolidates her position as a 'cultural consultant'. Since Anu is member of the same category 'people in Finland' as Elina, telling the narrative of her health care encounter in Russia also serves to indicate that Irina recognises and validates the 'Finnish interpretation' that Elina has just shared. Elina reacts to Irina's turn by issuing a token of appreciation with a 'rolling on the floor laughing' emoticon. She then provides another cultural interpretation on the subject matter by presenting a comment about people in Finland ridiculing the constraints introduced by the digitalisation of doctors' work. References to popular sayings and jokes serve as 'factual' evidence that authorises speakers' knowledge claims (Lepper, 2000). Elina shares insider knowledge about the general experience of being a patient in Finland. This comment can also be viewed as face-saving as it mitigates the polarised image of technology-related practices in Finland and Russia constructed earlier by emphasising similarities in the positioning of patients in the two countries. Both reliance technology and its lack can have a negative impact on patient care.

'Clarification giver – recipient'

This was the other category collection invoked in establishing shared understanding in unfolding interaction. Unlike category pair 'interpretation giver – recipient' where the sharing of cultural knowledge was casual and optional, clarification was necessitated by occasional breaks in immediate mutual understanding as the conversation developed. It pivoted on the mechanism of conversational repair (e.g. Silverman, 1998) through which a notion presented in one of the participant's turn was exposed as a novel culturally-signified item and its meaning was clarified to the other not knowing participant. This category collection could be introduced by the participant who was currently producing a turn as she herself displayed a presumption that some item that she had just used could be considered as problematic by the other, and provided an explanation or clarification of it. Categorisation could also be mobilised by the other participant who assumed a not knowing position by issuing a request for clarification. The mobilisation of this category collection evidences that the participants monitored own and the other's turns for potential sources of non-understanding. Categorisation as 'clarification giver' implied the given participant's personal experience in the specific cultural group. As the problem was attended to, the main activity was momentarily put on hold, and resumed once the item had been clarified.

The excerpt below starts with Elina making an announcement that she will not be available for computer-mediated interaction on the following day:

Excerpt 6

- [15:51:53] Elina: Meillä on huomenna kehittämisspäivä, joten olen poissa toimistolta. Minut saa kiinni puhelimella :)
'We have a development day ["kehittämisspäivä"] tomorrow so I'll be away from the office. I can be contacted by phone :)
- [15:54:50] Irina: На что похож этот kehittämisspäivä? Что вы там будете делать?
'What is this kehittämisspäivä? What do you do there?'
- [15:57:04] Elina: uutta [organisaation nimi] organisaatiota, joka tulivoimaan 1.9 :) Kehitämme palveluita, sisäisiä toimintapoja jne. 🤖

‘[our organization’s] new operational mode that came into force on 1.9 :) We develop services, internal procedures etc. 🤔’

[15:57:53] Irina: А, вот он про что! Ну ладно, иди. не волнуйся, мы тут справимся!

[15:58:26] Elina: **‘Oh, it’s about that! Anyway, don’t worry, we’ll be alright here!’**

soittakaa jo tuli hätä :)
‘call if there’s an emergency :)’

The reason for being away from the office provided by Elina (‘We have a development day [“kehittämispäivä”] tomorrow’) prompts Irina to introduce category collection ‘clarification giver – recipient’ as she asks what a development day denotes. By using the Finnish word ‘kehittämispäivä’ in her otherwise Russian utterance, she briefly orients to the interaction as bilingual and indicates that the novelty of the concept may stem from her inability to formulate its Russian language counterpart. The follow up question (‘What do you do there?’) mirrors Elina’s use of ‘we’ with plural ‘you’ but there is no indication of Irina knowing who the ‘you’ refers to, and therefore, who, and how, participates in development days. Elina’s response confirms the category collection mobilised by Irina as she elaborates on the problematic item as ‘event at the central office.’ she mentions such category-bound activities as discussing services and internal procedures, and the organisation’s name is given. By implication, the membership categories this collection comprises are the employees located at the central office. Since Elina is a central office employee, she has knower status about its practices. Irina, in turn, is an outsider and a not knower. Elina finishes her clarification with a ‘puke’ emoticon that downgrades the meaning of her utterance and indicates that the activities described should be read as a nuisance. Irina’s following confirmation (‘Oh, it’s about that!’) signals that she appreciates the clarification and that her understanding of the reasons for Elina being unavailable has been expanded. Her additional statement starting with ‘anyway’ terminates the category collection ‘clarification giver – recipient’ and puts the main activity back on track.

Discussion

This article describes the systematic commonsensical ways in which members of an internationally dispersed team shared cultural knowledge in their Skype™ chat interactions through mobilising categorisation as (1) ‘consultation giver – recipient’, (2) ‘review giver – recipient’, (3) ‘interpretation giver – recipient’ and (4) ‘clarification giver – recipient’. The study offers insights into the knowledge sharing processes of one team conducted in one communication channel. Its contribution lies in the use of naturally occurring data and an inductive interaction-centred method, rendering observations that do not correspond with the theoretical frameworks that have typically informed research in the area. Clearly more studies that draw on records of naturally occurring interactions of real working life teams are needed to expand our understanding of knowledge processes in internationally dispersed collaboration.

The dominant image of cultural team diversity presumes that asymmetries in cultural and linguistic knowledge are an omnipresent feature of the interactional backdrop. The data discussed in the study show the contingent, moment-by-moment and collaborative character of knowledge processes. Although sharing cultural knowledge was important for the completion of tasks and maintenance of mutual understanding, my participants did not always orient to possible differences in their cultural knowing, and did not automatically construe their chat conversations as intercultural. The chat medium was used to accomplish a variety of activities and, depending on the local context, category collections that mobilised cultural knowledge gaps were occasionally talked into (and out of) being. It is remarkable that even when the team members chatted in their respective mother tongues, they often did not make their different linguistic memberships visibly relevant. The team’s language

practices that defy the traditional idea of distinct speech communities could be explored in more depth with concepts such as metrolingualism, multilanguaging and lingua receptiva (e.g. Lüdi, 2013; Otsuji & Pennycook, 2010).

The findings do not support the prevalent ‘double-edged sword’ understanding of the relationship between cultural diversity and team interactions. The chat conversations I analysed were neither fraught with cultural misunderstandings and conflict, nor brimming with cultural synergy and innovation. Reliance on communication technologies has been blamed for constraining spontaneous informal interactions among team members (e.g. Berry, 2011; Sole & Edmondson, 2002). Researchers have claimed that members of dispersed teams fail to share knowledge about their local situations (e.g. Cramton, 2001) and that they may intentionally refrain from interacting with distant team members whom they perceive to be culturally different (e.g. Cramton & Hinds, 2005). The participants of my study, however, displayed interactional commitment and concern for monitoring mutual understanding and, where necessary, made active efforts to build awareness of one another’s perspective through mobilising category collections ‘interpretation giver – recipient’ and ‘clarification giver – recipient’. The relative infrequency of these category pairings should be considered in the light of the fact that the team shared a working history and oriented towards the future together; they had developed fairly close interpersonal bonds and a store of common knowledge to fall back on – all through mostly technology-mediated interaction.

The most popular category collection ‘consultation giver – recipient’ was mobilised to quickly access the other’s knowledge base to deal with a task-related issue. The team members appeared to know who knew what and had established routines for knowledge sharing enabling the efficient division and accomplishment of tasks. I found no examples of situations where the participants occupying different cultural knowing positions would disclose and creatively combine their *respective* knowledge domains in innovative or synergistic ways to create new alternatives and perspectives (see also Gupta et al., 2006). While the chat medium may privilege specific knowledge-sharing practices over others (see also Erhardt & Gibbs, 2008), this observation is nevertheless significant since the team’s activities explicitly concerned cultural exchange. The finding contradicts the popular theoretical expectations about knowledge work in internationally dispersed teams, encouraging a thought that the lived reality of such collaboration may be more mundane than it is often assumed. Cultural synergy, innovation and intercultural learning in organisational contexts are knowledge construction processes that require more systematic, qualitative and situated, empirical investigations.

Existing research into internationally distributed teaming has tended to presume that there is a ‘natural’ and enduring connection between team members’ national/ethnic background and their cultural knowledge. In my study, the participants often made national-level practices, symbols and meanings relevant. However, these categories did not exist on their own (see also Dervin, 2014). For instance, patient care practices in Russia or Finland are affected by access to technological and economic resources. Cultural knowledge did not appear to have an exclusive relationship with nation/ethnicity but was fashioned also with reference to linguistic proficiency, and business, organisational, social or institutional contexts. Just as nation was made salient, it was also problematised as in the excerpt where Elina matches familiarity with specific famous Russian women to different subgroups of the Finnish society. Furthermore, the team allowed flexibility, permeable boundaries and joint access to cultural knowledge domains. The participants’ cultural knowing did not have a straightforward relationship to, and it extended beyond, their national backgrounds. This observation illustrates the fallacy of the traditional thinking that ties people’s cultural knowing to physical place. My participants drew their epistemic resources from their multiple group memberships, educational backgrounds, travel, media consumption, and their shared

experience of internationalisation work enabled through modern communication technologies. Taken together, the team's flexible accomplishments of cultural knowing evidence their ability to jointly build and maintain their shared reality through both 'being diverse' and 'being similar'. This can be regarded as a highly important form of the team's shared communication competence (see also Stokoe, 2010).

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland within the research project Interpersonal Communication Competence in Virtual Teams [138186], and the Finnish Cultural Foundation. The present article is part of the author's doctoral dissertation under preparation supervised by Professor Maarit Valo at the Department of Communication, University of Jyväskylä. The author wishes to express her gratitude to Dr Margarethe Olbertz-Siitonen for her support and invaluable comments on ethnomethodological inquiry.

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