

Eerika Hedman

Facilitating Leadership Team Communication



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Eerika Hedman

Facilitating Leadership Team Communication

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"Well-formed coordinations are collaborative artistic achievements."
W. Barnett Pearce

ABSTRACT

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Finnish summary

The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how to facilitate competent communication in leadership teamwork. Grounded in the premises of social constructionism and informed by such theoretical frameworks as coordinated management of meaning theory (CMM), dialogic organization development (OD), systemic-constructionist leadership, communication competence, and reflexivity, this study seeks to produce further insights into understanding leadership team communication, communication competence, and team facilitation as applied communication research. This study consists of five articles. The first focuses on the theoretical framing of the relationality of communication competence in the context of organization development. The second article presents the first empirical dataset from thematic interviews with leadership team members and describes the typical communication challenges leadership teams face. The third article presents the second dataset on a participatory action research process conducted as a development program for a top leadership team at a manufacturing company. This article focuses on explaining and describing the facilitation process which promoted team reflexivity. The fourth article takes an applied theoretical perspective to show how CMM theory can be used as a practical method for facilitating leadership team communication. The fifth article demonstrates the practical value of the study by presenting a Leadership Team Tool built on the theoretical underpinnings of communication as meaning making and designed for the context of leadership teamwork. The findings suggest that leadership teams face various complex communication challenges, and to deal with these challenges and further build competent communication patterns, it is important that leadership teams develop reflective practice and reflexivity within their core processes. Competent communication and reflexivity can be developed through facilitation grounded in the emerging discourses and communication patterns of the social system. This insight should be taken into consideration in addition to more traditional communication-development programs which too often are based on fixed, individual-based definitions of communication competence.

Keywords: communication competence, coordinated management of meaning, dialogic organization development, interpersonal communication, leadership team, reflexivity, small groups, team facilitation, workplace communication

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FOREWORD

This journey begins with the story of a little girl who quite early in life became curious about the mysteries of human communication. The wonders of why something becomes misunderstood, why people say certain things to each other, and why making small changes in the way you respond to others is sometimes so difficult continue to arouse my curiosity. That is the beauty of communication—there is always more to the story, and new things can be discovered and learned, while at the same time, many things remain mysteries.

For me, communication is foremost about growing as a human being. In a way, my doctoral studies have not only been about learning to do research or gaining understanding of leadership teams but, most importantly, about developing new ways of seeing myself and the social worlds of which I am part. As we never grow in isolation, I would like to recognize and acknowledge the various conversations, relationships, and organizations that have made this journey possible.

First, I am forever grateful to my research participants. The individual leadership team members whom I interviewed and the leadership team who took a chance and began a nine-month development journey with me, you have been great. I am truly humbled by the trust and respect you have given me.

This study was funded by the Finnish Work Environment Fund, Jenny and Antti Wihuri Foundation, and Faculty of Humanities of the University of Jyväskylä. Thank you for making it possible for me to fully focus on my studies. I would also like to express thanks for the mobility grant from the University of Jyväskylä. It enabled me to spend a valuable two months as a visiting scholar at Texas A&M University, which gave the necessary flow for this thesis.

I am grateful for the excellent, professional supervision I have received throughout my doctoral studies. I am thankful for Professor Maarit Valo, my supervisor, whose encouragement and support have made this journey not only painless but also very enjoyable. I thank you for sharing your wisdom and for holding my hand when I needed it. I would also like to thank Senior Lecturer Tarja Valkonen, who first encouraged me to start doctoral studies. Another thank you goes to Dr. J. Kevin Barge, who provided his insights and supervision when I was at Texas A&M University.

Docent Anu Sivunen and Docent Mikko Luoma reviewed this doctoral thesis. I am grateful for your thoughtful comments and constructive feedback, which further improved this thesis.

I would like to thank the wonderful people in my academic home in the Speech Communication unit in the Department of Communication. My fellow doctoral students, I thank you for making me feel that I am not alone in this journey. As someone who has been working remotely in another country, it has been so important to feel welcome whenever we have met, whether it was in the doctoral seminars or conferences. I cherished those moments not only from a learning perspective but also from a personal perspective. Sometimes, all one needs is a good conversation and a glass of port wine.

I would like to extend my gratitude to my colleagues and friends in the world of practice. In particular, Jukka-Pekka Heikkilä, Olli-Pekka Juoperi, Hellevi Kojo, Martin Little, Ilkka Mäkitalo, Christine Oliver, Annika Ranta, Vesa Purokuru, Anneli Tuura, and Eeva-Liisa Vihinen, you have been my conversation partners and sounding boards throughout this journey. Thank you for your encouragement and curiosity. I would also like to thank the lovely colleagues in the CMM Institute for Personal and Social Evolution, in particular, Marit Eikaas Haavimb, Sergej van Middendorp, Jesse Sostrin, and Ilene Wasserman. I thank you for many transformative conversations.

I feel blessed that I have many dear friends and loved ones. Thank you for just being there and discussing everything else but my doctoral studies.

This journey could not have arrived at this point without the valuable tools given to me when I was growing up and learning to live in various social worlds. I thank my parents Tarja and Jari and my brothers Eetu and Aleksi for always encouraging me to explore the world and to appreciate differences.

Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge the dearest one of all. Ian, your love and support throughout this process have been beyond words. You are the best.

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LIST OF ORIGINAL ARTICLES

- I. Hedman, E. & Valkonen, T. 2013. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus ja työyhteisön kehittäminen. Työelämän tutkimuspäivien konferenssijulkaisu: 4/2013. University of Tampere, 1-13.
- II. Hedman, E. & Valo, M. 2015. Communication challenges facing management teams. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 36 (8), 1012-1024. doi: 10.1108/LODJ-04-2014-0074
- III. Hedman, E. & Barge, J. K. Facilitating leadership team reflexivity through participatory action research. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- IV. Hedman, E. & Gesch-Karamanlidis, E. 2015. Facilitating conversations that matter using coordinated management of meaning theory. *OD Practitioner* 47 (2), 41-46.
- V. Hedman, E. The Leadership Team Tool for better meaning making: A communication perspective for developing leadership teams. Manuscript submitted for publication.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and rationale of the study

Communication is at the heart of leadership teamwork. Leadership teams make decisions that have long-lasting impacts on the future of their organizations. The quality of these decisions and subsequent actions are, to a large extent, dependent on the quality of the communication among leadership team members. Indeed, communication matters, and therefore, it is not surprising that many communication scholars have been interested in examining what is considered competent communication and what conditions are needed to enable it.

This study explores leadership team communication. In particular, I am interested in exploring the question of how to facilitate competent communication in the context of leadership teamwork. Studying leadership team communication opens the door to better understand how organizations are managed and led (Zorn & Tompson 2002). Leadership teams often operate in contexts characterized by power, complexity, contradictory expectations, and the need for individual achievement. These settings pose multiple challenges to competent leadership team communication. Although leadership teams have been studied from different approaches, leadership team research is a relatively new field of study (Menz 2012). Leadership team communication has remained surprisingly under-studied given the impact of leadership teams in their respective organizations.

Most leadership team research conducted so far has focused on investigating the relationship between team composition and organizational performance. However, present organizational challenges lie in the interfaces and relationships between people and teams, not within individual people (Hawkins 2014). Studies in leadership have been colored by an overemphasis on individual leaders (Alvesson & Svenigsson 2004), and consequently, many interventions and development activities focus on developing individual skills and abilities rather than the relational processes between people. On this basis, leadership teams can be seen as relational systems which are under constant co-

construction by the team members and in relation to others within the organization, as the bona-fide group perspective suggests (Putnam *et al.* 2012).

Recent approaches in organization and leadership studies have begun to foreground communication as the fundamental process by which organizations, teams, and relationships are created and negotiated in the social arrangements and communicative activities of an organization's members. This focus is due to the many communication scholars who have drawn attention to the issue and succeeded in injecting communication into the agenda of organization and leadership studies (e.g., Barge 2004, 2012; Barge & Fairhurst 2008; Cooren *et al.* 2011, 2015; Deetz 2001; Fairhurst 2007; Fairhurst & Putnam 2004; Grant *et al.* 2011).

This study begins with the assumption that the quality of communication among leadership team members is the key to successful leadership teamwork. In this study, competent communication is regarded as situated in the relational and contextual activities of leadership team members. Hence, what is understood by such terms as "quality," "good," and "competent" communication is dependent on the unique, subjective meanings the leadership team members construct. Here, communication competence is based on the ideas presented by Pearce (2008) and Barge (2014) and is understood as a relational, team-level construct that emerges from communication processes. The concept of relational communication in the team context has been used to distinguish task-related communication from emotional messages (Keyton 1999). In this study, however, relationality refers to the broader concept that human activity, by its very nature, is relational (Gergen 2015). Although relationality has been part of definitions of communication competence, the concept has not been extensively discussed in the context of teams or organization development (OD).

In addition, this study puts the emphasis on *reflexivity* as a key component of communication competence. To create conditions for competent communication, leadership teams must develop reflexivity, which refers to team members' responsibility "regarding how the moves they make in conversation help create the very conversation in which they find themselves having to respond" (Barge 2012, p. 131). Although a growing number of studies has investigated team reflexivity, this research has mostly been quantitative and focused on measuring the connection between reflexivity and team performance. More qualitative research on the process of the social construction of team reflexivity is needed, especially within the leadership team context.

To build a rigorous theoretical framework, this study uses various approaches in communication, organization, and leadership studies that share social constructionist premises. Through this crosspollination of theoretical approaches, this study is aimed at contributing to several fields of study. For example, leadership teams have rarely been studied from the perspectives of group and interpersonal communication, and in group communication research, there have been few studies on leadership teams. As well, the combination of group communication theory and OD has not been extensively explored. The study is aimed at contributing to the theoretical debates in these fields.

In this study, I am interested in exploring the phenomena of leadership team communication by inquiring into the experiences of leadership team members and immersing myself in the naturally occurring communication processes that occur during leadership team meetings. The study data consist of two empirical datasets, one based on interviews with members of different leadership teams and the other gathered in a participatory action research process with a top leadership team. The study can be located at the intersections of applied communication, group communication, and interpersonal communication research (see, for example, Lindlof & Taylor 2011).

The present study uses the perspective of participatory action research. Scholars in applied communication have been increasingly concerned about the relevance of theory and research (Barge & Schockley-Zalabak 2008). They argue that the theory-practice gap results from problems not in the transferability of research knowledge but in the ways that research is conducted. Frey (2009, p. 206), for example, encourages communication scholars to make a difference “not just from but through research.” The problem with conventional research is that researchers have spent little time with organizations, so they have not developed any understanding of contextual organizational challenges and have been cut off from the real issues. As well, thinking practically might not be a strength of researchers, so they cannot help participants in research understand how they can implement change (Heron & Reason 2004). In contrast, practitioners, such as consultants, are often focused on finding solutions rather than building the capabilities of organizational members (Massingham 2014).

Applied communication studies often take a collaborative approach to research; that is, it is seen as a joint process of diagnosing and resolving practical problems undertaken by the researcher and the research participants. A participatory action research setting is designed to integrate theory and practice for the benefit of research participants. These natural, authentic settings offer rich platforms for building and testing communication theories in practice (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). One such theory that can offer a valuable platform for applications during fieldwork is coordinated management of meaning (CMM) (Pearce & Cronen 1980). CMM is considered a pragmatic communication theory and in this study is used as a lens for defining communication competence and guiding the practical choices made during the study. CMM theory can point to interesting new paths for defining communication competence from relational and reflexive perspectives, as shown by such authors as Pearce (2008) and Barge (2014). Based on its practical nature, CMM theory could offer valuable approaches to explore how to develop and facilitate competent communication in practice, in this study, in the context of leadership teams.

Finally, this study was inspired by my experience as an external consultant. I have taught, facilitated, and consulted on communication matters with various groups for several years. Based on my experience, communication training often focuses on providing quick solutions or tools to handle challenging, sometimes difficult communication situations. These solutions are often based on the so-called transmission model of communication, and as a social

constructionist, I feel that there is more to be understood and explored. One of the biggest questions driving this study is how to conduct research based on communication as meaning making. By adopting the philosophical stance of social constructionism in this study, I do not hide my experience and pre-understanding of the research topic. Instead, I let my experience guide my choices throughout this study while aiming to develop a deeper understanding of leadership team communication.

1.2 The aims of the study

The aim of this study is *to understand and describe how to facilitate competent communication within leadership teams*. This study draws its ontological and epistemological premises from social constructionism. Social constructionism perceives reality as socially constructed, which simply means that, as we communicate, we create our sense of what reality is. Social constructionism frames communication as meaning making and points our attention to investigating how our social realities are created in communicative processes (Gergen 2015). Important to social constructionist research is the question of how constructions within a particular social system take place (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). This study seeks to understand how competent communication is created within leadership teamwork and how the construction of competent communication can be facilitated.

One important aspect of social constructionist research is participation. As knowledge is seen as socially and locally constructed, the researcher becomes a participant in creating knowledge. Rather than trying to remain an objective observer, the researcher is seen to intervene in and influence the social system. Consequently, it is important that researchers be aware of the choices they make and the factors that might guide their interpretations. Therefore, this study also follows the critical paradigm in the sense that theory and practice are not seen as separate but integrated. The critical paradigm stresses that researchers should engage in continuous, rigorous reflection upon the commitments they make to address the concrete needs of individuals and groups (Lindlof & Taylor 2011).

Based on social constructionist and critical premises, the present study follows hermeneutic and pragmatic research strategies (e.g., Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). The aim is not to reveal a single truth, as in positivist studies, but to acknowledge that there exist several subjective truths which can all be interpreted differently at different times. This study seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of leadership team communication based on locally constituted knowledge.

The aim of this study is divided into five research objectives. The first objective is to discuss communication competence from a relational perspective and in the context of OD. Although relationality has been included in conceptualizations of communication competence, it has rarely been described in terms

of interpersonal communication theories or in the context of OD. In this study, communication competence is perceived and defined as a relational rather than as an individual construct. The first objective forms the theoretical basis for this study and is explored in the first research question:

1. What does relationality mean in the contexts of communication competence and organization development?

The second objective is to examine what communication challenges leadership teams face as the basis for developing competent team communication. To understand how to facilitate communication competence, it is important to understand what factors might hinder competent communication behavior. In this study, the communication challenges are not part of the theoretical framework, although they form an important basis for better understanding competent leadership-team communication. The second objective is achieved with the help of the second research question based on the first set of empirical data:

2. What kinds of communication challenges do leadership teams face?

Third, the study is aimed at understanding how a facilitation process framed as participatory action research promotes the development of leadership team reflexivity. In this study, reflexivity is seen as the key component of communication competence, and facilitating leadership team reflexivity could enable leadership teams to develop more competent communication patterns. The study also describes the key moments that can contribute to the construction of leadership team reflexivity. This objective is achieved using the second empirical dataset gathered during a participatory action research process and guided by two research questions:

3. What key moments during the facilitation of leadership team communication promote leadership team reflexivity?
4. How does the facilitation of leadership team communication influence the construction of leadership team reflexivity?

Fourth, the study seeks to explore how CMM theory can be used as a facilitation method. The aim is not to validate the use of CMM theory or to investigate the degree to which application of the theory is successful but, rather, to demonstrate the use of CMM theory in practice. This objective leads to the fifth research question:

5. How can coordinated management of meaning theory be used as a practical theory to inform the facilitation of leadership team communication?

Finally, the fifth research objective of this study is to create a tool to facilitate competent communication within leadership teams. Translating the theoretical underpinnings and main findings of this study into a practical tool fulfills this

objective. The tool includes a set of questions about different contexts of leadership teamwork which aims to facilitate new forms of communication and meaning making within leadership teams. *The Leadership Team Tool* offers a concrete framework and structured process for both internal and external facilitators involved in developing leadership team communication.

1.3 Research phases and original articles

This study consists of five original articles and this present overview. The articles in the study focus on the facilitation of leadership team communication from theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives.

- I. Hedman, E. & Valkonen, T. 2013. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus ja työyhteisön kehittäminen. Työelämän tutkimuspäivien konferenssijulkaisu: 4/2013. University of Tampere, 1-13. (ref.)
- II. Hedman, E. & Valo, M. 2015. Communication challenges facing management teams. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 36 (8), 1012-1024. (ref.)
- III. Hedman, E. & Barge, J. K. (submitted manuscript). Facilitating leadership team reflexivity through participatory action research.
- IV. Hedman, E. & Gesch-Karamanlidis, E. 2015. Facilitating conversations that matter using coordinated management of meaning theory. *OD Practitioner* 47 (2), 41-46. (ref.)
- V. Hedman, E. (submitted manuscript). The Leadership Team Tool for better meaning making: A communication perspective for developing leadership teams.

This study can be described as a process with various phases leading to new insights and choices. The phases of this study are presented in Figure 1.

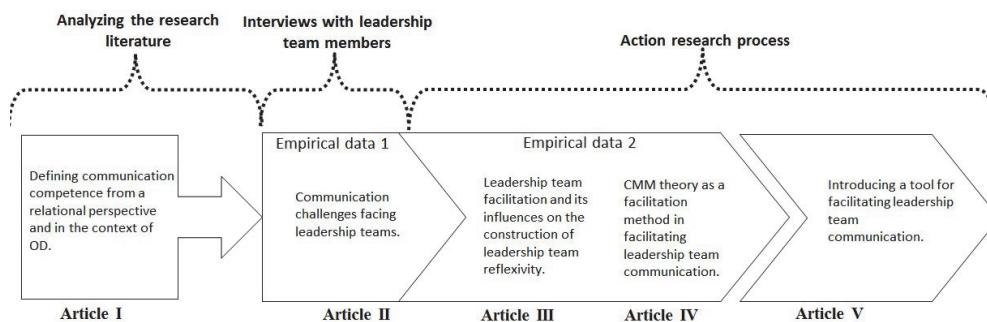


FIGURE 1 Research phases

The first co-authored article summarizes the theoretical basis for this study. I was responsible for analyzing the chosen interpersonal communication theories and writing the manuscript. The co-author participated throughout the writing process by commenting on the different versions of the article. She also made a significant contribution to defining communication competence in the article.

The second article presents the first empirical dataset gathered in this study and focuses on understanding what kinds of communication challenges leadership teams face. I gathered and analyzed the data and was responsible for writing the manuscript. The co-author participated in the data analysis and helped determine the focus of the article, including the research question.

The third co-authored article presents the second set of empirical data gathered for the study. I gathered and analyzed the data and was responsible for defining the focus of the article and writing it. The co-author contributed by helping with data analysis, commenting on the article at different stages, and editing the final version of the manuscript.

The fourth article describes an application of CMM theory as a facilitation method. As the first author, I was responsible for writing the article and presenting the practical examples and applications derived from the study's second set of empirical data. The co-author helped define the focus of the article and made important contributions to the theoretical framework and discussion.

Finally, the fifth article introduces a tool for facilitating leadership team communication that was developed based on the previous research phases.

Table 1 presents a summary of the articles and their relations to the research questions and the main concepts relevant for this study.

TABLE 1 Articles and their relation to the research questions and the main concepts

Articles included in the study	Research questions	Main concepts and frameworks
I Hedman, E. & Valkonen, T. 2013. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus ja työyhteisön kehittäminen. Työelämän tutkimuspäivien konferenssijulkaisu: 4/2013. University of Tampere, 1-13. (ref.)	1. What does relationality mean in the contexts of communication competence and organization development?	Communication competence Relationality Dialogic organization development
II Hedman, E. & Valo, M. 2015. Communication challenges facing management teams. Leadership & Organization Development Journal 36 (8), 1012-1024. (ref.)	2. What kinds of communication challenges do leadership teams face?	Communication competence Leadership team communication
III Hedman, E. & Barge, J. K. (submitted manuscript). Facilitating leadership team reflexivity through participatory action research.	3. What key moments during the facilitation of leadership team communication promote leadership team reflexivity? 4. How does the facilitation of leadership team communication influence the construction of leadership team reflexivity?	CMM theory Leadership team communication Participatory action research Reflexivity
IV Hedman, E. & Gesch-Karamanlidis, E. 2015. Facilitating conversations that matter using coordinated management of meaning theory. OD Practitioner 47 (2), 41-46. (ref.)	5. How can the coordinated management of meaning theory be used as a practical theory to inform the facilitation of leadership team communication?	CMM theory Dialogic organization development Leadership team communication Reflexivity
V Hedman, E. (submitted manuscript). The Leadership Team Tool for better meaning making: A communication perspective for developing leadership teams.		CMM theory Communication competence Dialogic organization development Leadership team communication Reflexivity

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I explain the theoretical background of the study. The study takes place at the intersections of several fields of study. As summarized in Figure 2, I approach the subject of the study—facilitating leadership team communication—from four theoretical angles. In Figure 2, the numbers represent the logic and order explaining the theoretical framework. First, leadership team communication combines two research traditions, group and team communication and leadership teams and leadership. Studies on leadership teams have rarely utilized group and team communication literature, although leadership team research has focused on typical group communication processes, such as decision making. Group and team communication sets the foundation for using previous research on leadership teams and leadership. These two different fields of research build the theoretical lens for viewing leadership team communication.

Second, the aim of the study is to understand how to facilitate competent communication, so the concepts of communication competence and reflexivity are central and placed at the top of the triangle in Figure 2. Here, communication competence and reflexivity are understood as team-level constructs that are relational, situational, and contextual. Finally, the study is conducted in the larger context of dialogic OD, taking the approach of CMM theory. Dialogic OD and CMM set the broader approach and mindset for this study and, thus, are illustrated as the foundation of the theoretical framework in Figure 2. In addition to their theoretical value, both frameworks also guided the methodological choices. They set the tone for the way in which this study was carried out in practice.

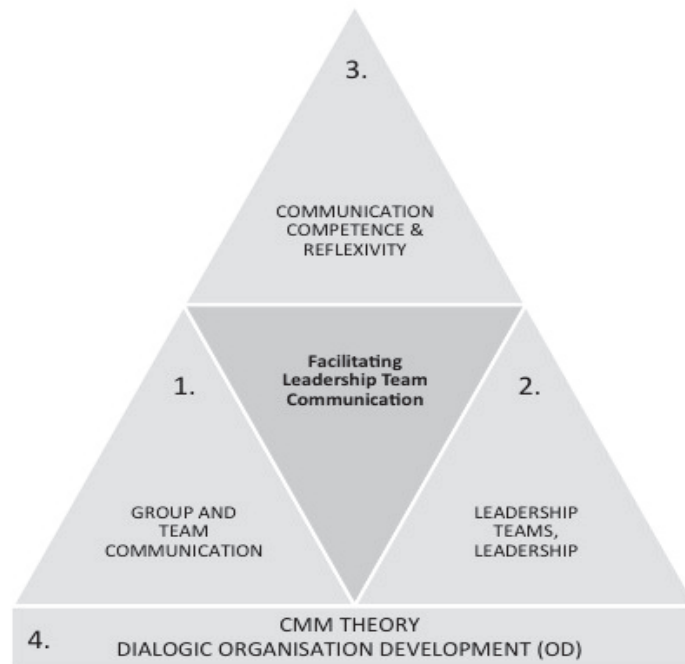


FIGURE 2 Theoretical framework of the study

2.1 Group and team communication in organizations

Group communication scholars have argued that groups and teams are fundamental units of organizations (Poole 1997, 2013). Beebe and Masterson (2000, p. 4) define small group communication as

interaction among a small group of people who share a common purpose or goal, who feel a sense of belonging to the group, and who exert influence on one another.

The use of group and team structures has been seen as a response to the growing complexity of work as one cannot rely on a single person's know-how anymore. Current work life is characterized by rapid changes, globalization, and the knowledge-based nature of work, which are all reflected in group- and teamwork in different ways. Similar reasons explain why leadership teams exist: organizations cannot rely on the know-how of sole leaders but must rely on groups of leaders.

Teamwork has been seen as a way to improve organizational performance and achieve goals (Wheelan & Furbur 2006) and as central to flattening organizational hierarchies (Minssen 2006). Moving to teamwork requires a re-orientation of coordination and communication. Although it is well documented that teams usually perform better than individuals, many teams find it diffi-

cult to perform effectively (Frey 2006). For instance, in research on information sharing in small groups, Bonito et al. (2008) concludes that group members do not always disclose the information they possess, which can have negative consequences for the quality of the decision making. The communication processes in groups influence members' decisions to participate and share information. The relationships between group members might affect what they feel they can say or do within a group (Littlejohn & Foss 2008). This is especially relevant in the context of leadership teams because knowledge sharing and decision making can be regarded as core processes of leadership teamwork.

The origins of group communication research lie in ideas to improve democracy. Group communication research focuses on group behavior, symbolic activity, and their nature and effects on group formation, dynamics, and dissolution. Group communication has been studied from different perspectives and theories, such as systems, function, symbolic constitutive, and structuration theories. Group communication scholars have tackled various methodological difficulties to studying group behavior on the collective and individual levels. For example, the development of interaction process analysis helped group scholars understand how one utterance can influence the next utterance (for an overview of group communication research, see Littlejohn & Foss 2009; Frey 2008).

This study takes the theoretical perspective of so-called bona-fide groups introduced by Putnam and Stohl (1990). They argue that the boundaries of groups are fluid and usually not given and that these characteristics should be the basis for group research. This perspective can be seen as a dramatic shift toward researching more natural groups because most previous group communication research has relied on investigating groups convened for the purpose of research. After introducing the perspective, Putnam (1994) later criticized the limited interpretation of it and pointed out that the bona-fide perspective is not only relevant to the study of natural groups as one type of group but is also an approach to group research in general. The bona-fide group perspective emphasizes that groups socially construct their boundaries and identities (Putnam *et al.* 2012). Groups, then, are seen to navigate multiple memberships and conflicting role identities while they form group identities (Putnam 1994).

Leadership teams are a good example of bona-fide groups because leadership team members often possess multiple memberships within their organizations. In this study, the bona-fide group perspective offers a good lens through which to investigate the social construction of competent communication within leadership teams. On this basis, leadership team facilitation as used in this study focuses on how leadership team members construct their communicative patterns and how these are linked to the social construction of the members' identity as a team, their relationships, and their organizational culture.

2.2 Leadership teams and leadership

Leadership teams are often regarded as the most powerful group within organizations (Hambrick 2010). Similarly to organizational groups and teams in general, the use of leadership teams is often seen as a response to the increasing complexity of the business environment (Cohen & Bailey 1997; Edmondson 2003). It is generally accepted that top teams have strong impacts on organizational performance. Moreover, successful leadership teams are linked to successful organizations. In addition to organizational performance, top teams have been linked to strategy, innovation, and change.

While leadership teams are often referred to as top management teams in academic discourse, I have chosen to use the term “leadership team” in this study. The decision to use the term leadership team was made after writing the second article, in which I use “management team” as a general term derived from top management team. In practice, however, the top team members participating in this study often referred to themselves as leadership teams. In addition to being used in business language, the term “leadership team” is, in my experience, also more commonly used by other scholar-practitioners. The final reason for changing the term arose from the actual context of leadership teamwork. Often, the tasks of the top teams have more to do with leadership than management. Therefore, in that sense, the term “leadership team” is more descriptive.

Research on leadership teams has a long history in strategy research. A specific focus has been upper echelon theory (Hamrick & Mason 1984), which has led to a number of studies on leadership teams. The upper echelon perspective stresses that leadership team members’ experiences, values, and personalities influence the choices they make and provide insights into the functioning of an organization (Hambrick 2007). The majority of studies on leadership teams has focused on the diversity and composition of these teams, that is, on the demographic characteristics of team members and their connection to organizational performance (for an overview of this topic, see, for example, Carpenter 2011; Hambrick 2010; Luoma 2010; Zorn & Tompson 2002).

In addition to leadership teams, there has also been a strong focus on chief executive officers (CEO) and their capabilities (Hawkins 2014; Mooney & Amason 2011; Peterson & Zhang 2011; Wageman *et al.* 2008). Studies focusing on CEOs have demonstrated their powerful impact. For example, in organizations where the CEO has much more power than other leadership team members, performance tends to be extreme (i.e., large wins or losses) (Tang *et al.* 2011). There might also be a risk that only some leadership team members are allowed into the CEO’s inner circle (Mooney & Amason 2011).

The overemphasis on the individual has been criticized by a number of leadership and communication scholars (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2012; Barge 2012; Cunliffe 2014; Fairhurst 2007). Various recent perspectives on leadership, such as discursive (Fairhurst 2007), systemic-constructionist (Barge 2012; Barge

& Fairhurst 2007), and relational leadership (Ospina & Uhl-Bien 2012), stress that leadership is socially constructed in communication among actors. These perspectives all emphasize leadership as a relational quality rather than as an individual skill. This notion has informed the theoretical perspective of competent communication in leadership teams; that is, communication and leadership activities are explored as relational, not as something that individuals inherently possess.

The term “leadership team” has been problematic and criticized on the grounds that leadership teams are not real teams at all (Katzenbach 1997; Nadler 1998). One reason for this claim is that leadership teams are rarely seen to engage in real teamwork as defined in group communication literature. However, most group communication research has focused on organizational teams and groups other than leadership teams. Leadership team members have been reported to have strong achievement needs and an individualistic orientation (Nadler 1998). Another reason might be that, in reality, many decisions ultimately are made by the leader of the team, so leadership teams might function more as informational, consultative, or coordinating groups than decision-making groups (Wageman *et al.* 2008). Interestingly, group research has suggested that, if the team norm supports individualism instead of collectivism—for example, if team members focus on their own goals instead of the team’s—then individualistic behavior might be more tolerated (McAuliffe *et al.* 2003).

The challenges organizations face today are more complex and systemic than in the past and consequently call for better teamwork at the top of the organization (Hawkins 2014). Leadership teams need to work effectively as teams, not only to make better decisions but also to provide effective leadership for their organizations (Wageman *et al.* 2008). Leadership teams can set the example for leadership and communication in their organizations. Therefore, it is important to investigate how leadership team members communicate to understand the organizational discourses they create. A crucial part of that work often happens within *leadership team meetings*.

Leadership team meetings provide an important structure for leadership team communication. Meetings present conversational episodes in which organizational discourses and realities are created, maintained, and transformed. They are also places for teams to construct identity through various forms and ways of communicating, including communication technology (Sivunen 2006, 2007). Organizational culture and the relationships among team members often become clearer during leadership team meetings. In these meetings, decisions that have tremendous effects on the future of organizations are made (Cooren 2015). Therefore, meetings offer a fruitful platform for investigating how leadership team members communicate.

The focus on team meetings has allowed introducing a communication perspective into leadership team research. A good example of studies foregrounding communication is the increasing body of strategy-as-practice (SAP) research that seeks to understand strategy making as a communicative activity (Spee & Jarzabkowski 2011; Whittington 2006). SAP studies have shown not

only how strategic decisions are constructed through interactive moves but also how these moves can activate areas of expertise and knowledge that lead to competent performance by leadership teams (Samra-Fredericks 2000a, 2000b). For example, in a doctoral thesis on dialogical moments during leadership team meetings, Erkkilä (2012) concludes that new understanding and knowledge are constructed in such areas as learning, renewal, and internal organizational processes. However, for topics related to customers and strategy, there is little or no new knowledge and learning. In addition, Lainema's (2013) doctoral thesis on discussion practices in managerial meetings demonstrated that leadership team members employ discursive strategies to define relevant topics for discussion and to include or exclude each other from the discussion.

In sum, leadership teams offer an interesting context of study. The way that leadership team members communicate can have long-lasting effects on the way that the entire organization operates in its surroundings. Many scholars have pointed out how difficult it is for leadership teams to function effectively as real teams, which is the dominant ideal of teamwork presented in the group and team literature. However, one could argue that it is partly because of these difficulties and the need to work effectively that leadership teams should try to become real teams. To do so, leadership teams need to communicate competently and reflexively.

2.3 Communication competence and reflexivity

Communication scholars have been highly interested in explaining communication behavior, especially how to communicate well. Communication competence is a core concept in the field of speech communication. It is also a broad concept and has various definitions and descriptions (for an overview, see Rickheit, Strohner & Vorweg 2008; Hargie 2006).

Traditionally, communication competence has been seen as a combination of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. For example, communication skills are argued to form the behavioral basis of communication competence. In most definitions, communication competence also encompasses the ability to communicate in an appropriate and effective way (Spitzberg 2000, 2008; Spitzberg & Cupach 1989). Effectiveness and appropriateness have been used as criteria for judging communication competence (Rickheit, Strohner & Vorweg 2008), taking effectiveness to refer to the achievement of goals, and appropriateness to the fit between communication behavior and the rules and logics of a given social situation.

Although the perspective of communication competence sees communication as a relational, contextual, and situational activity, many studies still operationalize communication competence on the basis of the transmission model of communication, not the meaning-making model based on social constructionism (Fairhurst & Sarr 1996). The conceptualizations of communication competence seem to assume, first, that, to be effective, one must be conscious of the

goals one wants to achieve and, second, that demonstrating a skill leads to the perception of competent communication behavior (e.g., good listening is a manifestation of communication competence). These conceptualizations have led to relatively stable descriptions and valuations of what is considered good communication.

However, early studies conducted by interpersonal communication scholars found that good communication can be enacted unconsciously and occur even if the communicative actions themselves might be otherwise considered harmful or paradoxical. For example, in family research, communication scholars have observed that communication patterns can compel family members to communicate in specific ways that lead to undesired communication behavior (see Barge & Pearce 2004). Therefore, one can also suggest that poor enactment of a skill might still be perceived as competent communication behavior depending on the contextual factors, such as the structure and logics of the situation and the relationships of the people involved.

Barge (2014) argues that communication competence cannot be limited to individuals' skills, motivations, and knowledge. The difficulty of the socio-psychological approach to communication competence is that it assumes that context is shared or relatively stable; however, people are continuously and simultaneously enmeshed in multiple systems and contexts. Therefore, Barge (2014) suggests that communication competence should focus on the ways people initiate, sustain, and transform patterns of communication. Communication competence is a *relational* accomplishment and is co-created in a specific situation between persons-in-conversation (Barge & Little 2002, 2008). This approach highlights the improvisational nature of communication behavior and reflexivity.

Reflexivity and reflectivity are often used synonymously, but the concepts differ ontologically. To differentiate between them, Cunliffe (2015) contends that reflection is about stepping back and taking an objective position toward the existing system, whereas reflexivity is about *living in* the system. However, reflective practice can lead to increased reflexivity (Puutio 2009; Schippers, Edmondson & West 2014; Schippers, Homan & Van Knippenberg 2013; West 1996).

As a general term, reflexivity refers to the double loop of different contexts reflected in one another (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). For example, reflexive communication patterns occur when the meanings made are reflected in the communicative activities, and vice versa. According to Garfinkel (1967), reflexivity refers to people's accountability: as people make sense of and enact in communication situations, they simultaneously construct it (Cooren 2015). Reflexivity emphasizes the self-authorship of social realities. The stories people tell constitute their social reality and their experiences of it, and to change their experiences, people need to re-write the stories they tell (Pearce 1999, 2007).

Regarding communication competence, this thinking means that one must first become aware of and accountable for participation in communication processes. Second, to communicate competently, one must enact and apply this understanding in practice. In the context of this study, the assumption is that

engaging in activities that promote reflexive patterns of communication can increase the reflexive abilities and communication competence of leadership team members. At this point, it is relevant to recall, however, that competence is regarded here as a relational activity, that is, what people *do* in communication with each other, not as the individual possessions of team members. Therefore, the facilitation of communication competence is connected to communication practices and processes. In the present study, I am interested in exploring the processes facilitating leadership team communication and, in particular, communication competence and reflexivity. I am also interested in investigating how the theoretical views of communication as meaning making presented in the study can be translated into practical interventions. All this work takes place in the wider context of OD.

2.4 Coordinated management of meaning theory as an organization development approach

CMM is a communication theory first put forward by Pearce and Cronen (1980; also Pearce 1976). As a criticism of the transmission model of communication, CMM theory sees communication as a meaning-making process. The starting point of this theory is the assumption that communication *makes* selves, relationships, organizations, communities, and cultures and that we, as people, are part of making these. CMM theory invites us to look directly at the communication processes created by the persons-in-conversation. Pearce (2012) explains the essence of CMM theory:

Communication is about meaning [...] We live lives filled with meanings, and one of our life challenges is to manage those meanings so that we can make our social worlds coherent and live within them with honor and respect. But this process of managing our meanings is never done in isolation. We are always and necessarily coordinating the way we manage our meanings with other people. (p. 4)

Drawing on Bateson's (1972) concepts of context and feedback loops, CMM holds that people are enmeshed in multiple contexts, some of which might be more powerful than others (Pearce 2007). To capture people's communicative activity, CMM uses the term "story." According to CMM, there is always a tension between the stories lived and the stories told. When we tell a story we can create a coherent explanation of our social reality, but we can never capture the richness of the stories lived (Griffin, Ledbetter & Sparks 2014; Oliver 2005). To facilitate interpretation of the stories lived and told, CMM scholars have introduced several frameworks, such as the hierarchy of meanings (presented in Article III of this thesis). These frameworks have been used as heuristics for interpreting and analyzing research data (Murray 2014). Interpretation is guided by the following questions: How did that get made? What are we making? How can we make better social worlds? (Pearce 2007).

CMM is a core theory of interpersonal communication. Since its introduction, CMM theory has informed a number of fields, including interpersonal and intercultural communication, organizational communication and management, public communication, therapy and consultation, and conflict, mediation, and dialogue (for a review of CMM research, see Barge & Pearce 2004). CMM theory has also been positioned as an interpretive, critical, and practical theory (Pearce 2012). In this study, I use CMM as an interpretive theory to explain leadership team communication and as a practical theory to generate knowledge about facilitating leadership team communication.

Despite its practical orientation, CMM theory has only recently been introduced into research on OD (Bushe & Marshak 2014; Hedman & Gesch-Karamanlidis 2015; Oliver & Fitzgerald 2013). OD is a multifaceted field of both research and practice interested in bringing about organizational change. Many scholars trace OD to T-groups and Lewin's change theories developed in the 1940s and 1950s. Since then, OD has been informed by Schein's (1969) ideas of process consulting, complexity theories, and social constructionism (Cheung-Judge & Holbeche 2011).

Although OD is frequently associated with organization-wide development interventions, the current OD framework seems to serve as an umbrella concept for various development approaches, including individual and group coaching and leadership development (see, for example, Gallos 2006). As CMM theory suggests, leadership team communication always involves multiple contexts, and leadership team development should not take place in isolation of its organizational context. That said, leadership team development frequently is also about OD due to the key role leadership teams play. In this study, the overall OD approach and, in particular, the research stream of dialogic OD serve as the overall framework for facilitating leadership team communication. More specific OD approaches often used in the context of leadership teams, such as executive education and management and leadership development, are excluded from this study.

Early OD and change theories focused on problem solving, but this approach has been criticized (Oswick *et al.* 2005). Bushe and Marshak (2009) label this OD approach diagnostic OD, which is based on the positivist orientation of treating organizations and people as objects of change. Diagnostic OD attempts to gather data to prescribe interventions. Examples of diagnostic OD interventions include survey feedback and SWOT analysis.

In response to diagnostic OD, a more dialogic concept of OD drawing from such theories such as appreciative inquiry (Oswick *et al.* 2005) has been introduced (Bushe & Marshak 2008, 2014; Marshak & Grant 2008, 2011). Dialogic OD is based on the social constructionist premise of emphasizing organizational discourse; that is, organizations are seen as conversational systems and, consequently, change by changing the conversations (Marshak & Grant 2008, 2011). This perspective arises from the discursive turn in organization studies introduced by communication as constitutive of organization, among other theories (Cooren 2015; Cooren *et al.* 2011).

Theoretically, it might be appropriate to distinguish between diagnostic and dialogic OD, but in practice, the two traditions co-exist. Oliver and Fitzgerald (2013, p. 30) criticize Bushe and Marshak's (2009) distinction between diagnostic and dialogic OD, asking, "If we are not doing diagnosis first, how do we go about making and negotiating meaning with organizational members?" Oliver and Fitzgerald (2013) reframe diagnosis as a joint process of making sense and creating meaning for the good of the organization. Diagnosis, therefore, can be seen as a form of reflective practice, of stepping back to explore the meaning-making patterns occurring within an unfolding situation to understand how to act in it (Raelin 2011). Bushe and Marshak (2015) also argue that dialogic and diagnostic OD practices are not mutually exclusive. However, it is important to understand that it is the mindset that matters because it determines how one approaches facilitation and selects practices to use.

In this study, dialogic OD is selected as the overall framework and mindset for developing leadership team communication because it emphasizes communication and discourse as the primary foci of OD work. Dialogic OD focuses on creating spaces, or containers, for dialogues in which organization members can collectively make sense of their social reality and create new ones. Whereas diagnostic OD attempts to directly change communication behavior, dialogic OD focuses on the frameworks and meaning making that guide behavioral changes. Bushe and Marshak (2009) write: "Change happens when people become aware of the variety of stories people have about themselves and each other and understand their own part in creating unproductive patterns of interaction" (p. 353). Dialogic OD assumes that this awareness leads to generative image changes (Bushe 2013) which influence changes in communication behavior. Regarding communication competence, then, dialogic OD is interested in facilitating effective conversations that build people's capacity to create reflexive patterns of communication. This is the aim of CMM theory as well and, therefore, the underlying assumption in this study.

In conclusion to the theoretical framework of this study, different fields of research collectively seem to highlight communication as the fundamental process in which our relationships, organizations, and sense of selves are constituted. These theories are illustrated in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Social constructionism in the different fields influencing this study

Field of study	Applied theories and concepts	Basic beliefs
Organizational communication studies	Communication as constitutive of organization (Cooren 2015, Cooren et al. 2011; Fairhurst & Putnam 2004)	Organizations are constituted in communication. Focus is on organizational discourses.
Organization development	Dialogic organization development (Bushe & Marshak 2009, 2014; Marhak & Grant 2008, 2011) Coordinated management of meaning (Pearce & Cronen 1980)	Organizations change by changing the conversation. Focus is on discursive and conversational methodologies.
Leadership	Relational leadership (Uhl-Bien & Ospina 2012) Discursive leadership (Fairhurst 2007) Systemic-constructionist leadership (Barge 2012)	Leadership is a relational quality, not an individual skill. Leaders are practical authors.
Group and team communication	Bona-fide perspective (Putnam et al. 2012; Putnam & Stohl 1990)	Groups socially construct their boundaries, identities, and relationships.
Communication competence	Coordinated management of meaning (Pearce & Cronen 1980) Reflexivity (Cunliffe 2008, 2014; Barge 2004)	Focus is on the ability to initiate, sustain, and transform patterns of communication. Becoming aware of communicative activities (e.g., the way we speak, the words we use) can enhance communication. Individuals take responsibility for authorship of communicative situations.

As demonstrated, social constructionism has influenced different fields of study in various ways. This study integrates these research streams to form a rigorous theoretical foundation informing how this study was conducted.

3 ARTICLES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY

This study aims to increase understanding of how to facilitate competent communication within leadership teams. This section discusses the original articles in this study and positions them in relation to the research process and data. The research setting of this study is presented in Table 3, which summarizes the research questions, methods, and data in relation to the articles included in the study.

3.1 Article I: The relationality of communication competence in the context of organization development

The first article responds to the first research objective: to describe communication competence from a relational perspective and in the context of OD. This article is a theoretical overview based on a critical analysis of interpersonal communication theories which foreground the relationality of communication. The article discusses communication competence from the perspectives of three interpersonal communication theories: relational communication theory (Millar & Rogers 1987), relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery 1987), and the CMM theory (Pearce & Cronen 1980). These interpersonal communication theories were chosen because of their emphasis on relationality. Although there has been much research on communication competence, the subject has not been explored in the context of OD or in the light of interpersonal communication theories that emphasize relationality.

The three mentioned interpersonal communication theories highlight the discursive nature of social activity in various ways. Relational communication theory treats relationships as continuous dialogues and focuses on understanding how relationships are constructed in these dialogues. Relational dialectics theory focuses on examining relationships as the dynamic formation of different dialectics, which is a natural process of meaning making. This theory increases understanding of how meanings are socially constructed. CMM theory focuses on the way people manage and coordinate meanings and

TABLE 3 Research objectives, questions, methods, and data of the articles

Research objectives	Research questions	Research methods and data	Articles included in the study
To describe what communication competence is from a relational perspective and in the context of organization development	1. What does relationality mean in the contexts of communication competence and organization development?	Critical analysis of previous literature on interpersonal communication theories emphasizing relationality	Article I: Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus ja työyhteisön kehittäminen
To examine the kinds of communication challenges leadership teams face	2. What kinds of communication challenges do leadership teams face?	Thematic analysis of interviews with leadership team members (N=7)	Article II: Communication challenges facing management teams
To understand how facilitation can promote leadership team reflexivity	3. What key moments during the facilitation of leadership team communication promote leadership team reflexivity? 4. How does the facilitation of leadership team communication influence the construction of leadership team reflexivity?	Participatory action research with a leadership team (N=9); thematic and theoretical analysis of two video-recorded team meetings, three audio-recorded workshops, and eight audio-recorded interviews; field notes taken during participant observation	Article III: Facilitating leadership team reflexivity through participatory action research
To describe how coordinated management of meaning theory can be used as a facilitation method	5. How can coordinated management of meaning theory be used as a practical theory to inform the facilitation of leadership team communication?	Applied theoretical article utilizing the action research data	Article IV: Facilitating conversations that matter using coordinated management of meaning theory
To develop a tool for facilitating leadership team communication		Applied theoretical article utilizing the knowledge gained during the previous research phases	Article V: The Leadership Team Tool for better meaning making: A communication perspective for leadership team development

communicative actions in relation to one another. This theory focuses on exploring how meaning making occurs and is affected by systemic connections among different meanings, actions, identities, relationships, and cultures.

Regarding communication competence, these theories suggest that communication competence is based on the processes and structures of relationships and is always connected to wider social and cultural discourses and contexts. In the context of OD, it is beneficial to examine the different dialectical discourses prevalent in organizations that might influence the ways people conduct their daily lives within the organizations. Exploring one's discursive histories and potential futures could be useful for individuals as organizational members and for their relationships in the work community.

The article suggests that, by becoming aware of the relationality of communication, one can create better social realities. Workplaces are constructed and re-constructed continuously as the subjective experiences and perceptions of organizational members become enmeshed. OD, then, should focus on creating conversational spaces where relationships and practices can be renewed and communication competence can further develop. These spaces should facilitate future-oriented discussions in which people can create future possibilities for developing their work. The relational aspect of communication also promotes constructive dialogue through responsible and ethical communication behavior.

The article concludes that CMM theory seems to offer a variety of conceptual tools for defining communication competence and for framing an approach to facilitate leadership team communication. CMM takes a practical stance aimed at developing better social realities, so it is selected as the main theoretical framework for the later stages of the study.

This article contributes to the theoretical debates on communication competence by placing relationality at the center of competent communication behavior. Adopting the social constructionist perspective means that organizations are seen as relational systems and that communication competence is attached to the relationships and communication practices of that system.

3.2 Article II: Communication challenges facing leadership teams

The second article focuses on the second research objective: to examine the kinds of communication challenges leadership teams face. The effectiveness of leadership teamwork, to a great extent, is dependent on how well team members communicate with one another. To understand how to facilitate competent communication among leadership team members, it is essential to understand the typical challenges encountered in leadership team communication. This article is exploratory in nature and not based on a particular theory of communication challenges.

The article is based on thematic in-depth interviews with seven members of leadership teams from different international companies and industries. The

interviews were exploratory in nature. Researchers commonly use exploratory methods to inform their decisions about research design (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). The leadership team members were recruited mostly through my professional network. I contacted some interviewees directly, while others were identified through various contact points with their companies.

I mostly conducted the interviews in meeting rooms at the interviewees' company facilities. One interview was conducted online via Skype due to scheduling issues. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each, and the total duration of the interviews was about seven hours. At the beginning of each interview, I asked the interviewee's permission to audio-record the interview. I stressed that the interview was confidential and that no one else could access the data. All the interviewees gave permission for recording and did not request a more formal contract. In addition, I framed the interviews as conversational and exploratory to encourage interviewees to share their experiences and examples of their leadership team communication.

The interviews were designed to be as open as possible, and I followed the emerging themes raised by interviewees. The interview questions touched on general aspects of leadership team communication ("What is good communication in a leadership team?"), specific examples from interviewees' teams ("How would you describe the communication of your leadership team?"), how their leadership teams make decisions ("Could you describe how you make decisions?"), and the communication challenges they have encountered ("What challenges are there to communication and collaboration?"). My first objective was to explore what kind of communication competence is required in leadership teamwork, but early in every interview, the interviewees began to talk about the major communication challenges their team faced, and in the end, that focus led to much richer data.

This data-driven approach shaped the second research question so that it focused on understanding the communication challenges that leadership teams face in their work. This question guided the data analysis, in which all the references to communication challenges were first collected and then grouped into themes. Grouping the references under themes followed a systematic process in which the references were first grouped under larger themes, often similar to the themes of the interview questions. The main themes were further analyzed, leading to sub-themes under each main theme. During further analysis, the sub-themes began to form opposites or continuums with each other and were grouped into dimensions that shed light on the contextual and sometimes contradictory interpretations of communication challenges experienced by the interviewees.

From the thematic analysis of the interview data, six dimensions of communication challenges were identified and presented in the article:

- Common objectives vs. personal objectives
- Equally distributed participation vs. polarized participation
- Leader-centric communication vs. team-centric communication
- Consensus decision making vs. unilateral decision making
- Formal communication vs. information communication
- Face-to-face communication vs. ICT-assisted communication

These dimensions show the diversity of interpretations of what constitutes a challenge to communication. It is important to point out that neither end of the dimension is more or less accurate than the other. Rather, the dimensions represent contextual interpretations and experiences.

Common objectives vs. personal objectives. Interviewees typically experienced a tension between common objectives and personal objectives. Common objectives refer to shared team objectives, and personal objectives to the objectives of individual members based, for example, on their function or division. Many interviewees explained that their personal objectives sometimes clashed with the common objectives, which could make collaboration difficult.

Equally distributed participation vs. polarized participation. This dimension refers to the extent to which leadership team members participated in leadership teamwork. Participation was seen as a challenge, especially during meetings when some team members participated, while others remained silent. Some interviewees said that team members sometimes shared their opinions elsewhere and that they found out members' true opinions only outside the meeting context. Problems in participation were attributed to team members' roles and positions (e.g., more active participation by members with expertise on a given topic), the team atmosphere (e.g., encouragement or discouragement of participation by other team members), and personality differences (e.g., domination of the conversation by strong members).

Leader-centric communication vs. team-centric communication. Interviewees' perceptions of the extent to which the leader plays a central role in the team varied. Most interviewees emphasized that the leader of a team can influence the ways in which team members participate in leadership teamwork, the communication culture of the team, and the development of team communication. In contrast, some interviewees stated that the role of the leader is not necessarily very central in a well-functioning team. The central role of the leader was mostly seen as positive, although some interviewees reflected that the leader might dominate the conversation and discourage others' participation.

Consensus decision making vs. unilateral decision making. This dimension refers to who participates in decision making: is it the entire leadership team, a smaller number of team members, or only the leader? Ideally, according to the interviewees, decision making should be open and shared. In practice, however, they talked about experiences of lobbying and getting support from an outside authority, such as the CEO. Sometimes, the leader or a coalition of team members had already made the decision. A lack of engagement in the decision making process might reduce commitment.

Formal communication vs. information communication. The interviewees reported differences in communication during and outside team meetings and the overall work context. Formal communication was related to meetings and, in particular, to the topics on the agenda, while informal communication was related to a more relaxed atmosphere and topics, such as team development and feedback. Increasing informal communication was seen as important because it facilitated familiarity, relationships, and trust among team members.

Face-to-face communication vs. ICT assisted communication. This dimension is concerned with the extent to which teams relied on face-to-face communication or ICT-assisted communication. Although the interviewees represented multicultural and widely distributed teams, much of their leadership teams' communication depended on face-to-face communication. The interviewees were of the opinion that face-to-face communication was more informal and genuine than online meetings.

The article concludes that leadership teams face various communication challenges which they need to discuss to establish competent communication practices. Although the leadership team members were aware of typical communication challenges, they rarely discussed them with their teams. Topics related to the team itself were often not included on meeting agenda, although it would be valuable for leadership teams to continuously reflect on and evaluate team development.

This article contributes to research on leadership team communication because previous research on leadership teams has rarely investigated leadership team members' perceptions of their internal communication. The article adds to understanding of the complexities of leadership team communication and obstacles to engaging in competent communication behavior.

3.3 Article III: Facilitating leadership team reflexivity through participatory action research

The third article focuses on the third research objective: to describe how to facilitate leadership team reflexivity. This article introduces the second empirical dataset gathered during participatory action research. The article describes a process of team facilitation based on the systemic-constructionist approach, in particular, CMM theory, using the methodology of participatory action research. During the team facilitation, I worked as the external consultant and drew on ideas of process consulting (Schein, 1969). The participatory action research was conducted with a top leadership team at an international manufacturing company operating in Finland. The team had nine members, all of whom were male. Eight team members were Finnish, and one team member was German. The leadership team operated in English.

During the action research process, I gathered various forms of naturally occurring data (see Silverman 2011). Most data were collected during leader-

ship team meetings, which often lasted two days. I video-recorded three team meetings, participated in and took field notes at five team meetings, and audio-recorded five intervention workshops and 17 individual conversations. In addition, I gathered written material from the intervention workshops. I participated in informal conversations outside the meetings. I did not participate in meetings during a break in March and April when team members put their proposed actions into practice. The action research process and data gathered are presented in Figure 3.

The nine-month action research process was used to inform the process of selecting data for further analysis. This article presents the findings from the first six months of the process. At that point, the data were sufficient to fulfill the research objective. Two sets of video-recorded data from meetings 1 and 3 and the audio-recorded data from intervention workshops 1, 2, and 3 were transcribed verbatim. The video-recorded data from meeting 3 were also translated from Finnish into English because unusually, this meeting was conducted in Finnish. All the other data were originally in English.

The data were analyzed in accordance with the theoretical framework. The article was aimed at answering two research questions. The first focused on exploring the key moments in which team reflexivity was promoted. The second focused on investigating the possible influences of these moments on the construction of team reflexivity. To answer these research questions, the video-recorded leadership team meetings and the audio-recorded workshops were analyzed thematically. All references to the teams' stories of themselves and their relationships and performance were collected and grouped under CMM theory's storylines of self (as team identity), relationship, and culture.

The analysis of the key moments followed the theoretical concept of bifurcation points developed by Pearce (2007). These moments are characterized by the need to make an important choice of what action to take to change the course of interaction. The key moments were selected based on the external consultant's view of the need to intervene. Within these moments, reflexivity was addressed explicitly or implicitly. Moving back and forth between theory and the empirical data, five key moments were identified and selected for further analysis. This analysis involved going through the transcripts and identifying the sequential turns that took place at the key moments.

During the facilitation, the tone of the leadership team communication shifted from more negative to more positive. This is demonstrated by changes in the stories used by team members from the beginning of the facilitation compared to the end of the six-month process. For example, stories such as "we are seen as an unprofessional team" were shared. The article illustrates how team members started to use more positive forms of communication. For example, they provided encouraging feedback to one another and shared examples of what they had been doing well. Although they also shared criticism, it tended to be related to the meeting practices, not to their identity or relationships. Team members also demonstrated the development of reflexivity

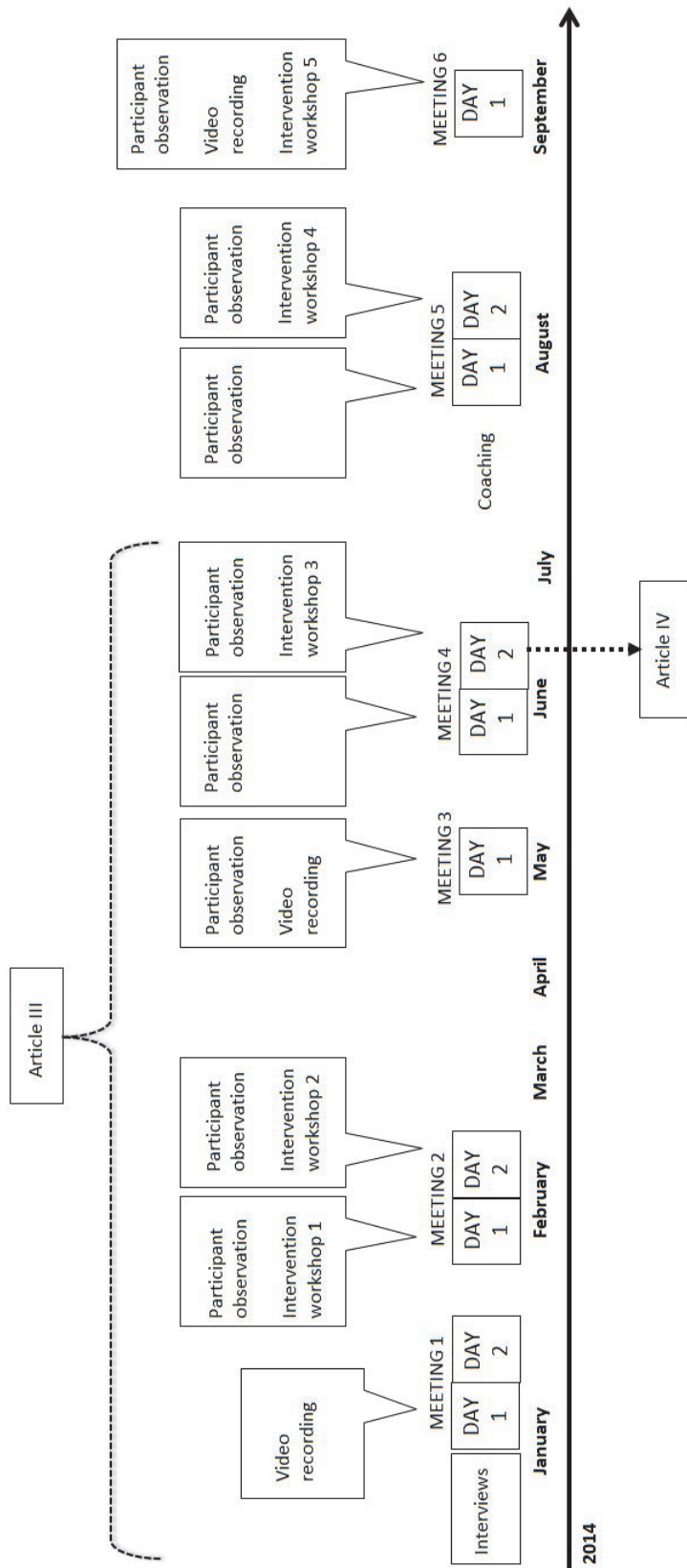


FIGURE 3 Action research process and the data used in the articles

in the way they engaged in meta-communicative behaviors: they openly began to reflect on how they responded to each other's behavior during meetings and how they showed each other support. Later, team members also expressed the view that, during the facilitation, they had become more aware of their communication behavior and started to monitor how they responded to other team members.

The article presents five key moments connected with these shifts in the leadership team's communication. Within these moments, interventions were made, including the activities of framing facilitation, inquiring into the key issues, role-modeling feedback, positive storytelling, and reflecting on concrete communication actions. During these interventions, reflexivity was promoted in different ways. For example, when a moment of tension emerged, the facilitator invited team members to become conscious of what they created with their speech acts. Another example of this strategy occurred during a key moment of framing when the facilitator explicitly asked team members to focus on how they coordinated their communicative actions instead of placing blame on individual members.

Earlier research on team reflexivity demonstrated the role of reflexivity in predicting team performance and suggested different factors that might foster reflexivity (see, for example, Schippers *et al.* 2014). However, research has neither provided much insight into how team reflexivity can be fostered nor paid attention to the actual process of the social construction of reflexivity. This article addresses this gap by suggesting that a facilitation approach focused on changing and working with the team discourses that emerge in the unfolding moment could be a useful approach to develop leadership team reflexivity. In doing so, the article makes an important contribution to research on team reflexivity, making connections among reflexivity, team communication, and discourse. As well, addressing reflexivity explicitly and directly during the facilitation seems to be meaningful.

The article makes another valuable contribution related to the role of emotionality in developing reflexivity. Most team-reflexivity literature has focused on measuring the activities of reflection but neglected the emotional tones of communication. Here, the different forms of communication, especially the positive ones, became important for enhancing reflexivity. Future research further elaborating the relationship between reflexivity and emotionality is needed.

The findings of the study are in line with previous ones showing that interventions, inducing reflexivity, do not need to be extensive or time consuming. Here, all the interventions were integrated within the leadership team meetings. This made the facilitation approach gentle in the sense that the moments of facilitation were at most one hour long. However, the extensive, on-site participation of the researcher over a long period of time was also crucial. It enabled the researcher to engage in informal conversations with the leadership team members outside the meetings and develop relationships of trust. Immersion in the research site added value to the facilitation and made it possible to create a comprehensive description of the case. Nevertheless, it is difficult to judge

whether the changes that took place were long lasting. Further studies investigating the construction of reflexivity over a long period of time are needed. As well, it would be interesting to examine the scalability of facilitation; in other words, how interventions promoting reflexivity might migrate throughout an organization is an important area for future research.

In conclusion, the article suggests that a facilitation approach heavily drawing upon systemic-constructionist approaches and CMM concepts is useful in developing leadership team reflexivity. The article proposes a model in which changes in leadership team discourse can lead to changes in behavior and, thus, enhance reflexivity. The facilitation approach used methodologies from participatory action research, which offers a useful frame for conducting an intervention study. The reflexive cycle involving theory, empirical data, and practice as methodology can be seen as an important foundation for conducting applied communications research.

3.4 Article IV: Facilitating conversations that matter using coordinated management of meaning theory

The fourth article discusses the fourth research objective: to explore how CMM theory can be used as a method of facilitation. The article focuses on applying CMM theory in practice and is based on the action research process illustrated in Figure 3. During the action research, CMM was used as the overall approach for the facilitation, and consequently, it became relevant to further clarify how CMM theory can be used to facilitate leadership team communication. The article describes an intervention based on the *hierarchy of meanings* model of CMM theory, which facilitators can use to craft questions that promote reflexive dialogue in organizations.

This article addresses the assumption of dialogic OD that organizational change happens by changing conversations. However, there has been little OD research on the quality of these conversations, which is needed because some conversations might facilitate change, while others lead to undesired patterns of communication. Recently, dialogic OD scholars have addressed the need to create ways to promote effective conversations (Bushe & Marshak 2009). Oliver and Fitzgerald (2013) stress that dialogic OD should promote the capacity for reflexive dialogue. The article argues that, to really change the conversation, it is essential to pay attention to the patterns of communication.

The article, therefore, presents the CMM theory as a means to facilitate reflexive patterns of communication. Developing reflexivity builds organizational members' capacity to make critical choices about which patterns to invite and sustain and which to transform (Barge 2014). To demonstrate the usefulness of the CMM theory, the article presents an example that occurred in a leadership team meeting during the action research process. The speech act of "this shows how bad we are" occurred after one team member took more time for his topic

than scheduled. This and other speech acts were collected and used as the basis for an intervention. The article illustrates how facilitators can help leadership teams explore their stories by crafting questions based on the hierarchy of meanings. For example, exploring the speech acts with the help of questions – How does the speech act reflect your typical meeting? (episode); What kind of a team does it construct? (identity/self); How does it contribute to your relationships and team spirit? (relationship); How does it reflect the cultural values of the organization? (organization/culture) – might help facilitators lead a conversation in which leadership team members can expand their understanding of their communication and enhance their reflexivity.

Through these questions, the facilitator can lead a reflexive dialogue in which team members become aware of and responsible for how they create their relationships, organizational culture, and sense of self through their communication. This awareness can enable team members to build their capacity to transform their communication patterns on their own, which fulfills the aim of dialogic OD to facilitate conversations that matter.

This article demonstrates the practical use of CMM theory as a method to facilitate leadership team communication. The article contributes to the academic and practical developments in the dialogic OD field which highlight the importance of transformative conversations. In line with the goals of dialogic OD, the article adds to understanding of how to transform undesired discourses and patterns of communication.

3.5 Article V: The Leadership Team Tool for better meaning making: A communication perspective for developing leadership teams

The fifth objective of this study is to develop a tool for facilitating competent leadership team communication and reflexivity. The Leadership Team Tool was developed as an outcome of the action research process, in which the need for using a feedback tool emerged. This section discusses the Leadership Team Tool, presented in Appendix 1 of the fifth article included in this study (Hedman, submitted manuscript).

That there is overemphasis on the individual leader is a common view in leadership team research and leadership development (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2004; Hawkins 2014; Heyden *et al.* 2013). Often, different OD interventions and feedback tools further support this emphasis. However, if we understand communication as meaning making,

we cannot reduce our explanations of human behavior to simple linear-cause effect explanations where we attribute someone's behavior to psychological mechanisms such as personality traits, motives or drives. Rather, we need to create systemic descriptions of joint human activity which provide us the means to explain

how any individual's behavior is the product of the interactional system jointly created by people. (Barge 2012, p. 110)

Taking up this call, the fifth article points to the need for a tool that takes the communication perspective seriously. The construction of the Leadership Team Tool is based on the following premises: 1) it needs to be grounded in the theoretical framework of communication as meaning making; 2) it needs to fit and be relevant in the context of leadership team communication; and 3) it needs to facilitate reflexivity and competent communication between team members. The purpose of the Leadership Team Tool is to serve as a facilitated process that provides a structure for transformative conversations which enable team members to reconstruct their patterns of communication. The Leadership Team Tool is intended, first and foremost, for use by both internal and external facilitators who have a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical premises of communication. This knowledge guarantees a depth of perspective in facilitating leadership team communication.

The Leadership Team Tool consists of three parts based on the CMM theory model of the hierarchy of meanings (Pearce 1999, 2007; Pearce & Cronen 1980). Based on the ideas of the hierarchy of meanings, facilitating the connectedness of the contexts of selves, relationships, and organizational culture is relevant to forming reflexive patterns of communication. The Leadership Team Tool helps leadership teams explore each of these contexts in isolation and create connections between them. The assumption is that, by doing so, the team members will become practical authors who are reflexive and responsibly shape their communication as it shapes them. Let us look briefly at each component of the tool.

Part I: Leadership team. The first component of the tool focuses on the level of the overall leadership team. The questions in this part of the tool seek to promote team members' collective understanding of what they should be doing as a team in their organizational context. This component also includes a scale based on the dimensions of the communication challenges presented in the second original article in this study (Hedman & Valo 2015).

Part II: Relationships between team members. The second part of the tool focuses on the relational level, that is, on communication among team members. In this part, team members provide feedback about their relationships rather than individuals. For instance, team members name the relationship they are exploring transparently and describe the qualities of that relationship. This component is aimed at promoting mutual accountability for the present condition and future development of relationships.

Part III: Oneself as a team member. The third and final part of the tool focuses on team members themselves for the purpose of enhancing self-awareness and reflexivity. The questions in this component of the Leadership Team Tool help team members explore their communication behaviors in their relationships and with the entire team. These questions also invite team members to think about their identities as team members in the present and in the future

and to become aware of the connection between their communicative actions and the construction of identity.

This article makes a practical contribution to leadership development literature and management studies by demonstrating how the idea of communication as meaning making can be translated into a practical tool targeted at leadership team development. This concrete tool can help leadership team members structure their conversations in such a way that new patterns of communication can emerge. Dialogic OD has introduced various methods and practices based on social constructionism but not many assessment and feedback tools. The article concludes that, to take the communication perspective seriously and apply it in the world of practice, other such translations from theory to practice need to be made.

4 DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION

4.1 Summary of the findings

The objective of this qualitative study was to understand and describe how to facilitate competent leadership team communication. This study has focused on leadership teams operating in the context of international companies.

In line with previous literature, this study assumes that leadership teams are the most influential groups in organizations (Hambrick 2010; Zorn & Tompson 2002). The decisions leadership teams make can have long-lasting consequences for the future of their organizations and members. Zorn and Tompson (2002, p. 253) argue that understanding communication within leadership teams “will make an important contribution to our knowledge about the management of organizations.”

Leadership teams are a good example of bona-fide groups. They have fluid boundaries and multiple memberships. Leadership team members are not only members of the top team but also leaders of different functions and divisions in their organizations and might participate in the work of other leadership teams. Consequently, they might need to cope with multiple and even contradictory expectations and objectives, some of which might not be clear. This can become a challenge to effective leadership teamwork: sometimes, the role-specific objectives of a leadership team member can come into conflict with the team’s shared objectives. These conflicts might become crucially visible when the leadership team has to make strategic decisions about, for example, budgets, investments, and organizational structures.

Leadership team meetings serve an important function in leadership teamwork (Cooren 2015). Meetings are one of the most common organizational activities, and a great deal of leadership teams’ meaning making happens in meetings. In this study, some leadership team members were concerned about the effectiveness and usefulness of leadership team meetings. The findings of this study suggest that leadership teams should pay more attention to facilitating participation by all members. Participation is connected to the forms of

communication (formal or informal), decision making, and leadership. Problems in effective leadership teamwork can arise, for instance, when leadership team members express their true opinions only outside the boardroom, when members are not involved in decision making, or when the team has no clear, shared goal or direction.

Although these challenges are familiar, members of leadership teams seem to rarely reflect on or discuss them openly in the presence of the entire team. Such topics might surface once or twice a year during the conversations that take place during retreats. However, as dialogic OD suggests, change happens by changing everyday conversations and organizational discourse. The present study, therefore, suggests that, to improve communication, leadership team members should establish reflective practice that enables them to deal with emerging communication challenges and then move forward. Through reflective practice, leadership teams can develop reflexivity, which enables them to make wiser choices about their communicative activities, such as decision making. This assumption was further examined during the participatory action research process, in which the practices of team facilitation and process consulting were employed.

Previous studies have demonstrated the value of communication facilitation in team contexts (Frey 2006; Parrish-Sprowl 2006; Seibold & Meyers 2012; Wheelan & Furbur 2006). Different group communication facilitation techniques have been employed to help teams manage the everyday communication challenges that arise while achieving their goals. Team communication facilitation can be especially valuable for leadership teams given the complex environments in which they work (Zorn & Tompson 2002). Here, the facilitation approach was incorporated into the participatory action research methodology, drawing upon the systemic-constructionist framework. In particular, CMM was employed as a practical theory to inform the interventions.

Within this framework, the facilitation approach had two important characteristics. First, the facilitation was integrated into the leadership team meetings to enable intervening in the naturally occurring discourses of the leadership team. Therefore, the facilitation approach in this study was not focused on teaching aspects of team development or effective team communication, which might often dominate team facilitation or communication training. Instead, the facilitation approach focused on using discursive material from the team's meetings as a basis for reflection and further development. Second, the facilitation used CMM heuristics to conceptualize the leadership team's discourses, and this enabled team members to make connections between their communication and what it created, enhancing their reflexivity. This type of facilitation uses discursive strategies which explicitly or implicitly address reflexivity. These interventions focus on expanding the communicative landscape and enriching the views and understandings of the people in the situation.

The research approach chosen for the study has proven to be appropriate, and the objectives of the study were achieved. However, the chosen research approach imposes certain restrictions and raises ethical considerations that war-

rant being evaluated in more detail. In the following sections, I first discuss what, in general, should be taken into account in qualitative research. Then, I focus on specific characteristics of action research, such as the design and the role of the researcher. At the end of this section, I present the theoretical and practical implications of the study and ideas for future research.

4.2 Evaluations and reflections

It has been argued that the conventional understanding of reliability and validity as the basis for credible research is inappropriate for qualitative research because it is context sensitive and assumes that there are multiple socially constructed realities that cannot be objectified or generalized (Lindlof & Taylor 2011). Therefore, qualitative researchers have suggested using credibility and transferability, instead of reliability and validity, as the basis for evaluating the type of work they do (Guba & Lincoln 2005). What ensures the credibility of this study is the use of multiple theoretical perspectives, multiple methods, and the collection of multiple datasets, discussed as follows.

4.2.1 Philosophical and theoretical framework

In this study, I approach the topic of facilitating competent communication within leadership teams from various theoretical standpoints from communication theories and organization and leadership studies. This approach has resulted in a solid, broad theoretical and methodological basis that shares ontological premises similar to social constructionism.

The way this study was conducted was affected by the philosophical orientation of social constructionism, which sees reality and knowledge as socially constructed. As illustrated in the different ways the empirical data were gathered, social constructionist research can be done in different ways. In this study, I approach leadership team communication from two perspectives in social constructionist research. One, the subjective cognitive approach focuses on exploring how people make sense of their reality (Cunliffe 2008). In this study, this approach is applied to fulfill the second research objective to understand what communication challenges leadership team members experience.

Second, the inter-subjective approach in social constructionist research is based on the idea that “our sense of social worlds emerges continually as we interact with each other” (Cunliffe 2008, p. 128). Within this approach, research focuses on the micro-movements and interaction episodes in which the researcher is also a participant. This approach is applied in my studies, especially in the participatory action research process which was conducted collaboratively with a leadership team in its natural context.

In particular, this study employs dialogic OD and CMM theory as the framework for facilitating leadership team communication. Both approaches are grounded in social constructionist ideas emphasizing communication and

changing conversations. Despite performing a critical analysis to determine which theories might be appropriate for the purposes of my study, I cannot overlook that both dialogic OD and CMM theory represent the way I see the world and the beliefs I practice in OD work. CMM theory offers concepts and tools for both interpretation and practical interventions and is used by various scholar-practitioners applying the communication perspective. Primarily for these reasons, CMM theory seems appropriate for the purposes of this study. In addition, the concepts of communication competence and reflexivity have a key place in CMM theory.

However, one should question whether choosing different theoretical lenses might have captured different perspectives when analyzing the data. Although CMM theory is broad and offers a diverse set of hermeneutic conceptualizations, it still might have limited possible interpretations when conducting this study. In future, it would be fruitful to use other theories to enhance the richness of interpretation. For example, structuration theory could add depth to understanding of the interplay among leadership team communication, organizational structures, and the daily practices of leadership teams (about structuration theory, see, for example, Littlejohn & Foss 2009).

This study emphasizes that leadership teams are discursively constituted but does not extensively explain what a discourse is and how it is practiced in the context of leadership team communication. Most recently, a discursive take on leadership teamwork has been the strategy-as-practice approach, which focuses on investigating, for example, how leadership teams do strategy in their meetings as an everyday communicative practice (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2006). Although the discursive framework was important for guiding this study, the study could have benefited from a more detailed focus on leadership teams' discourses.

4.2.2 Research methods and data

Rather than aiming to produce generalizable knowledge, this study is driven by insight and understanding, and qualitative methodologies are appropriate for these purposes. This study consists of two sets of empirical data gathered using multiple methods. The first empirical dataset consists of in-depth interviews conducted with seven leadership team members from different teams and international companies. Interviews are often used to understand people's experiences with a certain topic, in this case, leadership team communication. In this study, the in-depth interviews offer a good basis for understanding what kinds of communication challenges leadership teams face and how to facilitate competent leadership team communication.

One objective of this study is to carry out applied communication research to produce practical and actionable knowledge. Therefore, the second empirical dataset was gathered during an action research process with a top leadership team at an international manufacturing company. The action research consisted of interviews, participant observation, and video- and audio-recordings of naturally occurring talk during leadership team meetings and intervention work-

shops. The purpose of using multiple methods is to ensure that the data are rich in depth and breadth. The value of capturing different types of data in qualitative research is that it adds rigor and complexity rather than forming an objective truth (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, cited in Silverman 2011).

Action research shares similar standards for credibility as qualitative research. For example, good action research should be transferable and use multiple methods. Like qualitative research, action research includes a broad variety of approaches and methodologies, and therefore, the quality of action research should be evaluated within the specific context and approach in which it is carried out (Coghlan & Shani 2014; Reason & Lincoln 1996; Reason 2006). Reason and Lincoln (1996) argue that the quality criteria for action research are its social relevance, participation, and practical outcomes.

According to Reason (2006), one sign of a good action research process is that it is emergent in an evolutionary way. In other words, the process of continuous action and reflection defines how the research process is designed along the way. In this study, I approach the action research process from the standpoint of process consulting (Schein 1969, 2006). This approach enabled me to thoroughly reflect on and respond to the emerging needs of the leadership team members with whom I was working. To ensure the relevance of the action research process, it and the leadership team members were continuously and transparently evaluated. The team members were encouraged to share, for example, their opinions about useful discussion topics or interventions.

This study adopts the perspective of participatory action research, which emphasizes the engagement of the participants throughout the research process (Reason & Bradbury 2006). This approach could be considered a weakness if participation were understood to its fullest extent, that is, if the leadership team members should have participated in all phases of the research process. For example, the team members did not engage in analyzing the data or writing the report. Given the team members' time limitations, their full participation would have been difficult, if not impossible. However, members of the leadership team did participate in designing the content and process of the action research and making the interventions relevant for them. I also offered them some excerpts from the data and was transparent about the analysis to maximize their involvement.

The practical outcomes of this study are many. First, the action research process provided new insights for the leadership team members and produced practical ideas with which they can experiment to develop their communication style. Another outcome is the Leadership Team Tool, which emerged based on the action research process and the previous phases in this study. The practicality of this study ultimately will be judged by other scholar-practitioners.

Participatory action research should be grounded in theory (Simpson & Seibold 2008), and this study is based on a broad theoretical background which informed the entire action research process. This basis is well illustrated in the applications of CMM theory in practical interventions to facilitate leadership team communication. In addition, to ensure consistency between theory and

practice, I took a critical, reflexive position toward the action research and my role in conducting it. It is recommended that scholars engage in continuous and rigorous reflective practice (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009; Lindlof & Taylor 2011). The next section highlights some aspects of the reflective practice in which I engaged during the action research process.

4.2.3 Role of the scholar-practitioner

In some ways, my role as a scholar-practitioner could be seen as problematic because I conducted interventions which I later analyzed and evaluated. Additionally, I assumed multiple positions. I took the third-person position when I observed the leadership team, the second-person position when I collaborated with team members to decide the next steps in the process, and the first-person position when I participated in making social reality during the intervention workshops (see Barge & Pearce 2004). These positions call for a reflexive stance in the evaluation of the action research.

Participatory action research requires the researcher to be “both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research” (Reason & Bradbury 2006, p. 7). Cunliffe (2008) suggests that, to do research from the social constructionist and critical perspectives, researchers need to be reflexive about the underlying assumptions they use when interpreting communicative situations and gathering and analyzing data. To be reflexive, one needs to question what is taken for granted, check validity, and reveal hidden foundations (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2009).

Analyzing the research data became one form of reflective practice because it increased my understanding of the flows of interaction, the turns I took, and what might have influenced taking those specific turns. The continuous cycle of action and reflection—that is, collecting, analyzing, and making sense of data before interventions—enabled me to move back and forth between theory and practice and to reflect on how I could remain truthful to the theoretical background in its application.

To further ensure that I continuously reflected on and evaluated the quality of the action research process while conducting it, I asked my colleague Martin Little to interview me. Little is a consultant and family therapist working from a systemic-constructionist perspective (about this perspective, see, for example, Barge & Little 2002, 2008). The interview took place in the middle of the action research process and was video-recorded. Here, I present some parts of that conversation to shed light on the role of the scholar-practitioner. During the interview, the terms “consultant” and “consultation” were used and can be extended to the role of scholar-practitioner.

One factor of which engaged scholar-practitioners need to be mindful is the frame of reference they use. This was the subject of the first question Little asked me during the interview:

Extract 1:

- 1 L: As a consultant, when you sit down to work with someone,
 2 what is the basic idea you use? That is a starting question.
 3 E: Hmm, not an easy one but a useful one.
 4 L: Given that you are saying that you are using a communication
 5 approach—
 6 what is the basic idea of communication that you use?
 7 E: I think ... the basic idea of communication is ... kind of trying to
 8 focus on coordination and how everyone contributes to that.
 9 Something like a balance between coordination and
 10 individual responsibility for the actions.

As illustrated in Extract 1, Little inquired about my sense and understanding of the ontological premises of the action research process (lines 1–2). I remember hesitating and struggling to answer his question. This simple question made a big difference, leading me to realize that I had not extensively or explicitly clarified the philosophical stance of the so-called communication approach. This led me to reflect on what I really meant by the communication approach and how I made sense of it. The change I later made in the action research process was that I purposefully aimed to be more transparent about the theoretical background I used for the research process.

Later in the interview, Little deepened his original question by asking how the ontological premises might be shown in the research practice (lines 10, 12–13):

Extract 2:

- 1 L: So when you reflect, what do you reflect upon?
 2 E: I usually reflect on what is going on here.
 3 L: And what do you think then? What does that phrase
 4 mean? What are you interested in, curious about?

During the action research process, the communication perspective became a living practice, and some interventions were more intuitive than planned. Shotter (1993, 2006) calls this practical knowing or knowing from-within. However, what seems intuitive can sometimes form the blind spots in facilitation; that is, what feels appropriate in certain situations might limit identifying and exploring other options. This question eventually made me think about why I paid attention and responded to some aspects but not others when conducting this study. It also made me consider what aspects I, as a scholar, tended to notice when analyzing data and how they were related to my assumptions about leadership team communication.

I also became aware that I was quite concerned about whether I was introducing the right interventions and if they were useful for the leadership team members. Little responded by reminding me about what it means to really look at my own practice from the social constructionist lens: “you can only do what you can do in the moment. That applies [to] all people. In the moment, you do what you do.” In this statement, I think, the focus on the relational na-

ture of human behavior became apparent. Relationality became further emphasized in the conversation as I reflected on what I had noticed in my own doing, as shown in extract 3:

Extract 3:

- 1 E: I have noticed that, usually or in this process, I am
 2 introducing the contrast or taking somehow not the
 3 opposite but a different perspective –
 4 L: So now, you are talking about what you are doing,
 5 but what is it that you are doing together with them
 6 and they are doing together with you?

In Extract 3, I made two interesting observations. One concerned relationality and the difficulty of keeping one's focus on the system and the coordination of communication, instead of oneself. The second observation was related to my sense of introducing a difference. Barge (2015) writes that a key value of dialogic OD is working with difference. This means not only deliberately introducing something that is different but also allowing the differences within the system to become visible. Differences can generate new possibilities when affirmed and challenged. I believe that the facilitation approach in this study enabled some differences among the leadership team and between the team and myself to surface in our conversations, increasing reflexivity. However, understanding the role that differences might have played during the action research process would require deeper reflection and investigation.

To conclude, the mindset of the scholar-practitioner affects the choices made during research practice (Bushe & Marshak 2015). A certain mindset creates both possibilities and limitations. For me, it was worthwhile to engage in a practice in which I reflected on my role and the ways I participated in the production of this study and consequently affected the outcomes. Although engaging in thorough reflections on one's role and its impact might be difficult because one's beliefs and logics of interpretation come under scrutiny, it is this kind of reflection that increases the quality of research.

4.2.4 Transferability of the study

One question is whether the findings of this study are valid and transferable to other leadership teams or organizational groups in general. Qualitative research generally aims to understand phenomena as locally constituted, which leads to situated and contextual knowledge. That is why qualitative research often uses small sample sizes, as in this study. Such a small sample size poses a challenge to making general conclusions about leadership team communication. Also, the majority of the participants in study, although representing intercultural companies and leadership teams, is Finnish. In addition, participants were recruited through my professional network, which might have limited the diversity of the leadership team members participating in this study. This method might have led to the fact that most participants were in HR roles. However, this study is

located in the applied communication field, and its primary purpose is to apply, not create, theory.

Silverman (2011) points out that it is a misunderstanding to believe that a single case study or small sample cannot offer knowledge that can be used in more general contexts. In this study, I gather rich data focusing on leadership teams within the context of large international companies. Although mostly Finnish by nationality, participants represent a similar group of people, which can be seen as increasing transferability. The leadership team members in this study share similar experiences with the communication challenges that arose in leadership teamwork. These shared experiences form rather coherent data. In addition, I have encountered similar challenges in other leadership teams and organizational groups during my professional career as a consultant. The issues that emerged in the study are similar to the communication processes of organizational teams in general, including such communication phenomena as decision making, knowledge sharing, defining objectives, managing disagreements and conflicts, and leading through change. In that sense, this study points to valuable future directions for investigating communication challenges not only in leadership teams but also in teamwork in general.

The transferability of this study can also be evaluated based on how the research process was documented. This study focuses on qualitative methodologies to in-situ investigate the subjective experiences of leadership team members and naturally occurring leadership team communication. I describe and illustrate the various phases of the research process and the data collection and analysis methods in this conclusion and in the original articles. These descriptions might help others apply the research setting in other contexts.

4.2.5 Ethical considerations

All research involves ethical decisions. This is especially true of action research because the researcher purposefully intervenes in and seeks to change an existing system (Frey 2006). This study followed the ethical principles recommended by the National Advisory Board on Research Ethics (2009).

All those involved in the study participated voluntarily. Every participant was informed of the purpose of the research and the design of the research process. All but one participant gave permission to be recorded. One participant refused to be recorded in one-to-one situations (e.g., interview, coaching) during the action research process because he felt uncomfortable with it. In his case, I wrote notes, instead of making a recording.

One ethical responsibility of the researcher is to ensure confidentiality. Confidentiality was discussed with every participant at the beginning of both the interviews and the action research process. Participants' anonymity was ensured throughout the study. Any references in the quotations that could reveal the identity of the person or the organization were deleted. As well, in the action research process, the company and I signed a contract of confidentiality. Throughout the study, I was careful not to disclose any information about the companies or the people who took part in this study.

During collaborative research and engagement, scholar-practitioners need to work with several dialectics (for different dialectics, see, for example, Cheney 2008). One such dialectic is acting honestly and transparently while being sensitive and confidential (Frey 2006). The position of the scholar-practitioner allowed me to access the leadership team's authentic communication situations by participating in their meetings and informal conversations outside the meeting room. This participation was an important way of building a relationship of trust with each team member. Team members explicitly but confidentially shared their perceptions and experiences not only in the formal research setting but also outside the meeting room, for example, during lunch.

Through this engagement, I gained more information than could be disclosed to participants. This discrepancy raised an ethical dilemma: how to be honest and transparent but confidential and discreet at the same time. The questions of how much of what I heard and learned I could share and how to formulate what I shared so that it did not harm the existing relationships among team members were present throughout the action research process. To manage this dilemma, I had to find ways of respecting privately shared stories while bringing important points to the notice and consideration of the entire leadership team.

4.3 Theoretical and practical implications

The starting point for this study was conducting theoretically and practically relevant research, and this objective has informed the design and selection of methods in this study. Applied communication scholars aim to make a difference through, not only from, their research (Frey 2009). To this end, the present study employs an approach in which the theoretical framework and research methodology come together in a joint process of leadership team facilitation. Communication is a practical discipline, and communication theories often have a practical value: they help people make sense of their communication behavior in relation to others and develop ways to improve their communication practice.

Communication competence has been a core interest of communication scholars. However, the prevailing conceptualizations of communication competence have largely focused on a socio-psychological approach to individuals' skills, knowledge, and motivations (Barge 2014), evaluated by the criteria of effectiveness and appropriateness (Spitzberg 2000, 2008; Spitzberg & Cupach 1989). These conceptualizations serve well in some contexts, but to understand and take communication seriously as meaning making, we have to create definitions that highlight communication competence as a relational accomplishment, not as individual performance. This study sheds light on possible ways to fulfill that aim using perspectives from interpersonal communication theories and dialogic OD. Another needed development that is a possible task for communication scholars is to seek ways to operationalize communication compe-

tence using the meaning-making model of communication. Instead of working from skill-based definitions, it could be fruitful to move toward more practice-based conceptualizations. For example, such concepts as systemic questioning (Tomm 1988) and episode work (Pearce 2008) could offer interesting new pathways to define communication competence from the standpoint of meaning making.

This study increases understanding of leadership team communication in general. The study findings show that leadership teams face various communication challenges that can distract them from working effectively. However, these challenges are rarely discussed openly within teams. It is important that leadership teams become aware of and discuss the various communication challenges they face in order to overcome them and increase the leadership team's reflexivity (Schippers *et al.* 2012, 2014). Leadership team meetings are important social activities in which the different aspects of leadership teamwork are socially constructed (Cooren 2015; Putnam *et al.* 2012). Although a growing number of studies has employed the bona-fide group perspective to explore the discursive constructions related to strategies and team identities, more research in authentic leadership team settings is needed. Leadership teams are seen as the most influential groups within organizations, and to understand the functioning of an organization, we could do no better than start by attempting to understand leadership team communication. However, this task is not easy; indeed, the difficulty accessing the interactions that take place in the boardroom might be one reason for the lack of studies in this area (Samra-Fredericks 2000a, 2000b).

Future directions for leadership team research are many. We should continue to examine the challenges to communication to further our understanding of how these challenges occur and are managed within unfolding situations. Additionally, focusing on each of the communication challenges presented in this study could offer a more specific and comprehensive understanding of how they might influence the communication processes of leadership teams. It would also be important to further investigate the interplay of communication challenges and communication competence. The findings of this study suggest that competent communication is related to managing communication challenges in leadership teams. The idea of integrating communication challenges with the conceptualization of communication competence is an interesting one and worth further exploration.

Although the leadership teams in the study were multicultural and interacted using communication technologies, the themes of intercultural communication or communication technology were not explicitly addressed. However, larger contexts, such as the economic climate, globalization, and communication technology, affect leadership team communication in various ways and, therefore, should be included in future studies.

This study describes a facilitation approach based on the methodology of participatory action research and theoretically founded in systemic-constructionist thinking and CMM theory. This approach provides conceptual tools to make sense of unfolding communication situations and to intervene to

promote competent communication and reflexivity. Drawing on the principles of process consultation, the facilitation was incorporated into the existing structure of leadership team meetings, which enabled working with the discursive material emerging from within the moment to change the conversations (Marshak & Grant 2011). This facilitation approach differs from most team facilitation interventions because it (1) is emergent rather than planned; (2) focuses on modifying actual discourses rather than teaching aspects of team communication; and (3) does not take much of participants' time. Much communication training happens outside the work context and frequently takes long periods of time, ranging from one to several days. This facilitation took place during leadership team meetings and never lasted more than an hour.

Hopefully, this study will lead to further innovations and approaches in communication training and facilitation, where the focus all too often remains on developing individuals' skill sets or offering fixed definitions of what can be considered good team communication. The facilitation approach in this study provides a framework for working with meaning making which has proven to have valuable theoretical and practical relevance. However, research should be advanced in further directions to extend facilitation to the organizational context of leadership teams and to broaden understanding of the long-term outcomes of team facilitation.

Facilitators and OD consultants directly and indirectly influence organizations and their members by introducing different ideas and methodologies (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2004). A possible direction for future research is to explore the choices and decisions that facilitators make in the moment and their impacts on organizations. Interesting questions include what facilitators actually do and how they know what to do. Facilitation work has been studied by facilitators themselves and by some scholars (e.g., Alvesson & Sveningsson 2004; Puutio 2009; Simon & Chard 2014). Further attention needs to be paid to investigating the outcomes of facilitation and the different theories and methodologies employed in communication facilitation.

The study's practical contribution is the Leadership Team Tool, which adds to the scholarly discourses on leadership teams, OD, and communication by demonstrating how the theoretical framework of communication as meaning making can be translated into practical solutions. One example is the instant application of the dimensions of communication challenges operationalized for the Leadership Team Tool. Additionally, the Leadership Team Tool counterbalances the strong emphasis that has been put on developing individual leaders. The tool, therefore, also makes a practical contribution to the concept of communication competence and the understanding of competent communication behavior.

Further investigation and development of the Leadership Team Tool are needed to understand its potential in leadership team development. Empirical research on the use of the tool in an authentic leadership team setting could offer valuable information about how and in what circumstances the tool can facilitate leadership team communication. As well, collecting feedback and ideas

from leadership team members could aid in the further development of the tool. Finally, connecting the tool and its outcomes to other team-level and organizational measurements (Wheelan & Furbur 2006) could be an important next step in developing the Leadership Team Tool.

This study focuses on understanding and describing how to facilitate leadership team communication. In particular, the study's interest lies in the development of competent communication and reflexivity. To improve communication, leadership team members need to become aware of the communication challenges they face and to engage in rigorous, continuous reflection on different aspects of communication and their effects on teamwork. They need to develop reflexivity, that is, a sense of responsibility for the fact that they construct a given situation even while responding to it.

To conclude, I encourage communication scholars to move toward engaged scholarship and to further illustrate the practical value of communication theory. There is a growing demand for tools and methodologies based on communication as meaning making. This study demonstrates one way of conducting engaged, reflexive research, which hopefully will provide a framework for scholars to "extend their research through intervention" (Hartwig 2014, p. 65). I encourage practitioners to engage in communication theory to enhance their practice and communication scholars to engage in practices to make a difference *through* their research. This is a quest for scholarship that is reflexive and relationally responsive.

YHTEENVETO

Tutkimuksen tausta

Erilaiset tiimit ja ryhmät ovat keskeinen osa tämän päivän organisaatioiden toimintaa (Poole 1997, 2013). Kun työ on muuttunut yhä kompleksisemmaksi, yhden ihmisen tietotaito ei enää riitä työn menestyksekkääseen hoitamiseen. Organisaatioiden tiimirakenteilla onkin pyritty lisäämään organisaatioiden tuloksellisuutta ja tavoitteiden toteutumista (Wheelan & Furbur 2006). Samalla myös erilaiset ja eritasoiset johtoryhmät ovat yleistyneet ja nykypäivänä päätöksiä useimmiten tekevätkin yksittäisten johtajien sijaan johtoryhmät. Yksittäisten johtajien yhteen saattaminen ei kuitenkaan välttämättä muodosta vielä johtoryhmää. Johtoryhmä muotoutuu ryhmäksi sekä ylläpitää ja uudistaa toimintaansa vuorovaikutuksessa. Tämän väitöskirjatyön tärkeänä oletuksena on, että kehittämällä johtoryhmän vuorovaikutusta, erityisesti vuorovaikutusosaamista voidaan vaikuttaa johtoryhmätyön tuloksellisuuden parantumiseen.

Johtoryhmät eroavat muista työyhteisön ryhmistä siten, että johtoryhmän toiminnalla on aina merkittävä vaikutus koko organisaation toimintaan. Johtoryhmät yleensä nähdään organisaation vaikutusvaltaisimpana ryhmänä (Hambrick 2010). Johtoryhmien tekemillä päätöksillä on vaikutusta sekä strategisen että operatiivisen tason toimintaan.

Johtoryhmätutkimus on pitkälti ollut painottunut johtoryhmän kokoonpanon ja organisaation tuloksellisuuden välisen yhteyden selvittämiseen (esim. Carpenter 2011; Hambrick 2010; Luoma 2010; Zorn & Tompson 2002). Aiempi tutkimus on keskittynyt muun muassa johtoryhmän jäsenten yksilöllisiin ominaisuuksiin, kuten ikään, sukupuoleen tai persoonallisuustekijöihin. Lisäksi johtoryhmätutkimuksessa on usein keskitytty tutkimaan toimitusjohtajaa koko johtoryhmän sijaan (Hawkins 2014; Mooney & Amason 2011; Peterson & Zhang 2011, Wageman ja ym. 2008). Vaikka erilaisia ryhmiä ja tiimejä onkin tutkittu ryhmäviestinnän puolella, johtoryhmien vuorovaikutuksesta tai sen kehittämisestä on tutkimustietoa yllättävän vähän ottaen huomioon johtoryhmän keskeinen asema.

Keskeisen asemansa ja kompleksisen tehtäväkenttensä vuoksi johtoryhmät eivät aina välttämättä toimi ryhmä- ja tiimiviestinnän kirjallisuudessa esitettyjen ihanteiden mukaisesti. Johtoryhmän tehokas toiminta ja tuloksellisuus riippuvatkin hyvin pitkälti siitä, miten johtoryhmän jäsenet ovat vuorovaikutuksessa keskenään. On syytä keskittyä vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämiseen, jotta johtoryhmän työskentely on tehokasta ja hyödyttää koko organisaatiota.

Tässä väitöskirjatyössä vuorovaikutusosaaminen nähdään erityisesti ryhmätason konstruktiona, jossa korostuvat erityisesti relationaalisuuden ja refleksiivisyyden näkökulmat. Esimerkiksi Barge (2014) on kritisoinut, ettei vuorovaikutusosaamista voida rajoittaa vain yksilön taitoihin, tietoihin ja motivaatioon, vaan vuorovaikutusosaaminen tulisi nähdä nimenomaan relationaalisena ilmiönä. Tällöin vuorovaikutusosaamisen määrittelyssä ja kehittämisessä tulisi keskittyä siihen, miten erilaisissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa vuorovaikutusosa-

puolet luovat, ylläpitävät ja muuttavat vuorovaikutusrakenteitaan, -käytänteitään ja -prosessejaan. Relationaalisessa näkökulmassa korostuu myös refleksiivisyys, jolla tässä työssä tarkoitetaan sitä, että vuorovaikussopuolek ovat tietoisia ja vastuullisia siitä, että kun he merkityksentävät, tulkitsevat ja reagoivat vuorovaikutustilanteissa, he samanaikaisesti myös rakentavat tuota kyseistä vuorovaikutustilannetta. Tällöin kukin johtoryhmäläinen nähdään ikään kuin oman vuorovaikutuksensa käsikirjoittajina: he todentavat omaa sosiaalista todellisuutta vuorovaikutuksessaan ja muuttaakseen tuota todellisuutta heidän tulee muuttaa vuorovaikutustaan (Pearce 1999, 2007).

Tässä väitöskirjatyössä johtoryhmän vuorovaikutuksen ja vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämistä lähestytään dialogisen organisaation kehittämisen teorian (Dialogic OD, Bushe & Marshak, 2008; 2014) sekä merkitysten yhteensovittamisen teorian eli CMM-teorian (Coordinated Management of Meaning, Pearce & Cronen, 1980) viitekehyksistä käsin. Tällöin vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämisessä tulee keskeiseksi erilaisten johtoryhmän jäsenten välisten vuorovaikutussuhteiden ja keskustelujen sekä niissä ilmentyvien vuorovaikutuskäytänteiden kehittäminen. Dialogisen OD-teorian lähtökohtana on sellaisten keskustelujen fasilitointi, joissa tuetaan refleksiivisyyden ja vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittymistä.

Tutkimustehtävä

Tässä puheviestinnän väitöskirjatyössä tarkastellaan vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämistä johtoryhmätyön kontekstissa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on ymmärtää ja kuvata, miten taitavaa vuorovaikutusta voidaan kehittää johtoryhmätyössä. Tämän väitöskirjatyön lähtökohtana on soveltava viestintätutkimus, jossa keskeistä on sekä teorian että käytännön tiivis integrointi. Tämä väitöskirjatyö voidaan jakaa viiteen tutkimustavoitteeseen ja se on toteutettu viiden artikkelin avulla.

Ensinnäkin tavoitteena on jäsentää vuorovaikutusosaamista relationaalisuuden näkökulmasta ja työyhteisön kehittämisen kontekstissa. Tähän tutkimustavoitteeseen vastataan ensimmäisessä artikkelissa, jossa vuorovaikutusosaamista on tarkasteltu kolmen relationaalisuutta korostavan interpersonaalisen viestintäteorian näkökulmista.

Toiseksi, tutkimus selvittää, minkälaisia vuorovaikutushaasteita johtoryhmät kohtaavat ja joutuvat käsittelemään johtoryhmätyössä. On tärkeää ymmärtää erilaisia vuorovaikutushaasteita toimivan vuorovaikutuksen kehittämiseksi. Tähän tutkimustavoitteeseen vastataan toisessa artikkelissa, joka perustuu ensimmäiseen empiiriseen aineistoon.

Kolmanneksi, tutkimuksessa pyritään kuvaamaan ja ymmärtämään, miten osallistava toimintatutkimus sekä sen puitteissa toteutettu tiimifasilitointi voi edesauttaa johtoryhmän jäsenten vuorovaikutusosaamisen ja erityisesti refleksiivisyyden kehittymistä. Tähän tutkimustavoitteeseen vastataan kolmannessa artikkelissa. Artikkelissa on tarkasteltu avainhetkiä, joissa refleksiivisyyttä on joko tietoisesti tai tiedostamatta edistetty sekä sitä, miten tiimifasilitointi vaikuttaa refleksiivisyyden rakentumiseen.

Neljänneksi, tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan, miten CMM-teoriaa voidaan soveltaa käytännössä kehittämismetodinä. Tähän tutkimustavoitteeseen vastataan neljännessä artikkelissa, jossa demonstroidaan CMM-teorian käyttöä fasilitointitilanteissa.

Viidenneksi, tutkimuksen tavoitteena on kehittää tutkimuksen teoreettisen viitekehyksen ja tutkimustulosten pohjalta työkalu johtoryhmien vuorovaikutuksen fasilitointiin. Tähän tutkimustavoitteeseen vastataan viidennessä artikkelissa, jossa esitellään konkreettinen työkalu Leadership Team Tool.

Tutkimuksen toteutus

Tämän väitöskirjatutkimuksen aineisto on kerätty kahdessa vaiheessa. Ensimmäisessä vaiheessa olen haastatellut seitsemää johtoryhmän jäsentä (N=7), jotka kaikki edustavat eri kansainvälisiä yrityksiä ja toimialoja. Haastateltavat löytyivät ammatillisen verkostoni kautta. Joihinkin johtoryhmän jäseniin otin yhteyttä suoraan ja osa haastatelluista löytyi useamman yhteyshenkilön avustamana. Johtoryhmän jäsenten löytäminen, haastatteluun suostuminen ja haastatteluai-kataulusta sopiminen oli yllättävän haastavaa ja aikaa vievää. Johtoryhmätutkimusten haasteena monesti saattaa olla nimenomaan hankala pääsy aitoihin johtoryhmiin.

Haastattelut olivat luonteeltaan syvähaastatteluja ja kestivät keskimäärin noin tunnin. Haastatteluista kuusi toteutettiin haastateltavien omilla työpaikoilla joko heidän työhuoneessaan tai varta vasten varatussa kokoustilassa. Yksi haastattelu toteutettiin Skype:n avulla aikatauluhaasteiden vuoksi. Haastatteluista kuusi toteutettiin suomeksi ja yksi englanniksi. Kieli tai verkkoteknologian käyttö ei näyttänyt vaikuttavan merkittävästi haastatteluihin.

Kaikki haastattelut nauhoitettiin, johon pyydettiin lupa haastattelujen alussa. Haastattelua ohjasi muutama haastatteluteema kysymyksineen, mutta haastattelu oli luonteeltaan keskustelevalta ja haastateltavia rohkaistiin jakamaan omia kokemuksia johtoryhmätyöstä, siihen liittyvistä vuorovaikutushaasteista ja tarvittavasta vuorovaikutusosaamisesta.

Haastattelut litteroitiin, jonka jälkeen aineistoa tulkittiin aineistolähtöisesti. Tässä vaiheessa varsinaiseksi kiinnostuksen kohteeksi ja tutkimuskysymykseksi nousi johtoryhmätyöhön liittyvät vuorovaikutushaasteet, mikä ohjasi aineiston tarkempaa analysointia. Aineistosta poimittiin ensin kaikki viittaukset vuorovaikutushaasteisiin, jotka edelleen ryhmiteltiin eri teemoihin osittain tutkimuskysymysten mukaisesti. Teemoja edelleen tarkennettiin erilaisiin alateemoihin. Koska alateemat alkoivat muodostaa jatkumopareja, niistä muodostettiin lopuksi dimensioita keskeisiä johtoryhmien vuorovaikutushaasteita kuvaamaan.

Aineistonkeruun toinen vaihe toteutettiin osallistavan toimintatutkimuksen periaattein erään kansainvälisen yrityksen ylimmän johtoryhmän kanssa. Yritys on Suomessa toimiva teollisuuden alan yritys. Tutkimuksen aikana johtoryhmässä oli yhdeksän henkilöä (N=9), joista kaikki olivat miehiä. Kahdeksan johtoryhmän jäsenistä olivat suomalaisia ja yksi oli saksalainen. Johtoryhmän yhteisenä kielenä oli englanti. Aineistonkeruun aluksi allekirjoitettiin salassapitosopimus.

Toimintatutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin pääosin johtoryhmäkokousten aikana yhdeksän kuukauden ajan vuoden 2014 tammikuusta alkaen. Tutkimusaineisto koostuu kolmesta videoidusta johtoryhmäkokouksesta, viidestä äänitallennetusta johtoryhmän fasilitoidusta työpajasta sekä yhteensä 17 äänitallennetusta yksilöhaastattelusta ja –keskustelusta. Tämän lisäksi olin paikalla viidessä kokouksessa, jonka aikana havainnoin ja tein muistiinpanoja. Fasilitoiduista työpajoista kertyi myös kirjattua materiaalia. Koska kokoukset kestivät yleensä vähintään päivän ja toisinaan kaksi päivää, osallistuin myös johtoryhmän epävirallisiin tauko- ja lounaskeskusteluihin. Koko yhdeksän kuukauden prosessi on vaikuttanut tutkimuksen aikana tehtyihin valintoihin ja tulkitoihin. Loppujen lopuksi tarkempaan analyysiin valittiin ensimmäisen kuuden kuukauden aikana tuotettu aineisto, sillä sen katsottiin riittävän tutkimuksen tavoitteiden täyttämiseksi.

Kaksi videoitua johtoryhmäkokousta sekä kolme äänitettyä työpajatallennetta litteroitiin sanatarkasti. Tämän lisäksi yhdeksän haastattelua, jotka toteutettiin toimintatutkimuksen alussa, litteroitiin sisältötarkasti. Haastattelut olivat alun perin tarkoitettu kehittämisteemojen fokusointia varten, eikä varsinaiseen tutkimusraporttiin liitettäväksi.

Ensiksi aineistosta etsittiin kaikki viittaukset siitä, miten johtoryhmän jäsenet viittaavat itseensä ja tekemiseensä tiiminä ja johtoryhmänä sekä miten jäsenten väliset vuorovaikutussuhteet ilmentyvät johtoryhmäkokouksessa. Tämän jälkeen viitteet teemoiteltiin CMM-teorian merkitysten hierarkkian mukaisesti ryhmiin: johtoryhmä itse/johtoryhmän identiteetti, johtoryhmän sisäiset vuorovaikutussuhteet sekä kulttuuri.

Tämän jälkeen aineistosta analysointiin avainhetkiä, joiden löytämiseen käytettiin CMM-teorian ajatusta kriittisistä hetkistä tai bifurkaatiopisteistä. Näissä hetkissä korostuu tarve muuttaa vuorovaikutuksen suuntaa. Avainhetkien valinta perustui siihen, että noissa hetkissä minulla ulkopuolisena konsulttina esiintyi tarve puuttua keskusteluun tavoitteenani vaikuttaa sen lopputulemaan. Aineistoa analysoitiin teoreettisesti, mikä mahdollisti, että lopulliset viisi avainhetkeä pystyttiin identifioimaan.

Tutkimustulokset ja päätelmät

Ensinnäkin vuorovaikutusosaamista työyhteisöjen kehittämisen kontekstissa on tarpeellista ja tarkoituksenmukaista tarkastella relationaalisena, vuorovaikutusprosesseihin ja –käytänteisiin kiinteästi liittyvänä ilmiönä. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen määrittelyissä on harvoin hyödynnetty interpersonaalisen viestinnän teorioita, joissa relationaalisuus on keskeisessä osassa. Tämä ymmärrys olisikin tarpeenmukaista liittää nykyisiin vuorovaikutuskoulutuksiin, joissa hyvin usein nojataan valmiiksi määritettyihin yksilökeskeisiin kuvauksiin siitä, mitä hyvä vuorovaikutus on ja mitä se ei ole. Tällöin riskinä on liian yksinkertaistetut selitysmallit ihmisten vuorovaikutuskäyttäytymisestä, kun toisaalta taitavan vuorovaikutuksen takaamiseksi olisi tärkeää kehittää ihmisten ymmärrystä vuorovaikutuksen kompleksisesta luonteesta ja jokaisen vastuullisesta roolista vuorovaikutuksen rakentajana.

Toiseksi, johtoryhmät kohtaavat työssään monenlaisia, toisinaan jännittäviä vuorovaikutushaasteita, jotka tässä väitöskirjatyössä on esitetty dimensioina ja raportoitu artikkelissa II. Esimerkiksi joskus johtoryhmän jäsenen omaan työtehtävään liittyvä funktio- tai osastokohtainen tavoite saattaa mennä johtoryhmän yhteisen tavoitteen edelle, mikä edelleen hankaloittaa yhteistyötä. Vuorovaikutushaasteet ilmentyvät usein johtoryhmän kokouksissa, jotka saatetaan kokea turhan virallisina ja jäykkinä. Toisinaan johtoryhmän jäsenet kokevat, että todelliset mielipiteet tulevat esille kokouksen ulkopuolella, ja joskus päätökset on jo sovittu etukäteen pienemmällä porukalla. Ihanteena tunnutaan pitävän avointa vuorovaikutusta, jossa kaikilla on mahdollisuus osallistua päätöksentekoon. Johtoryhmän vetäjällä näyttäisi olevan merkittävä rooli johtoryhmän vuorovaikutuskulttuurin luomisessa ja kehittämisessä. Osa johtoryhmän jäsenistä näki toimitusjohtajan asettavan vuorovaikutuksen mallin koko organisaatiolle, ja osa taas korosti, ettei hyvin toimiva johtoryhmä välttämättä kaipaa vahvaa johtajaa.

Vaikka johtoryhmät usein tiedostavat nämä vuorovaikutushaasteet, he harvoin käyttävät aikaa niistä keskustelemiseen tai reflektointiin johtoryhmän kokouksessa tai koko johtoryhmän läsnä ollessa. Johtoryhmyön kehittämiseen keskitytään yleensä erillisillä kehittämisspäivillä kerran tai kaksi vuodessa. Kuitenkin erilaisiin vuorovaikutushaasteisiin ja muihin yhteistyötä haastaviin tekijöihin olisi syytä tarttua niiden ilmentyessä, jotta taitava vuorovaikutus ja vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittyminen mahdollistuvat.

Kolmanneksi, tämä tutkimus tarkasteli vuorovaikutusosaamisen ja erityisesti refleksiivisyyden kehittämistä johtoryhmyön kontekstissa. Tutkimuksen kehittämisprosessi ja sen tulokset on raportoitu artikkelissa III. Kehittämisessä hyödynnettiin osallistavan toimintatutkimuksen, tiimifasilitoinnin sekä prosessikonsultoinnin periaatteita. Kehittämisellä pyrittiin lisäämään johtoryhmän jäsenten ymmärrystä johtoryhmän toimintaa haastavista teemoista, luomaan rakentavaa palautekulttuuria johtoryhmän jäsenten välillä sekä auttamaan johtoryhmän jäseniä kehittämään tehokkaampia vuorovaikutuskäytänteitä johtoryhmän kokouksiin. Näin vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen nivottiin osaksi laajempia teemoja ja todellisia vuorovaikutusprosesseja. Tutkimusten tulosten perusteella voidaan sanoa, että vuorovaikutuksen fasilitointi ja kehittämisinterventiot, jotka tapahtuivat johtoryhmäkokousten osana ja fokusoivat sen hetken vuorovaikutuksen reflektointiin, edistävät johtoryhmän jäsenten tietoisuutta omasta vuorovaikutuskäyttäytymisestään ja sen vaikutuksista koko ryhmän vuorovaikutukseen ja toisinpäin.

Neljänneksi, tutkimuksessa tuotettua kehittämistyökalua sekä siihen rakennettua kysymysrakennetta voidaan pitää yhtenä tutkimustuloksena. Tämän tutkimuksen lähtökohtana on alusta saakka ollut teorian ja käytännön yhdistäminen ja sen havainnollistaminen. Viidennessä artikkelissa esitetty konkreettinen ja praktinen työkalu havainnollistaa osaltaan sitä, miten tutkimuksen aikana tuotettua ymmärrystä vuorovaikutusosaamisesta ja refleksiivisyydestä voidaan konkretisoida ja siten hyödyntää johtoryhmän kehittämisprosesseissa.

Tämä väitöskirjatyö tarjoaa uusia suuntia sekä vuorovaikutusosaamisen jäsenyksille että vuorovaikutuksen kehittämiseen keskittyvän tutkimuksen toteuttamiselle. Tutkimukseni on ollut välittömästi hyödyllinen siihen osallistuneille johtoryhmän jäsenille. Lisäksi sen tuloksia voidaan soveltaa niin vuorovaikutuskoulutusten ja laajempien kehittämisohjelmien toteuttamisessa. Väitöskirjatyöni tarjoaa uutta ymmärrystä johtoryhmien vuorovaikutuksesta ja sen kehittamisestä. Se on osoittanut myös yhden mahdollisen polun soveltavan viestintätutkimuksen toteuttamiseksi ja tarjoaa siten menetelmällisen kontribuution johtoryhmätyön ja ylipäättään vuorovaikutuksen tutkimiseen.

Jatkotutkimusmahdollisuudet ovat monet. Tämä tutkimus on tarjonnut luotauksen johtoryhmän vuorovaikutushaasteisiin. Vaikka laadullisessa tutkimuksessa vähäinen tutkimusaineisto on tyypillistä, tämän tutkimuksen luotettavuutta ja siirrettävyyttä olisi lisännyt suurempi tutkimusaineisto. Osaltaan tutkimusaineiston hankintaa hankaloitti yllättävän haastava pääsy johtoryhmiin. Johtoryhmien vuorovaikutushaasteita olisi kuitenkin syytä tutkia lisää suuremmalla otannalla. Erityisesti vuorovaikutushaasteiden ja vuorovaikutusosaamisen yhteyttä olisi mielenkiintoista tarkastella lisää. Lisäksi vuorovaikutushaasteiden yhteydessä voisi vielä syvemmin pureutua kulttuurienvälisen viestinnän sekä teknologiavälitteisen viestinnän problematisointiin. Tässä väitöskirjatyössä näitä teemoja vain pintaraapaistiin.

Tämä väitöskirjatyö on osoittanut, että johtoryhmien vuorovaikutuksen tutkiminen on merkittävää, sillä se tarjoaa moninaisen näköalan organisaatioiden elämään ja vuorovaikutuskulttuuriin. Jatkossa olisikin syytä nivoa johtoryhmien vuorovaikutuksen kehittäminen vielä näkyvämmiin koko organisaation kehittämiseen. Olisi tärkeää ymmärtää, miten johtoryhmissä tehtävät kehittämistoimet vaikuttavat laaja-alaisemmin organisaatioissa ja muussa henkilöstössä.

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ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

VUOROVAIKUTUSOSAAMISEN RELATIONAALISUUS JA TYÖYHTEISÖN KEHITTÄMINEN

by

Hedman, E. & Valkonen, T. 2013

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Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus ja työyhteisön kehittäminen

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Abstrakti

Relationaalisuus on kiinteästi puheviestinnän ominaislaatuun liittyvä käsite, ja sen merkitys ihmisten viestintäkäyttäytymistä selittävänä ilmiönä on vahvistunut entisestään sosiaalisen konstruktionismin myötä (Gergen 2009). Vaikka relationaalisuus on liitetty jo pitkään ikään kuin itsestään selvänä lähtökohdaksi vuorovaikutusosaamisen määrittelyihin, ei juuri ole syvällisesti pohdittu ja jäsennetty, miten vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus voitaisiin ottaa huomioon viestintäkoulutuksessa ja -konsultoinnissa tai muissa työyhteisön kehittämistoimissa. Vuorovaikutusosaamista ei ylipäätään ole jäsennetty niin, että lähtökohtina olisivat olleet relationaalisuutta korostavat interpersonaalisen viestinnän teoriat tai työelämän kehittämisen tarpeet. Tämän artikkelin tavoitteena on tarkastella ja jäsentää vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuutta työyhteisön kehittämisen kontekstissa. Artikkelissa tarkastellaan, mitä relationaalisuudella tarkoitetaan puheviestinnän ja erityisesti vuorovaikutusosaamisen ominaislaatuina ja miten vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalinen luonne voitaisiin nykyistä paremmin ottaa huomioon työyhteisön kehittämisessä.

Avainsanat: merkitysten yhteensovittamisen teoria, relationaalinen viestintäteoria, relationaalisuus, työyhteisön kehittäminen, vuorovaikutusosaaminen, vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teoria

Johdanto

Nykyinen työelämä korostaa vuorovaikutuksen ja vuorovaikutussuhteiden merkitystä työyhteisön toiminnassa, ja modernit johtamistyön näkökulmat tähdentävät johtamisen vuorovaikutteisuutta ja relationaalisuutta (Barge & Fairhurst 2008; Tourish & Hargie 2009, 4). Työyhteisön vuorovaikutussuhteilla onkin suuri merkitys niin yksilön kuin koko organisaation hyvinvoinnille (Gergen 2009; Sias 2009, 18). Työyhteisöjen huomioiminen relationaalisina systeemeinä on merkittävä lähtökohta työyhteisöjen kehittämistoimille, ja relationaalisuus on syytä nivoa myös vuorovaikutusosaamisen ja vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämisen määrittelyihin. Tässä artikkelissa pohditaan, miten vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus voitaisiin ottaa entistä paremmin huomioon työyhteisön kehittämistoimissa.

Työyhteisön kehittämisen taustalla ei ole omaa teoriaa tai jotain tiettyä käytäntöä, vaan kehittämiseen on useita näkökulmia ja otteita. Tässä artikkelissa työyhteisön kehittämistä

¹ Artikkelin perustuu ensimmäisen kirjoittajan puheviestintäalan väitöskirjatutkimukseen, jota ohjaa lehtori Tarja Valkonen Jyväskylän yliopiston viestintätieteiden laitoksella.

tarkastellaan organisaation kehittämisen (organization development, OD) viitekehystä. OD-teoria liitetään yleisesti Kurt Lewinin 1950-luvulla lanseeraamiin muutosteorioihin. Kehittämisen lähtökohtana oli organisaatiomuutosten tehokas läpivieminen. Tätä perinteiseksi OD-teoriaksi kutsuttua lähestymistapaa kritisoidaan monesti sen jäykkyydestä ja pyrkimyksestä korjata pelkästään virheitä. Kehittämisen fokus on tuolloin pikemminkin menneisyydessä kuin tulevaisuudessa, ja työyhteisön jäsenet nähdään enemmänkin kehittämisen kohteina kuin yhteistyökumppaneina.

Parin viime vuosikymmenen aikana kasvanut kiinnostus sosiaalisen konstruktionismin ja kompleksisuusteorioiden näkökulmiin vaikuttaa nykyiseen OD-teoriaan, johon Marshak ja Grant (2008) viittaavat uuden OD:n käsitteellään (New OD). Tämän niin sanotun dialogisen OD-suuntauksen lähtökohtana on useampien todellisuuksien läsnäolon ja kokemusten subjektiivisuuden hyväksyminen. (Cheung-Judge & Holbeche 2011; Hutton & Liefoghe 2011, 78; Marshak & Grant 2008, 7–19; Puutio 2009, 13.) Dialoginen OD-teoria painottaa jokapäiväisen dialogin ja vuoropuhelun merkitystä. Bushke ja Marshak (2008) väittävätkin, että organisaatiomuutos tapahtuu vain muuttamalla jokapäiväisiä keskusteluja. Kehittämisessä käytetään sellaisia interventioita, joiden avulla pyritään muuttamaan työyhteisön jäsenten keskusteluja tuomalla tietoisuuteen organisaatiossa vallitsevat monet todellisuudet ja luomalla uusia todellisuuksia dialogin avulla. Dialoginen OD-teoria korostaa, että kaikilla osallistujilla tulisi olla yhtäläiset mahdollisuudet ja valta osallistua uusien relationaalisten todellisuuksien luomiseen yhdessä toisten kanssa. Tällaisia interventiomenetelmiä ovat muun muassa arvostava haastattelu (appreciative inquiry), tulevaisuustyö (future work) ja niin sanottu open space -teknologia (open space technology). (Hutton & Liefoghe 2011, 78–79.)

Vaikka työyhteisön kehittämiseen ja esimerkiksi oppivaan organisaatioon liittyvässä kirjallisuudessa korostetaan yhteisöllisyyttä edistäviä kollektiivisia kehittämistoimia, näyttäisi työyhteisöjen kehittäminen edelleen olevan suurelta osin vain johtamisen kehittämistä. Johtamisen kehittämistoimetkin ovat Suomessa usein vain yksilökeskeistä johtamiskoulutusta (Rouhiainen-Neunhäuserer 2009, 53).

Työyhteisöjen kehittämiseen liittyy usein myös vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen, ja vuorovaikutustaitojen koulutus on aina ollut merkittävä osa organisaation kehittämistoimia (Engeström 2004, 103–124; Mirvis 2006, 61). Vuorovaikutusosaamisen merkitys työelämässä on korostunut entisestään, varsinkin kun asiantuntija- ja tietotyön määrä on lisääntynyt. Vuorovaikutusosaamista on puheviestintätieteessä tutkittu paljon. Tosin tutkimus on pääosin toteutunut opetuksen ja koulutuksen konteksteissa, jolloin työelämän ja kehittämisen tarpeita ei juuri ole jäsennetty.

Relationaalinen viestintä ja interpersonaaliset viestintäteoriat

Yhteisöllisyyttä edistävät kollektiiviset kehittämistoimet edellyttävät sitä, että ymmärretään työyhteisön jäsenten sosiaalisen vuorovaikutuksen relationaalinen perusluonne. Relationaalisuutta on pyritty kuvaamaan monissa interpersonaalisen viestinnän teorioissa. Jo monialaisen tietoteoreetikon Gregory Batesonin (1956) peruskysymyksenä viestinnän tarkastelussa oli se, missä määrin ihmiset voidaan ylipäätään nähdä erillisinä siitä vuorovaikutuksesta, jossa he ovat. Tämä Batesonin ajattelu on myöhemmin parhaiten kiteytynyt Watzlawickin, Beavinin ja Jacksonin teoksessa *Pragmatics of Human Communication* (1967), jossa he määrittivät viestinnän tarkastelun yhdeksi perusaksiomaksi vuoro-vaikutussuhteen eli sen, että kaikessa viestinnässä on aina sekä sanoman sisällön että vuorovaikutussuhteen ulottuvuus ja että näistä nimenomaan vuorovaikutussuhde määrittää sisältöä.

Relationaalisen viestinnän (relational communication) määrittelyt eroavat toisistaan siinä suhteessa, tarkoitetaanko ylipäätään vuorovaikutussuhteita vai nimenomaan läheisiä,

henkilökohtaisia vuorovaikutussuhteita. Wood (2000) määrittelee oppikirjassaan *Relational communication*, että relationaalinen viestintä ei tarkastele mitä tahansa vuorovaikutussuhteita, vaan erityisesti läheisiä ystävyyssuhteita tai niin sanottuja romanttisia suhteita. Toisin sanoen esimerkiksi työpaikan vuorovaikutussuhteet eivät tämän määritelmän mukaan kuuluisi lainkaan relationaalisen viestinnän osa-alueelle. Usein relationaalisella viestinnällä tarkoitetaan kuitenkin muutakin kuin vain läheisiin ja henkilökohtaisiin vuorovaikutussuhteisiin liittyvää viestintää. Esimerkiksi Keyton (1999, 192) käyttää relationaalisen viestinnän käsitettä ryhmän jäsenten tehtäväkeskeisen vuorovaikutuksen vastakohtana kuvaamaan nimenomaan ryhmäviestinnän sosioemotionaalista ulottuvuutta. Relationaalisuus viestinnän ominaispiirteenä viittaa ylipäätään vuorovaikutussuhteessa tapahtuvaan tai vuorovaikutussuhteeseen liittyvään ilmiöön. Foley ja Duck (2006, 432, 440) luonnehtivat relationaalista viestintää yhteistoiminnalliseksi diskurssiksi, jossa viestijät ikään kuin kutovat yhteistä historiaansa samalla, kun luovat vaihtoehtoja tulevalle vuorovaikutukselle. Täten vuorovaikutusosaaminenkaan ei ole sidottu ainoastaan nykyhetkeen vaan myös siihen, miten tulevaisuuteen liittyviä odotusarvoja käsitellään keskinäisessä vuorovaikutuksessa.

Jotta voidaan pohtia, miten vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus otetaan paremmin huomioon työyhteisön kehittämisessä, on syytä tarkastella ja jäsentää relationaalisuutta interpersonaalisten viestintäteorioiden valossa. Seuraavaksi tarkastelemme, miten relationaalisuutta on määritelty erityisesti relationaalisessa viestintäteoriassa (Millar & Rogers 1987), vuorovaikutussuhteiden jännitteiden teoriassa (Baxter & Montgomery 1996) sekä merkitysten yhteensovittamisen teoriassa (Pearce & Cronen 1976, 1980).

Relationaalinen viestintäteoria

Relationaalinen viestintäteoria (relational communication theory) nojaa pääosin Batesonin ajatteluun sekä kyberneettiseen tutkimustraditioon, ja siihen viitataan toisinaan myös relationaalisen kontrollin teoriana (relational control theory). Teorian kehittämistä siivitti havainto vuorovaikutuksen ja vuorovaikutussuhteiden välisestä tiiviistä kytköksestä. Relationaalinen viestintäteoria tarkastelee viestintää ihmisille välttämättömänä sosiaalisena prosessina, jonka avulla ihmiset luovat ja ylläpitävät vuorovaikutussuhteitaan, identiteettejään ja sosiaalista todellisuuttaan. Relationaalisen viestintäteorian peruslähtökohtana on ymmärtää vuorovaikutussuhteiden rakentumista eli sitä, miten viestintäprosessit ja niissä syntyvät ilmiöt ja rakenteet vaikuttavat vuorovaikutussuhteisiin. Ymmärrys siitä, miten vuorovaikutussuhteita luodaan, tarjoaa tietoa vuorovaikutussuhteiden sisäisestä luonteesta. (Rogers 2008, 336, 344).

Relationaalinen viestintäteoria tarkastelee viestintäkäyttäytymistä nimenomaan suhteessa rakentuvana, jolloin viestintä ja vuorovaikutus eivät sinänsä ole riippuvaisia vain jommastakummasta vuorovaikutussuhteen osapuolesta, vaan molemminpuolisesta vastavuoroisesta sitoutumisesta. Relationaalinen näkökulma korostaa sitä, että ihmiset ovat aktiivisia toimijoita, jotka luovat merkityksiä ja kykenevät valitsemaan eri tilanteissa tarkoituksenmukaisia viestintäkäyttäytymisen muotoja. (Rogers 2008, 341–344.) Relationaalisen viestintäteorian oletuksena on, että vuorovaikutussuhteet ovat ikään kuin jatkuvaa vuoropuhelua tai dialogia. Tapa puhua rakentaa vuorovaikutussuhteita, joten uudella tavalla puhuminen mahdollistaa myös vuorovaikutussuhteiden rakenteiden uusiutumisen (Shotter 1993).

Relationaalista viestintäteoriaa on sovellettu läheisten vuorovaikutussuhteiden, erityisesti parisuhdevuorovaikutuksen, tutkimuksessa (Escudero, Rogers & Gutierrez 1997; Rogers & Farace 1975). Teoria tarjoaa kuitenkin mielenkiintoisia lähtökohtia myös työelämän vuorovaikutussuhteiden ymmärtämiseksi. Työyhteisöjen kehittämisessä on tärkeää kiinnittää huomiota siihen, miten työpaikan ja verkostojen sisäiset vuorovaikutussuhteet rakentuvat. Toinen keskeinen relationaalisen viestintäteorian korostama seikka onkin ymmärrys siitä,

miten erilaiset viestintäprosessit ja -rakenteet vaikuttavat siihen, millaisiksi työyhteisön vuorovaikutussuhteet muodostuvat ja toisaalta siitä, miten työyhteisön jäsenten vuorovaikutussuhteet vaikuttavat siihen, millaisiksi työyhteisön viestintäprosessit ja vuorovaikutuskäytännöt rakentuvat.

Vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teoria

Relationaalisuuden sosiokulttuurista tutkimustraditiota edustaa Leslie Baxterin ja Barbara Montgomeryn (1996) vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teoria (relational dialectics theory), jonka perustavanlaatuisena lähtökohtana on ollut Bahtinin (1984) käsitys siitä, että kaikki merkityksentäminen on lähtökohtaisesti dialogista, mikä tarkoittaa erilaisten merkitysten ja diskurssien jatkuvaa samanaikaista yhdistelyä ja erottelua. Dialogiin osallistuminen edellyttää, että vuorovaikutusosapuolet sekä tekevät kompromisseja että pitävät huolta omista näkökulmistaan (Baxter & Braithwaite 2008, 350.)

Vuorovaikutussuhteiden jännitteiden teoriaa tarkastelee ihmisten välistä viestintää dynaamisena, ristiriitaisten jännitteiden ja diskurssien vaikutussuhteena. Tyypillisiä relationaalisia jännitteitä ovat esimerkiksi avoimuus–yksityisyys ja tasapaino–muutos. Jännitteet ovat vuorovaikutussuhteiden kannalta välttämättömiä ja niitä hallitaan verbaalisen ja nonverbaalisen viestinnän avulla.

Vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teoria auttaa ymmärtämään, miten tietyt merkitykset ovat sosiaalisesti rakentuneita ja miten niitä ylläpidetään jokapäiväisessä vuorovaikutuksessa. Vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teoria on kehittynyt ja sitä on sovellettu erityisesti läheisten vuorovaikutussuhteiden, esimerkiksi kulttuurienvälisen parisuhteen, tutkimuksessa (Cools 2011). Vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teoriaa on sovellettu kahdenkeskisten vuorovaikutussuhteiden lisäksi myös ryhmän jäsenten vuorovaikutussuhteiden tarkasteluun. Esimerkiksi Prentice ja Kramer (2006) tutkivat opetustilanteessa ilmeneviä ryhmän sisäisiä jännitteitä. Näistä yksi keskeinen jännitepari oli ryhmän jäsenten halu toisaalta osallistua ryhmän keskusteluun ja toisaalta vetäytyä ja olla hiljaa keskustelun aikana. Halukkuutta osallistua vähensivät muiden ryhmäläisten, erityisesti negatiiviset, reaktiot ja oma käsitys osallistumisen tarkoituksenmukaisuudesta.

Vuorovaikutussuhteiden jännitteiden teoriaan mukaan vuorovaikutussuhteiden laatu rakentuu dialogissa. Dialogin perustana on moniäänisyys eli heteroglossia: "To talk with a new voice is to invite the other to treat one in a different way; to define oneself differently also defines the other in a new way" (Hosking 2011, 27). Dialogi mahdollistaa jokaisen ihmisen henkisen kasvun, ja jokainen luo tulevaisuutta vuorovaikutuksessa muiden kanssa. Vuorovaikutussuhteet ovat tällöin ikään kuin rajattomien mahdollisuuksien paikkoja. (Littlejohn & Foss 2008, 207–209.) Baxter ja Braithwaite (2008, 349; 360) korostavat, että aina kun viestimme, herätämme useita erilaisia merkityksiä. Siten jokainen työpaikalla käyty keskustelu olisikin syytä ymmärtää osana laajempaa työyhteisön kontekstia (Littlejohn & Foss 2008, 210).

Vuorovaikutussuhteissa ilmeneviä jännitteitä on tutkittu paljon, mutta vain vähän on kiinnitetty huomiota siihen, miten erilaisissa jännitteissä syntyy merkityksiä ja miten ne rakentavat sosiaalista todellisuutta. Baxterin ja Braithwaiten (2008, 357, 360) mukaan olisikin syytä tarkastella vuorovaikutussuhteita seuraavista näkökulmista:

- 1) Millainen on suhteen diskursiivinen historia ja miten se auttaa jäsentämään vuorovaikutussuhteessa ilmenevää nykyhetken puhetta?
- 2) Mikä on se suhdetta laajempi kulttuurinen diskurssi, joka vaikuttaa siihen, miten suhteen osapuolet kommunikoivat nykyhetkessä?

- 3) Mitä suhteen tulevaisuudelta odotetaan? Minkälaisia reaktioita ja odotusarvoja siihen liittyy? Tämä tarjoaa suhteen osapuolille eräänlaisen moraalisen vastuun toimia tarkoituksenmukaisesti nykyhetkessä.

Edellä mainitut näkökulmat voisivat työyhteisön kehittämisessä tarkoittaa sitä, että kehittämistoimet keskittyvät työyhteisön vuorovaikutussuhteiden syvempään tarkasteluun. Kehittäminen keskittyy mahdollistamaan sellaisia keskusteluja, joissa tarkastellaan, miten vuorovaikutussuhteet ovat muodostuneet, miten työyhteisön vallitsevat diskurssit ja vuorovaikutussuhteissa ilmenevät jänniteparit vaikuttavat vuorovaikutussuhteisiin ja miten työyhteisön jäsenet aikovat kehittää vuorovaikutussuhteitaan. Merkitysten yhteensovittamisen teoria näyttäisi tuovan tähän erityisen paljon lisäymmärrystä, sillä teorian kautta voidaan tutkia relationaalisuutta erilaisten kontekstuaalisten tekijöiden valossa.

Merkitysten yhteensovittamisen teoria

Kyberneettisen tutkimustradition piiriin kuuluvan merkitysten yhteensovittamisen teorian (coordinated management of meaning) eli CMM-teorian tarkastelun kohteena on, miten vuorovaikutuksessa olevat organisoivat ja koordinoivat vuorovaikutustaan ja miten sosiaalinen todellisuus rakentuu viestijöiden vuorovaikutuksessa. W. Barnett Pearcen ja Vernon Cronenin (1976) teoria merkitysten koordinoimisesta ja hallinnasta vuorovaikutussuhteissa sai alkunsa 1970-luvulla ja on sittemmin vaikuttanut sekä teoreettisena että käytännönläheisenä viitekehyksenä puheviestinnän tutkimuksessa sekä terapiatyössä ja työyhteisöjen kehittämisessä (Littlejohn & Foss 2009, 200). Teoria auttaa ymmärtämään ja jäsentämään merkitysten rakentumisen ja viestintäkäyttäytymisen välistä systeemistä kytköstä: miten erilaiset merkitykset rakentuvat vuorovaikutuksessa ja minkälaiset kontekstuaaliset tekijät vaikuttavat merkitysten rakentumiseen. (Littlejohn & Foss 2009, 200; Pearce 2007) CMM-teoria on kehittynyt erilaisten käytännön kehittämistoimien sovelluksena. Teoriaa on sovellettu ja kehitetty esimerkiksi perheterapiassa ja terveysviestinnässä, kulttuurienvälisen vuorovaikutussuhteiden tutkimuksessa sekä erilaisissa työyhteisöjen kehittämishankkeissa (Bruss ym. 2009; Montgomery 2004; Orbe & Kamara 2010; Pearce 1995).

CMM-teoriassa käsite *konteksti* on keskeinen ja vuorovaikutussuhde on yksi merkittävä merkitysten rakentumiseen vaikuttavista konteksteista. Kontekstilla tarkoitetaan tässä eräänlaista kokemuksellista ja subjektiivista viitekehystä tai lähtökohtaa, jonka perusteella asiat saavat merkityksensä. Kielellinen ja nonverbaalinen vuorovaikutus saa merkityksensä vain kontekstinsa kautta. CMM-teoriassa tällaisia konteksteja ovat vuorovaikutusteko (*speech act*), episodi (*episode*), vuorovaikutussuhde (*relationship*), itse (*self*) ja kulttuuri (*culture*). Kontekstit kehystävät toisiaan ja vaikuttavat toisiinsa. Esimerkiksi tiettyä tilannetta tai episodiat voi ymmärtää vain ymmärtämällä viestijöiden välistä vuorovaikutussuhdetta, johon puolestaan vaikuttaa laajempi sosiaalinen kulttuuri. Tosin kontekstit eivät vaikuta toisiinsa niin, että laajempi konteksti ikään kuin aina määrittäisi suppeampaa – esimerkiksi vuorovaikutussuhde yksittäisiä vuorovaikutustekoja – vaan kontekstihierarkiassa suppeammat kontekstit määrittävät myös laajempia konteksteja. Esimerkiksi yksittäiset vuorovaikutusteot vaikuttavat vuorovaikutussuhteen luonteeseen.

Työyhteisöjen kehittämisessä CMM-teorian anti liittyy vuorovaikutuksen heuristiseen ymmärtämiseen eli siihen, miten erilaiset vuorovaikutusteot voidaan ymmärtää osana laajempaa kontekstia ja miten toisaalta laajempi konteksti voidaan nähdä erilaisten vuorovaikutustekojen vaikutussuhteena. Työyhteisön kehittämistoimet voivat siten pureutua erilaisiin kontekstitekijöihin ja niiden välisiin suhteisiin. CMM-teoria tarjoaa viitekehyksen ymmärtää ja jäsentää työyhteisön toimintaa ja mahdollistaa sitä kautta uusia avauksia erilaisille muutostarpeille.

Edellä mainitut kolme relationaalisuutta korostavaa viestintäteoriaa liittävät relationaalisuuden läheisesti sekä diskurssin että dialogin käsitteisiin. Toisaalta relationaalisuus voidaan nähdä vuorovaikutussuhteen osapuolten välisenä yhteistoiminnallisena diskurssina. Relationaalisuus viittaa myös viestintätapaan, joka vaikuttaa vuorovaikutuksen luonteeseen. Kyky uudistaa viestintätapoja uudistaa myös vuorovaikutussuhteita. Erityisesti dialoginen viestintätapa lisää relationaalisuutta eli ihmisten välistä kytkeytyneisyyttä.

Seuraavaksi tarkastelemme, miten vuorovaikutusosaamista on määritelty tai voisi määritellä, jos otetaan huomioon edellä esiteltyjen interpersonaalisten viestintäteorioiden tarjoamat lähtökohdat relationaalisuudelle. Käsittelemme myös työyhteisön kehittämisen näkökulmia ja lopuksi pohdimme, miten vuorovaikutuksen relationaalisuus voitaisiin yhä paremmin ottaa huomioon työyhteisön kehittämistoimissa.

Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuus

Vaikka vuorovaikutusosaamista (*interpersonal communication competence*) on tutkimuskirjallisuudessa määritelty monin eri tavoin ja vaikka siitä käytetään usein monia eri käsitteitä, on ilmiön perusolemusta kuvaava teoreettinen jäsenitys vakiintunut. Ensiksikin vuorovaikutusosaamisen katsotaan muodostuvan kognitiivisesta, affektiivisesta ja behavioraalista ulottuvuudesta. Kognitiivisella ulottuvuudella tarkoitetaan tietoa ja ymmärrystä vuorovaikutuksen ominaisluonteesta sekä metakognitiivisia viestintätaitoja. Vuorovaikutusosaamiseen kuuluvat myös riittävä rohkeus, motivaatio ja halukkuus osallistua vuorovaikutukseen (affektiivinen ulottuvuus) sekä taidot toimia erilaisissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa tehokkaasti ja tarkoituksenmukaisesti (behavioraalinen ulottuvuus). (Ks. käsitteen määrittelyistä kohteja esim. Greene & Burleson 2003; Valkonen 2003.)

Vuorovaikutusosaaminen voidaan siis määritellä tiedoksi ja ymmärrykseksi tehokkaasta ja tarkoituksenmukaisesta viestintäkäyttäytymisestä, motivaatioksi osallistua kanssakäymiseen ja taidoksi toimia vuorovaikutustilanteissa tai -suhteissa tavalla, jota tilanteen tai suhteen osapuolet pitävät tehokkaana ja tarkoituksenmukaisena. Tietämisen, motivaation ja taitamisen lisäksi vuorovaikutusosaaminen edellyttää myös metakognitiivisia viestintätaitoja eli taitoa ennakoita, suunnitella, säädellä ja arvioida viestintäkäyttäytymistä. (Valkonen 2003.)

Toinen kiinteä peruslähtökohta vuorovaikutusosaamisen tarkastelussa on se, että osaaminen määrittyy aina jonkun tai joidenkin tilannekohtaisena päätelmänä tai arviona. Vuorovaikutusosaaminen ei siis ole pysyvä ominaisuus vaan pikemminkin viestintäkäyttäytymisen perusteella tehty tilanne- tai suhdekohtainen arvio toiminnasta.

Vuorovaikutusosaamista voidaan arvioida kahden kriteerin, *tehokkuuden* ja *tarkoituksenmukaisuuden*, näkökulmasta (Spitzberg 2003, 96). Vuorovaikutusosaaminen määrittyy siis sen mukaan, miten osapuolet tulkitsevat oman ja toistensa käyttäytymisen tehokkuuden tai tuloksellisuuden sekä miten tarkoituksenmukaisena ja sopivana he pitävät käyttäytymistä. Tuloksellisuuden kriteerin taustalla on näkemys siitä, että vuorovaikutus on luonteeltaan strategista ja funktionaalista toimintaa, vaikka viestintätavoitteet tai tulosodotukset eivät välttämättä ole kovin tietoisia. Vuorovaikutuksen tuloksellisuus ei työelämässäkään liity pelkästään viestinnän informatiivisten tai vaikuttamistavoitteiden saavuttamiseen. Tavoitteina voivat yhtä lailla olla esimerkiksi tuen ja empatian saaminen ja antaminen, vuorovaikutussuhteen luominen, ylläpito tai syventäminen, konfliktin hallinta tai yhdessä viihtyminen (Valkonen 2003, 145–152). Burleson, Metts ja Kirch (2000) korostavat sitä, että vuorovaikutuksen tavoitteet voivat olla välineellisiä ja yksilöllisiä mutta myös interpersonaalisia. Tässä mielessä vuorovaikutusosaaminen on aina relationaalista eli vuorovaikutussuhteeseen liittyvää. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen tuloksellisuutta on nimittäin myös se, että osapuolet pystyvät luomaan ja ylläpitämään relationaalista statustaan sekä

toteuttamaan suhteeseensa liittyviä odotuksia, säilyttämään vuorovaikutussuhteensa sellaisena kuin haluavat tai kehittämään sitä suotuisaan suuntaan.

Pelkkä tuloksellisuus tai tehokkuus ei riitä kompetenssin määrittäjäksi. Toinen yhtä tärkeä kriteeri on se, miten vuorovaikutusapuoleet määrittävät viestintäkäyttäytymisen tarkoituksenmukaisuuden ja tilannekohtaisen sopivuuden. Ihmisten keskinäinen vuorovaikutus tapahtuu aina jossain sosiaalisessa kontekstissa, joten vuorovaikutusosaaminen edellyttää kykyä mukautua kulloiseenkin viestintäkontekstiin sekä kykyä sovittaa oma viestintäkäyttäytyminen toisten toimintaan. Tarkoituksenmukaisuuden peruskriteeri kytkee vuorovaikutusosaamiseen kiinteästi eettisen ulottuvuuden. Vuorovaikutusosaamisesta voidaan puhua vain silloin, kun viestintäkäyttäytyminen ei vaaranna kenenkään kasvoja tai heikennä osapuolten välistä luottamusta ja yhteistyöhalukkuutta. (Valkonen 2003, 38–39.) On tärkeää oivaltaa, että vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämisellä ei pyritä edistämään sellaista viestintäkäyttäytymistä, jonka tavoitteena on muiden manipulointi tai henkinen väkivalta.

Valkosen (2003) mukaan vuorovaikutusosaaminen määrittyy esimerkiksi arviointitutkimuksissa useimmiten yksilön osaamisena, ja viestintäkoulutuksessa sen kehittyminen nähdään yksilön kehittymisenä. Toisaalta vuorovaikutusosaamisen perusolemuksesta luonnehtii relationaalisuus. Vuorovaikutus edellyttää aina vähintäänkin kahta osapuolta, jotka jollain tavalla pyrkivät sovittamaan yhteen omia yksilöllisiä viestintätavoitteitaan tai edistämään yhteisten tavoitteiden saavuttamista. Vuorovaikutusosaaminen voidaankin määritellä paitsi yksilön osaamiseksi myös *suhteessa* syntyväksi ja siihen sijoittuvaksi osaamiseksi. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen tarkastelussa käytetäänkin interpersonaalisen viestintäkompetenssin käsitteen rinnalla myös relationaalisen kompetenssin (*relational competence*) käsitettä. Tällä käsitteellä halutaan täsmentää sitä, että vuorovaikutusosaaminen syntyy viestijöiden yhteistyönä ja sen perustarkastelutaso on – tai ainakin tulisi olla – yksilön sijaan vuorovaikutussuhde. (Parks 1994, 594; Valkonen 2003, 33–34.) Toisinaan relationaalisen kompetenssin käsitteellä tarkoitetaan nimenomaan viestintäsuhteiden luomiseen ja ylläpitoon liittyvää kompetenssia, siis ikään kuin vuorovaikutusosaamisen erityistapausta (Valkonen 2003, 33–34). Relationaalinen kompetenssi tarkoittaa tässä yhteydessä kykyä luoda ja ilmaista viestejä, jotka välittävät nimenomaan sen, millaisena viestijä näkee tai millaiseksi hän haluaa luoda vuorovaikutussuhteen (Trenholm & Jensen 2008, 11–13). Tämän näkemyksen mukaan relationaalinen kompetenssi on siis kykyä viestiä tavalla, joka heijastaa esimerkiksi sitä, miten läheiseksi tai etäiseksi vuorovaikutusapuoleet kulloisenkin vuorovaikutussuhteensa määrittävät.

Vaikka vuorovaikutusosaamista on tutkittu paljon, sitä ei juuri ole tarkasteltu tai määritelty ylipäättään työelämän kontekstissa tai nimenomaan relationaalisuutta korostavien interpersonaalisten viestintäteorioiden valossa. Esimerkiksi Halone ja Pecchioni (2001, 67) kritisoivat sitä, että vuorovaikutusosaamista on tutkimuksissa käsitelty joko lähettäjä- tai vastaanottajakeskeisesti. Vuorovaikutusosaamista tarkastellaan usein siis vain yksilön osaamisena ja vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen on painottunut lähinnä yksilökohtaiseen koulutukseen (Rouhiainen-Neunhäuserer 2009, 37).

Vuorovaikutusosaamisen tarkastelu yksilön ominaisuutena on monin tavoin perusteltua erityisesti silloin, kun tarkastellaan esimerkiksi yleissivistävän ja ammatillisen peruskoulutuksen tavoitteita ja työtapoja. Työyhteisöjen kehittämisen näkökulma sen sijaan korostaa sitä, että vuorovaikutusosaamista on yksilön viestintäkäyttäytymisen lisäksi tarkasteltava myös työyhteisön vuorovaikutussuhteisiin ja vuorovaikutuskäytänteisiin liittyvänä kompetenssina. Tällöin on tärkeää, ellei peräti välttämätöntä, että työyhteisön jäsenten vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen kytetään työyhteisön vuorovaikutussuhteiden tarkasteluun.

Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuuden huomioiminen työyhteisön kehittämistoimissa

Jos työyhteisöjä halutaan kehittää, on kehitettävä yhteisön kaikkien jäsenten vuorovaikutusosaamista. Koska vuorovaikutusosaaminen on relationaalista, tarvitaan sellaisia kehittämistapoja, joissa relationaalisuus otetaan huomioon. Edellä esitellyt interpersonaaliset viestintäteoriat näyttäisivät tarjoavan teoreettisia jäsenyyksiä käytännön kehittämistoimien perustaksi. Sekä relationaalinen viestintäteoria että CMM-teoria korostavat kontekstin merkitystä, eli osaaminen on aina suhteessa ympäröiviin sosiaalisiin ja kulttuurisiin normeihin. Vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teoria puolestaan tähdentää vuorovaikutuksen jännitteistä perusluonnetta ja dialogisuutta.

Relationaalisen viestintäteorian mukaan vuorovaikutusosaaminen tulisi nähdä pikemminkin vuorovaikutussuhteiden rakenteisiin liittyvänä ilmiönä kuin yksilön suhteeseen tuomana kompetenssina. Relationaalinen viestintäteoria korostaa vuorovaikutuksen systeemistä luonnetta, jolloin vuorovaikutusosaamisen määrittelyssä huomio tulisi kiinnittää kykyyn tunnistaa erilaisia vuorovaikutussuhteen ilmiöitä ja rakenteita sekä taitoon uudistaa ja muuttaa näitä niin, että vuorovaikutusrakenteet ja yksilöiden viestintäkäyttäytyminen muuttuisivat entistä rakentavimmaksi ja joustavimmaksi. (Rogers & Escudero 2004, 3; Rogers 2008, 341–342).

Myös CMM-teoria tarjoaa uudenlaisia jäsenyyksiä vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämiseen. Pearce (2008) on tarkastellut vuorovaikutusosaamista erityisesti johtamisen ja esimiestyön näkökulmasta. Hän jäsentää olennaisia esimiestyössä tarvittavia vuorovaikutustaitoja kolmen taito-osa-alueen kautta. Ensinnäkin esimiehellä on oltava kykyä viedä haluttuja vuorovaikutustekojä käytäntöön. Tässä korostuu taito nähdä kukin yksittäinen vuorovaikutusteko samanaikaisesti sekä ikään kuin tiedostettuna reaktion (*second turn*) siihen, mitä toinen vuorovaikutusosapuoli on sanonut tai tehnyt että lähtökohtana eli ikään kuin kutsuna sille, mitä toinen vuorovaikutusosapuoli seuraavaksi tekee. Tämä edellyttää sensitiivisyyttä havaita ja kykyä kuvata ja sanoittaa vuorovaikutuksen ilmiöitä ja rakenteita.

Toiseksi Pearce (2008) korostaa esimiehen taitoa tunnistaa niin sanottuja kriittisiä hetkiä ja toimia niissä viisaasti. CMM-teorian mukaan kaikki vuorovaikutusteot ovat kriittisiä, mutta jotkut ovat kriittisempiä kuin toiset ja voivat siten vaikuttaa merkittävästi siihen, millaiseksi vuorovaikutus muotoutuu. Siksi on tärkeää tunnistaa juuri näitä kriittisiä hetkiä ja toimia niissä niin, että vuorovaikutusteot rakentavat sosiaalista todellisuutta parempaan suuntaan. Barge ja Little (2002) puhuvat dialogisesta viisaudesta (*dialogic wisdom*), joka voidaan saavuttaa tietoisuuden ja reflektion avulla.

Kolmas tärkeä taito erityisesti esimiestyössä on CMM-teorian mukaan taito tehdä episodityötä. Episodia voidaan kuvata tapahtumaketjuksi tai tarinaksi, joka kuvaa sitä, mitä tapahtuu. Täten episodityöllä tarkoitetaan kaikkea sitä vuorovaikutusta, jonka avulla pyritään luomaan, määrittelemään, ylläpitämään, uudistamaan ja muuttamaan organisaation eri tapahtumia. Episodityössä korostuu taito valita, ajoittaa ja rytmittää vuorovaikutustekojä niin, että ne mahdollistavat uusien ja rakentavien ilmiöiden ja tarinoiden syntymisen. Työyhteisössä yhteisesti jaettu ilmiö voi olla esimerkiksi valittaminen, jota työntekijät selittävät esimiehen etäisyydellä. Esimies puolestaan voi kertoa olevansa etäinen, koska joka kerta kun hän kertoo jotain, työntekijät valittavat. Edellä mainittu työyhteisön ilmiö on siis yhteisesti tiedostettu, mutta episodi on koettu eri tavoin rytmitykseltään ja ajoitukseltaan.

Vuorovaikutussuhteen jännitteiden teorian mukaan vuorovaikutusosaaminen liittyy sekä dialogiseen että jännitteiseen vuorovaikutukseen. Vuorovaikutussuhteiden kuten myös vuorovaikutusosaamisen laatu rakentuu dialogissa. Dialogin ajatus korostaa erilaisten äänien ja jännitteiden samanaikaista läsnäoloa ja arvostusta. Työyhteisön ja vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen voisi siten keskittyä jäsentämään työyhteisössä vallitsevia

diskursseja ja niiden vaikutusta käytännön toimintaan. Tämä vaatii relationaalisuuden huomioon ottamista sekä mikro- että makrotasolla. On siis tarkasteltava sitä, millainen on työyhteisössä vallitseva kulttuurinen diskurssi ja miten yksilöiden vuorovaikutuskäyttäytyminen on siihen yhteydessä? Minkälaisia jännitepareja työyhteisön vuorovaikutuksessa on havaittavissa? Miten ne vaikuttavat vuorovaikutussuhteisiin ja vuorovaikutusosaamiseen työyhteisössä?

Kaikki kolme edellä käsiteltyä relationaalisuutta korostavaa interpersonaalisen viestinnän teoriaa painottavat jokaisen yksilön aktiivista ja vastuullista roolia työyhteisön sosiaalisen todellisuuden rakentajana. Työyhteisö rakentuu ja muuttuu jatkuvasti, kun yksilöiden subjektiiviset kokemukset ja näkemykset kohtaavat arjen vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Relationaalisuutta onkin työyhteisön kontekstissa tarkasteltu osallistumisena työyhteisön sosiaalisen todellisuuden rakentamiseen (Hosking 2011, 58–61). Työyhteisön kehittämiseen liittyvä kirjallisuus korostaa osallistumisen merkitystä muun muassa yhteisöllisyyden, kytkeytymisen ja sitoutumisen näkökulmista. Esimerkiksi johtamisen kehittämisessä on havaittu se, että jos johto ei ole aktiivisesti mukana muutos- tai kehittämisprosessissa ja jos se ei ole sitoutunut muutoksen onnistumiseen, kehittämisyritykset todennäköisesti epäonnistuvat. On myös niin, että työntekijöiden osallistaminen organisaation päätöksentekoon lisää sitoutumista tehtyihin päätöksiin. (Hargie & Tourish 2000, 4–6.) Hoskingin (2011) mukaan muun muassa osallistava toimintatutkimus ja muut sen kaltaiset menetelmät antavat tilaa uudentilaisille keskusteluille ja uusille tavoille kytkeytyä (being in relation) luoden siten mahdollisuuksia uusille sosiaalisille todellisuuksille työyhteisöstä.

Vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen on keskeinen osa työyhteisön kehittämistä ja se liittyy organisaation käytänteiden ja prosessien kehittämiseen. Esimerkiksi johtajan vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämisessä on kyse myös organisaation käytäntöjen kehittämisestä ja kehittämistoimien kollektiivisesta toteuttamisesta. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämisessä tulisi siis huomioida organisaation oppimisen näkökulma eli se, että työyhteisön jäsenten vuorovaikutusosaaminen kehittyy sosiaalisissa tilanteissa yhteisöllisenä ilmiönä ja siten voidaan myös muuttaa toimintaympäristön vuorovaikutuskäytäntöjä. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen tulisi siis toteuttaa sellaisin kehittämistoimin, jotka ottavat huomioon vuorovaikutusosaamisen kontekstuaalisuuden ja relationaalisuuden. Kehittäminen tapahtuu siis osana työtä, lähellä käytäntöä ja yhteisöllistä oppimista tukien. (Rouhianen-Neunhäuserer 2009, 57, 60.) Juuri tätä dialoginen OD-teoria korostaa.

Kun työyhteisöjen kehittämiseen sovelletaan dialogista OD-teoriaa, painottuvat seuraavat seikat:

- Dialogisten menetelmien käyttö, jolloin mahdollistetaan sellaisten keskustelujen syntyminen, joissa työyhteisön jäsenet voivat merkityksentää nykyistä työyhteisönsä tilannetta sekä kuvata ja selittää omaa sosiaalista todellisuuttaan.
- Työyhteisön jäsenten henkilökohtaiseen energiaan keskittyminen. Kehittämistoimilla pyritään luomaan tila motivaation ja arvojen henkilökohtaiselle reflektoinnille sekä sen jakamiselle, mikä on kullekin työyhteisön jäsenelle merkityksellistä.
- Positiivisuuden välittäminen verkostoissa, jolloin kehittämistoimilla pyritään synnyttämään positiivista virettä ensin paikallisesti, josta se leviää laajemmaksi koko työyhteisön verkostoon.
- Luovien menetelmien, kuten teatterin, musiikin ja kuvataiteen käyttö. Kehittämistoimilla pyritään aktivoimaan työyhteisön jäsenten luovuutta ja hyödyntämään sitä työn merkityksentämisessä.
- Kehittämistoimien lähtökohtana käytetään voimavarakeskeisiä ja arvostavia lähestymistapoja. (Cheung-Judge & Holbeche 2011, 45.)

Takeuchi ja Nonaka (2004) puhuvat työyhteisön kehittämisen kontekstissa jaettujen merkitysten tilasta eli käsitteestä 'ba'. Heidän mukaansa työyhteisöissä tulisi luoda sellaisia tiloja, joissa työyhteisön jäsenet voivat jakaa merkityksiä ja jopa törmäyttää niitä. Tällaisen

merkityksiä yhteentörmäyttävän vuorovaikutuksen periaatteena on, että reflektointi kohdistetaan mahdollisimman selkeästi yhteiseen työnteon kontekstiin, konkreettiseen työn kehittämiseen ja yhteistyöhön. Lisäksi näiden vuorovaikutustilanteiden tulisi olla kuuntelemisen, rauhoittumisen ja keskittymisen paikkoja. Kun työyhteisön jäsenet voivat keskustella rauhassa, konkreettisesti ja aidosti, voi syntyä uusia merkitysten yhdistelmiä, ideoita ja ratkaisuja esimerkiksi työyhteisön käytänteiden kehittämiseksi. Työyhteisön vuorovaikutustilanteissa tulisi edesauttaa tulevaisuuteen suuntautuvaa keskustelua, jossa luodaan erilaisia mahdollisuuksia työn tekemiselle ja kehittämislle. Tällaisissa kohtaamisissa ja vuorovaikutustiloissa työyhteisössä olemiseen ja työn tekemiseen liittyvät merkitykset pysyvät työyhteisön jäsenille elävinä ja vuorovaikutus voi muuttua keskustelun ja toiminnan reflektion lisäksi myös käytännön kehittämisen välineeksi.

Lopuksi

Tässä artikkelissa olemme tarkastelleet vuorovaikutusosaamista relationaalisuutta korostavien interpersonaalisten viestintäteorioiden valossa. Sekä interpersonaalisiin viestintäteorioihin että nykyisiin työyhteisön kehittämisen näkökulmiin näyttää sisältyvän olettaimus, että tulemalla tietoisiksi vuorovaikutukseen liittyvistä relationaalisista ilmiöistä voidaan rakentaa parempia sosiaalisia todellisuuksia. Kehittämisessä korostuu tällöin sellaisten keskustelujen mahdollistaminen, joissa työyhteisön vuorovaikutussuhteet ja -käytännöt voivat uusiutua ja joissa yksilöiden vuorovaikutusosaaminen voi kehittyä.

Vuorovaikutusosaaminen voi kehittyä, kun keskustellaan työyhteisön vuorovaikutuksesta. Tällaisen työyhteisöä kehittävä keskustelun kohteena voi olla esimerkiksi se, millainen diskurssi työyhteisössä vallitsee, millaista vuorovaikutusilmapiiriä se rakentaa ja miten puhetaapaa tulisi muuttaa, jotta myös työyhteisö muuttuisi. Interpersonaalisen tasolla vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen fokuoittuu puolestaan siihen, miten oma viestintäkäyttäytyminen vaikuttaa esimerkiksi kollegasuhteiden luomiseen ja ylläpitämiseen tai miten kollegan viestintäkäyttäytyminen vaikuttaa kunkin omaan viestintäkäyttäytymiseen.

Kun vuorovaikutusosaamista tarkastellaan relationaalisen ominaispiirteensä kautta työyhteisön kehittämisen kontekstissa, näyttäisi vuorovaikutusosaamisen keskiöön nousevan erityisesti osaamisen metakognitiivinen ja eettinen ulottuvuus. Erityisen keskeisiä työelämän vuorovaikutustaitoja ovat dialogiseen viestintätapaan liittyvät taidot, jotka edellyttävät muiden arvostamista ja tilanneherkkyttä. Myös kyky reflektoida omaa ja toisten viestintäkäyttäytymistä korostuu. Tällaisten metakognitiivisten viestintätaitojen lisäksi voidaan puhua myös metakommunikaatiosta (metacommunication), jolla tarkoitetaan kommunikaatiota kommunikaatiosta. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen relationaalisuuden ja työyhteisön kehittämisen näkökulmasta metakommunikaatio tarkoittaa esimerkiksi sellaista viestintää, jossa oma viestintäkäyttäytymistä ja sen tarkoituksensa jäsennetään muille vuorovaikutussuhteen osapuolille. Tämä tarkoittaa reflektoinnin sanoittamista dialogiseen tarkoitukseen.

Vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittäminen liittyy olennaisesti siihen, että työyhteisöissä syntyy vastuullista ja eettistä vuorovaikutusta ja että työyhteisön vuorovaikutustilat ovat rakentavan keskustelun paikkoja. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen kehittämisellä tähdätään siihen, että työyhteisön kaikilla jäsenillä on taito huolehtia rakentavasta vuorovaikutusilmapiiristä. Ulkopuolinen asiantuntija on usein tarpeen, koska hän pystyy käynnistämään ja ohjaamaan keskusteluita ilman työyhteisön historian ja dynamiikan rasitteita. Toisaalta on tarpeen selvittää, milllaiset rakenteet työyhteisössä mahdollistavat esimerkiksi sen, että esimiehet huolehtivat kollektiivisesta kehittämisestä ja vuorovaikutustilojen ohjaamisesta. On tärkeää, että ne, jotka ylipäättään vastaavat työyhteisön kehittämisestä, jäsentävät ja pohtivat sitä, miten vuorovaikutusosaamista kehitetään, ketkä ovat kehittämisvastuussa ja miten kehittämisetimet organisoidaan.

Vuorovaikutussuhteilla on suuri merkitys työyhteisön toiminnassa, ja työyhteisöjen kehittämisen keskeinen kysymys onkin, miten relationaalisuutta voidaan vahvistaa työyhteisön eri tasoilla ja areenoilla. Dynaamisesti muuttuvassa työelämässä on tärkeää pystyä tunnistamaan työyhteisössä vallitsevia todellisuuksia, selkeyttämään omaa ajatusmaailmaa ja vuorovaikutukseen liittyviä tekijöitä sekä sanoittamaan niitä muille. Tämä vaatii sekä taitoa että halua toimia tilanteissa tarkoituksenmukaisella tavalla, mutta myös taitoa ja halua käydä avointa keskustelua siitä, minkä kukin kokee tarkoituksenmukaiseksi viestintäkäyttämiseksi kussakin tilanteessa.

Vuorovaikutusosaamista ei juuri ole jäsennetty interpersonaalisten viestintäteorioiden näkökulmasta. Vuorovaikutusosaamisen käsitteen ja relationaalisuutta korostavien interpersonaalisten teorioiden molemminpuolinen integrointi on tärkeä ja mielenkiintoinen haaste myös työelämän kehittämisen kannalta. Relationaalisuutta korostavat kehittäminenmenetelmät korostavat työyhteisön systeemisen luonteen ymmärtämistä, kaikkien työyhteisön jäsenien osallistumisen mahdollistamista sekä dialogisten menetelmien käyttöä. Kehittäminen tapahtuu yhdessä työyhteisön jäsenien kanssa, mikä edellyttää erilaisten vuorovaikutteisten tilojen synnyttämistä työyhteisöön.

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II

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES FACING MANAGEMENT TEAMS

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Communication challenges facing management teams

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore what kinds of communication challenges management teams (MTs) experience and to suggest ideas for developing competent communication practices.

Design/methodology/approach – Working according to the principles of qualitative research, a total of seven MT members from seven different international companies were interviewed. The thematic in-depth interviews were analyzed by first looking at all references of communication challenges, and then grouping them into six different dimensions.

Findings – Most of the communication challenges facing MTs are related to the teams' meetings, where issues of leadership, decision making and participation may well be intensified. The meetings were experienced as formal communication forums, where MT members do not always express their true opinions either because other team members prevent it or because they are unable to do so. Informal communication plays a pivotal role in facilitating trust and competent communication practices.

Practical implications – MTs need to be mindful of how they communicate and develop a reflective practice in order to develop competent communication practices.

Originality/Value – The study illustrates the essential themes that the MT members experience and perceive as central in MT communication and teamwork. Studying MTs from a communication perspective adds a valuable contribution to MT research.

Keywords: Communication, Communication challenges, Competent communication practices, Management teams, Qualitative research

Paper type: Research paper

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES FACING MANAGEMENT TEAMS

1. Introduction

Recent perspectives in studies of management teams (MTs) put communication and interaction in the foreground. This focus originates from the so-called *relational turn* in social sciences, which changes the focus from individuals and their characteristics to people-in-conversations (Ospina and Uhl-Bien, 2012). However, the most common interest of MT research has been in the composition of MTs and demographic factors such as team members' age, gender, tenure, and their connection to team performance, organizational success and corporate turnaround (Abebe, 2010; Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Zorn and Thompson, 2002). In spite of the important contributions made by composition research to MT research, the findings remain contradictory. A group of talented managers does not necessarily form an effective MT, but MTs exist and are shaped in communication. Lessem and Baruch (2000, p. 75) state that while it is relatively easy to focus on basic team characteristics "the way people come together as a combination, has rarely been explored".

There is a general agreement that MTs play a pivotal role in organizations (Lessem and Baruch, 2000). In most organizations no other group has such a vast impact on organizational outcomes as the MT (Hambrick, 2010). MTs have been linked to, for example, organizational performance, strategic processes, leadership, knowledge management and organizational change (Fuchs, 2011; Kakabadse *et al.*, 1995; Lakshman, 2009; Wang and Chan, 1995). It is not surprising that it is of such huge interest to both researchers and practitioners to understand how to build effective MTs.

Furthermore, it has long been known that communication affects outcomes that are important for top teams (DeWine, 2000). Although strategic management scholars have been interested in decision-making and problem-solving processes within MTs, communication has been treated as a variable rather than as the fundamental process whereby such teams come into being (Gibbs *et al.*, 2008). By communication we mean the ongoing process by which people construct their understanding and actions in collaboration with others. Communication is the process of creating social worlds, rather than simply the transmitting of information between people (Pearce, 2007).

Although studying MT communication has become of increasing interest to researchers, there has been relatively little research that has adopted an in-depth communication perspective on MTs. The recently-emerged perspective known as the strategy-as-practice perspective sees strategy as something that people *do* in communication with others, and foregrounds the interactions of the people involved in strategy making (Whittington, 2006). More research that adopts a qualitative perspective on MT communication is needed, in order to gain a better understanding of how MT members perceive and experience being part of the MT.

The purpose of this qualitative study is two-fold: first, we aim to build understanding of what kinds of communication challenges MT members face in their internal MT work in order to understand better how to facilitate competent communication among MT members, and second, to contribute to the research and literature of (top) MTs from a communication perspective, and therefore develop better knowledge about the innermost workings of MTs.

2. Competent MT communication

To make a distinction between teams and groups, Jones and Roelofsma (2000) say that team members are more differentiated and interdependent compared to group members. In addition, Dubrin (1998) defines team members as having complementary skills, being committed to common goals and holding themselves accountable for achieving them. The management and organization literature has adopted the term *top management team* (TMT) to refer to the small group of managers at the top of an organization. However, there are different kinds of MTs, and not all of them operate at the very top. Usually a recognizable business unit within an organization has its own MT. In this paper we have chosen to use the term MT to encompass the variety of different MTs at different levels in organizations.

Zorn and Thompson (2002, p. 255) distinguish MTs from other organizational groups by pointing out two distinctive factors. First, MTs are responsible for making strategic decisions, which are “more complex, consequential, and precursive than those made by other groups”. Second, MTs usually operate in a political and power-laden environment. Nadler (1998) points out that MT members often have strong power and achievement needs and an individualistic orientation. Because of this special context of the most powerful group within an organization, it is safe to assume that MTs need to coordinate their expectations, competences and actions skillfully and perform effectively as a team.

There is a growing body of research that shows that the quality of MT communication affects the organizational atmosphere and business outcomes. For example, Virany *et al.* (1992) noticed that developing social interaction within MTs improved the MTs’ ability to act in turbulent surroundings. Liang *et al.* (2010, p. 450) concluded that “the more communication that occurs among top managers, the greater the organization’s performance”. Communication frequency reduces perceptual differences amongst MT members and is important in resolving cognitive differences (Liang and Picken, 2011). Communication is of crucial importance in knowledge creation and decision making. Bonito *et al.* (2008) found that communication processes affect group members’ decisions about whether or not to participate and share their information: not sharing important information can lead to reduced quality in decision making. This is an important point, since the core work of MTs is strategic decision-making, which requires knowledge sharing. However, in a study of miscommunication in TMTs, Bang (2013) identified beliefs that prevented MT members from speaking up when experiencing miscommunication. Speaking up was perceived as a negative act that would lead to undesirable consequences for oneself, for others and for the overall atmosphere within the management team.

Group communication literature has pointed out several challenges that teams can face when trying to accomplish their tasks. For instance, distance, time and cultural differences within geographically distributed teams can be major challenges which can lead to mistrust and conflict (Janssens and Brett, 2005; Scott, 2013; Zakaria *et al.*, 2004). Thompson (2009) studied what communication processes influence or hinder the ability to build collective communication competence (CCC). In her study CCC was challenged by negative humour and sarcasm, debating expertise, communicating boredom and jockeying for power, whereas spending time together, practicing trust, task talk and negotiating meaning through discussion of language differences were foundational for establishing CCC. Also, CCC was facilitated by demonstrating presence, reflexive talk, backstage communication (as informal communication) and shared humour and laughter. Studies on *team reflexivity*

highlight reflexivity as a key factor in team effectiveness; that is, the more teams reflect on their performance, the more they improve it (Schippers *et al.*, 2012).

As MTs operate in a complex and demanding environment, the concept of competent communication becomes crucial. How effectively a MT operates is determined by how well the MT members communicate with one another. However, in order to develop competent communication within MTs, it is relevant to understand the communication challenges MTs work with. This led us to the research question:

RQ1. *What kinds of communication challenges related to the internal MT communication do MTs face?*

3. Research approach and method

The area of MT studies is relatively new and the knowledge about the internal communication in MTs is fragmented and scarce (Bournois and Roussillon, 2010; Lessem and Baruch, 2000). Furthermore, Liang *et al.* (2010) claim that the effects of MT communication have been missing in the literature. We here state furthermore that not only the effects but also an in-depth understanding of the MT communication itself seem to be missing. We hope that our contribution will open new directions for scholars interested in qualitative research on MTs, and particularly the communication processes within them.

For this study we chose a qualitative approach that is exploratory in nature. Keyton (2006) claims that qualitative methodologies are more effective in capturing the complexity of communication phenomena than quantitative ones. According to Silverman (2011), the quantitative approach provides information of certain pre-defined factors, whereas the qualitative approach can be used to study new and locally constituted phenomena, which can provide unique insights inaccessible through a quantitative approach. Given our research task of building understanding of communication challenges as MT members perceive and experience them, we found the qualitative approach to be appropriate.

We gathered data by means of thematic in-depth interviews with MT members. Qualitative interviews are particularly well suited for understanding experiences and for exploring people's explanations of a certain phenomenon (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011), in this case, the communication challenges. Given the exploratory nature of this study, in order to ensure the richness of the data we decided to approach MT members working in different positions in international companies that represented different industries. The MT members were selected by using the first author's professional network. The criterion for selection was that the MT member had to belong to a MT with responsibility for making business-related decisions in an international company. Some interviewees were contacted directly by the first author and some interviewees were found through several contacts within the organization. Getting access to the top level in an organization was challenging and often it was impossible to get past the first contact point. Although the interviews focused on communication issues, some potential interviewees might have been afraid of revealing secret company-related information. The contacting period was about six months, and the first interviews were held after the first four months. All those who participated in the research did so voluntarily, and the confidentiality of the interview was discussed in the beginning of each interview. A total of seven interviews were conducted. In qualitative research smaller sample sizes are often justified, especially if the research depends on hard-to-find people (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

Collecting qualitative research continues until new data no longer add much significance to the existing themes (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Much interview research relies on saturation although there are various views about when the data reach saturation point (Guest *et al*, 2006). Mason (2010) concludes that there is a general agreement that saturation is achieved at a comparatively low level. The saturation point in this study was reached relatively early, i.e. the main themes were present when seven interviews were gathered. Also, the first author's consulting background and expertise in the topic might have reduced the number of participants needed (see Jette, Grover and Keck, 2003). The communication challenges that emerged during the interviews appeared to be similar to what the first author had experienced as an organizational development practitioner.

Each one of the seven MT members, of whom three were female and four male, represented multicultural MTs operating at different levels within different international companies, and they represented a variety of MT positions (i.e. CEO, HR, Finance, Strategy). All the MT members represented diverse industries, including IT, insurance, food, manufacturing, metal and machinery. Four of the companies were Finnish, two were Swedish and one was Japanese. Six interviews were conducted in Finnish and one in English. Each interview lasted about one hour, and all but one of the interviews was conducted in a meeting room in the MT members' office building. One interview was conducted online via mutual synchronous audiovisual connection. There were no significant differences between using different channels or languages. The interviews were recorded, and transcribed by the first author. The duration of the interviews and the number of transcribed pages are presented in the following Table 1.

TABLE 1 Summary of interviews

Order number	Respondent's role	Date of interview	Means of interview	Language of interview	Duration of interview in minutes	Transcribed pages (with 1.5 spacing)
1	Head of (business unit in a country)	21.5.2013	Face-to-Face	Finnish	84	16
2	Director, Finance	3.6.2013	Face-to-Face	English	57	9
3	Senior Vice President, Corporate Human resources	18.6.2013	Face-to-Face	Finnish	51	13
4	CEO	18.6.2013	Face-to-Face	Finnish	48	9
5	Vice President, Business development	19.6.2013	Face-to-Face	Finnish	70	14
6	HR Director	2.7.2013	Skype	Finnish	59	11
7	Vice President, Human Resources	21.8.2013	Face-to-Face	Finnish	64	19
Total duration of interviews in hours: 07:13:00						

The interviews covered themes such as the MT's role and tasks, decision making, participation and the development of MT communication. The anonymity of the MT members has been ensured throughout the study and the results are reported in such a way that the identities of the MT members cannot be revealed. Extracts from the data have been translated from Finnish by the first author.

We analyzed the data by first looking for all references related to communication challenges in MTs. These could be difficulties, concerns or any issues that the interviewees expressed as having to do with the internal communication within their MT. Using thematic analysis, all the references were then grouped into themes, some of which were similar to the themes of the interviews and some of which were new. During further analysis we noticed that the themes started forming pairs, and we developed them into different dimensions. In line with the nature of qualitative research, the analysis was not guided by the number of references but instead we aimed at understanding and making sense of the data (Johnson, 2002).

4. Findings: communication challenges facing MTs

We were able to identify six dimensions that present a range of different communication challenges to MT work. Neither end of the dimension is better or worse than the other end, but rather they are dependent on contextual interpretations. By presenting the results as dimensions, we can appreciate the detailed data and the MT members' perceptions, which were sometimes contradictory.

4.1 Common objectives vs. personal objectives

According to the MT members' perceptions, there seems typically to be tension between the common objectives that are the MT's objectives, and personal, position-related objectives. The MT members emphasized that sometimes the personal objectives, whether it is a country, function or a division, might come into conflict with the common objectives, as the following statements illustrate:

M3: One of the biggest challenges for us is this divisional structure in which everyone has their own area where they are measured, so it sometimes makes collaboration over boundaries difficult.

M4: [...] the main thing in the management team is to take the whole business forward and not only one's own personal area of responsibility.

Also, for some MTs the common objective was clear, but for others there seemed to be a need for development in this area. An unclear common objective can sidetrack the MT away from its proper objective, and it ends up talking about topics that are too detailed or operational, when the discussion should remain on a more strategic level.

4.2 Equally distributed participation vs. polarized participation

The dimension of equally distributed participation versus polarized participation summarizes MT members' perceptions of whether all MT members participate equally actively or if it is only a few members who participate while the rest of the team remain silent. The ability to discuss issues that might be difficult or uncomfortable was seen as an important measure of competent communication. However, expressing oneself openly seems to be a challenge for most MTs, especially during meetings. For instance, MT members described situations in which some MT members do not speak up during meetings but instead share their opinions elsewhere in smaller groups, as the following statement shows:

M5: It is between meetings when you can hear the truth from other members, and you can ask why did you present this issue like this, so you can get at the real issues [...] you get the opinions also of those who have been quieter.

MT members described three different reasons that might affect the amount of participation. First, the position of the MT member can determine when it is the right time and place to contribute. One MT member explained that because of their position some MT members have stronger business orientation than others, and therefore it is natural for them to speak more during the meetings. In contrast, other MT members emphasized that everyone should be able to contribute to all of the discussions, whatever their degree of expertise on the matter in question.

Second, communication by other MT members can discourage or encourage participation. Just as a positive and supportive atmosphere was seen as an important condition for participation, negative comments, rejection and interruptions were seen as preventing it. How a certain communication act was interpreted depended on the context and the perceived intention of the speaker. For example, interrupting was experienced positively if it was done in the form of an inquiry or if the interruption continued to build on the idea already under discussion. The perception was that this form of communication motivates MT members to participate. On the other hand, if an interruption is interpreted as a rejection it can prevent participation, and therefore pose a barrier to competent communication. In general, trust, good relationships and respect for everyone in their own positions were seen as encouraging participation.

The third factor put forward by MT members to explain the amount of participation was personality differences. According to the MT members, personality differences explained why some MT members dominate the conversation and why other MT members do not participate or have difficulty voicing their opinions.

4.3 Leader-centric communication vs. team-centric communication

MT members highlighted the role of the leader, who in most cases was the CEO or the president of the business unit. According to the MT members, the leader's role is crucial in determining how team members participate in MT communication during and outside meetings, and this shapes the decision-making processes. Also, the role of the leader is seen as crucial not only to the communication culture of the MT but also to the entire company, as the following comment reflects:

M6: It's a very big role. It's significant for the atmosphere of the whole company, hence to the management team.

On the other hand, one MT member said that in a well functioning team with a good level of communication the role of the leader does not have to be central.

Change and development in the team's communication culture was often seen as something that only the leader could directly affect. One example of the leader's impact was brought out in a story in which the change of the CEO led to a company-wide culture change and efforts to develop the leadership in a new direction, because the new CEO had a different communication style than the previous CEO. Other MT members also emphasized that when the leader changes the communication within the team will change.

The leader's strong role was mainly seen as positive, although the leader might tend to dominate the communication and therefore reduce the participation of others. One MT member explained that sometimes the leader dominates the discussion because of being excited and enthusiastic about his or her work.

4.4 Consensus decision-making vs. unilateral decision-making

Decision making, and clarifying the decision-making process, were often mentioned as development needs during the interviews. The dimension of consensus vs. unilateral decision-making refers to the question of who participates in decision-making: whether it is the whole MT that makes the decision, or just the leader, or a smaller group within the MT. Problems related to decision making were lack of clarity in the decision-making process, participation in decision making, and the absence of joint decisions.

The ideal decision-making process, according to MT members, is equal and open; information is given early enough for all MT members to have time to familiarize themselves with it before the MT meeting. Instead of this ideal, MT members spoke about their experiences when clear decisions were not made, or when nobody kept track of the decisions that were made. Lobbying outside the boardroom, and trying to get support from another authority, for example from the function leader or the CEO, were also mentioned. Also, one MT member said that often the leader had already made the decision before the meeting, or the decision had been made elsewhere by other MT members. A lack of involvement in decision-making may reduce overall commitment, as described by a MT member:

M1: It's really an unbearable situation when some people have already talked and agreed on something. And then it's (the decision) presented like the thing is like this and the rest of the team don't know anything.

However, working in smaller teams or in pairs could be experienced positively because it is easier then to prepare the decisions. Gaining support for one's personal objectives could also be seen as positive, because by talking to other MT members beforehand one can get to know who is in favor of your idea and who is not.

4.5 Formal communication vs. informal communication

The dimension of formal and informal communication refers to the difference between communication during and outside meetings, communication at work compared to communication in one's free time, and the content of communication. A lot of the communication challenges were related to the meetings, which MT members perceived as being more formal than the other forums of communication. In particular, the topics on the agenda were connected to formal communication, and there seemed to be a desire to add more informal communication to the meetings.

Informal communication was also related to a more relaxed atmosphere, which was experienced as happening outside the meeting room and even outside the work context. One reason for experiencing the other communication forums as informal could be that "there is a less political agenda" than in the meetings, as one MT member put it. MT members explained that it is important to spend time together doing something that is not work-related, because that enables team members to get to know each other, establish relationships and develop trust, as demonstrated by one MT member:

M2: [...] speaking in informal context, about things outside the business as well, which is also important for building relationships.

Informal communication was also connected to speaking about team-related issues, such as team development or giving and receiving feedback. These kinds of topics are

not usually on the agenda for a meeting, but rather they are discussed outside that context, often during a team development day, which might be held once a year.

4.6 Face-to-face communication vs. ICT assisted communication

As the MT members represented multicultural MTs that use communication technology in their collaboration, it was emphasized that communication has to flow on many levels and in many different forums – not only in official meetings and face-to-face. Although many MT members reported that they use ICT in their communication, mostly video conferencing, email and telephone, much MT communication is still dependent on face-to-face communication, especially in MT meetings. Phone and email were used mainly for one-to-one communication between MT members.

Video conferencing was occasionally used for MT meetings. However, in most cases the meetings were arranged in such a way that there were some MT members who were participating face-to-face in the same location while others were participating online. Interestingly, the MT members experienced the meetings with the whole team present face-to-face as both more informal and more genuine than online meetings, as shown by the following comment:

M7: The best meetings have been those where we are face-to-face, because the discussion is genuine and open.

5. Discussion

As illustrated in this study, the interviewed MT members have versatile experiences related to internal MT communication. Although they stated that they very rarely discuss communication issues within their respective MT, the interviewees showed capability in analyzing MT communication and reflecting on the internal communication of their team and their own part in it. With a qualitative approach we were able to explore the unique and contextual challenges within internal MT communication as the MT members experience them (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). Lessem and Baruch (2000) have pointed out that very few studies have explored the top team performance as a team. This study has illustrated the essential themes (presented as dimensions) that the MT members experience and perceive as central in MT communication and teamwork.

The aim of this study was to understand what kinds of communication challenges MTs face, in order to develop competent communication. Based on our findings we suggest that MTs need first, to develop awareness of the communication challenges they are facing, and second, to learn to discuss those challenges in a constructive manner by establishing a reflective practice, which allows them to further develop MT reflexivity (Schippers *et al.*, 2012) and implement competent communication practices. In the following Figure 1 we present the dimensions and how they are linked to competent communication.

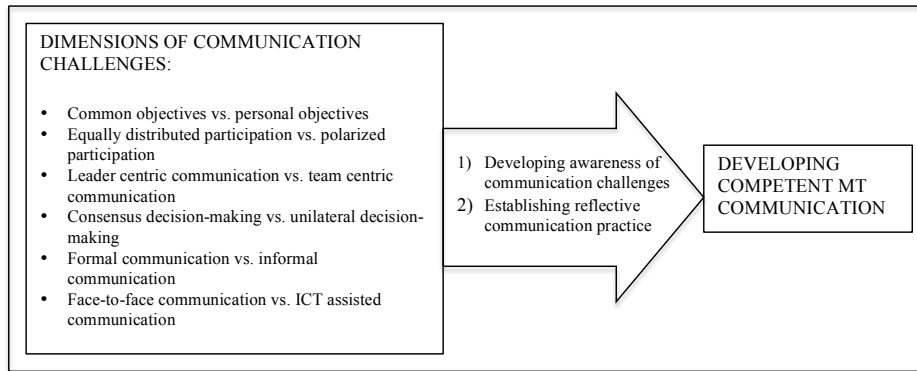


FIGURE 1 Communication challenges and developing competent MT communication

This study adds to the previous studies on CCC. In Thompson’s (2009) study communication processes that prevented competent communication were negative humor and sarcasm, debating expertise, communicating boredom and jockeying for power. According to the findings in our study negative comments about others, the rejection of ideas and interrupting can all challenge the development of competent communication (shown in the dimension of *equally distributed participation vs. polarized participation*). Similarly, previous research has shown that a fear of negative consequences can prevent participation during meetings (Milliken *et al.*, 2003). Also Bang’s (2013) study on miscommunication indicated that MT members believe that expressing concern can be damaging not only for oneself but also for team performance.

The findings of this study suggest that MTs should pay more attention to their informal communication, and particularly during meetings. Informal communication enables trust and relationships within the teams (Fay and Kline, 2012). Besides getting to know each other and spending time together, in this study, informal communication was also linked to reflecting on and discussing team-related issues, such as team development. Successful MTs are capable of informal dialogue and have time for reflection (Doz and Kosonen, 2007). However, there seems to be relatively little time, if any, for such topics during regular MT meetings. Although many MT members shared examples of how they try to provide feedback during the meetings, most of the team development is done outside the work context.

The current trend in organization development highlights the integration of development into the daily routines and practices of MTs (Cheung-Judge and Holbeche, 2011). This insight offers an important opportunity for both scholars and practitioners. The question is how MTs can create informal and reflective communication practices that will allow them to discuss the interplay between how they communicate and how they get their work done (Takeuchi and Nonaka, 2004). Continuously reflecting on MT communication practices and core processes such as decision making as part of the meeting as well as during other communication forums could improve team performance (Schipper *et al.*, 2012).

As the strategy-as-practice perspective suggest (Jarzabkowski *et al.* 2007), the MT meetings offer a fruitful platform for team development. The strategy-as-practice research has shown that the conduct of a meeting affects how strategic issues gain momentum during meetings (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2006). This indicates that in order to develop competent communication practice it is necessary not only to create a reflective space within the meeting but also to pay attention to how the

conversations are organized within that space. For instance, the dimensions presented in this study could work as a starting point for MTs to discuss major issues related to how they communicate and collaborate. When introducing organizational development interventions in the context of MT communication, practitioners could focus more on the dialogical spaces instead of on individual leaders and their skills. The dialogic approach to organizational development has introduced many intervention techniques focusing on the communicative nature of organizations. Approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), Art of Hosting (Bushe and Marshak, 2014b), to name but a few, aim at developing competent communication practices that enable people to respond and act in turbulent situations. In times of rapid change it is important for management teams to have their own development on the agenda all the time.

6. Conclusions

Although this study makes valuable contributions to MT research and literature it does not come without limitations. The first limitation is the number of interviews, which was relatively small. Getting access to top levels in organizations is challenging, and despite articulating the confidentiality of the research when approaching organizations, many MT members did not respond or they rejected the request. However, the aim of this study was to explore and understand the complexities of MT communication rather than produce a certain amount of data. With this approach we have gained new insights into the communication challenges within internal MT communication.

A second limitation to this study is that each MT member represented his or her whole MT. Although the communication challenges were surprisingly similar in spite the MT position and industry represented, the true nature of the challenges and how they are dealt are always contextual and team-related. Also, in the present study we focused mainly on the internal communication of MTs. During the interviews, however, many MT members brought up the differences between external and internal communication. In order to understand MT communication holistically, it is important to study MTs within their external context. MT level communication competence can only be evaluated and assessed within the context of the larger organization (Beebe and Barge, 1994).

The findings of this study could be further developed in a setting that occurs naturally for the entire MTs. That means applying a more constructionist approach to research design and using recordings of authentic MT communication. For example, using a strategy-as-practice approach (Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2007) to study MT meetings could be a worthwhile future direction. Further, new directions could be taken in order to focus on developing communication competence within MTs and on understanding the interplay of communication challenges and competent communication practices. Various global and intercultural contexts would provide fruitful possibilities for future research of communication challenges within MTs. In addition, this study opens possibilities for quantitative studies. One could for example develop a survey based on the dimensions of communication challenges, and further explore where different MTs would position themselves within the dimensions.

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III

FACILITATING LEADERSHIP TEAM REFLEXIVITY THROUGH PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

by

Hedman, E. & Barge, J.K.

Manuscript submitted for publication

IV

FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER USING COORDINATED MANAGEMENT OF MEANING THEORY

by

Hedman, E. & Gesch-Karamanlidis, E. 2015

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“The capacity for organizational change lies in the ability of initiating and sustaining desired patterns of communication. If the goal is to change the conversation and the quality of conversation, it is therefore important to pay more attention to the patterns of communication.”

Facilitating Conversations That Matter Using Coordinated Management of Meaning Theory

By Eerika Hedman and Eleni Gesch-Karamanlidis

The recently emerged sub-field of Dialogic Organizational Development highlights the importance of dialogue and conversations in organizational change. The aim of the dialogic approach is to “unleash, catalyze, and support the multitude of motivations and ideas amongst participants” (Bushe & Marshak, 2014b, p. 6). With this focus on dialogue among organizational members, changes in their thinking can alter their perceptions of what is possible in the organization and may lead to grander changes in behavior. Although the Dialogic OD literature claims that conversations are central in organizational change, there is little written about the essence of these conversations. Some conversations might facilitate change while others can lead to undesired outcomes.

Promoting effective conversations is one of the key questions in the future developments of Dialogic OD (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). This is where taking a communication perspective on organization development can be useful, as communication scholars often are interested in questions of communication patterns and effectiveness of communication. The capacity for organizational change lies in the ability of initiating and sustaining desired patterns of communication. If the goal is to change the conversation and the quality of conversation, it is therefore important to pay more attention to the patterns of communication.

Recently, Bushe and Marshak (2014a) as well as Oliver and Fitzgerald (2013)

introduced to the OD literature a communication theory that focuses on the patterns of communication called the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory. Oliver and Fitzgerald used CMM to demonstrate how facilitators might adopt a dialogic approach to exploring meaning making patterns through the interplay of stories of relationship, identity, and culture within an organization. By exploring the stories at various levels in the organization, Oliver and Fitzgerald hope to help individuals make the connection between these stories and the way they think and act as an organizational member. Building on Oliver’s (2005) idea of reflexivity, we use the term “reflexive patterns” to describe this self-awareness and ability for mindful action. Towards achieving the aims put forth in the Dialogic OD literature, Oliver and Fitzgerald (2013) highlight the need to “[invite] reflexive patterns through the ways in which small and large group exercises are designed, so that individuals and groups grow in responsibility for developing self-awareness and self-authoring as a function of organizational membership” (p. 34). The purpose of this article is two-fold: (1) to more fully present CMM so as to demonstrate its usefulness as a tool for inquiring into reflexive patterns within an organization, and (2) to offer questions that can be used to explore organizational stories at various levels and in turn, develop individual and group responsibility for managing organizational change.

The Emergence of Dialogic OD

In recent years, the scholars and practitioners of OD have applied more discursive and relational approaches to change, that is, interventions focusing on changing conversations (Marshak & Grant, 2011). This change in OD harkens back to the linguistic turn in social sciences, which highlights the discursive nature of human systems (Ospina & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Bushe and Marshak (2009) describe this turn as a bifurcation point that distinguishes between the Diagnostic and Dialogic OD approaches.

To make wise choices for action there needs to be awareness of the connections between personal actions and cultural stories told within an organization. Exploring the stories that are told will help to capture the personal accounts of how people construct their experiences and make meaning. CMM builds reflexive connections between meaning and action, which can develop the capacity of making choices regarding what patterns are useful to invite and sustain, and what patterns need to be changed...

Whereas Diagnostic OD had focused on objective data and problem-solving as a base for organizational change, Dialogic OD emphasizes the importance of everyday dialogue at work. According to Bushe and Marshak (2008), organizations change by changing the conversations and organizational discourse. The development interventions therefore focus on creating spaces where organizational members come together to share their understanding of the multiple social realities and to create alignment for decisions and actions. Bushe and Marshak (2009) refer to this space as a “container” (p. 356). Although both Diagnostic and Dialogic OD are interested in changing communication behavior of organizational members, Dialogic OD focuses on changing the collective meaning making that guides behavioral changes (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). The goal of Dialogic OD is to develop stories that help

the organizational members to coordinate meanings and action for the good of the organization (Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013).

Most of the recent literature in Dialogic OD is built on the assumption that when organizational members develop awareness of their own contribution to the diversity of multiple stories that constitute the organization, this will facilitate organizational change. More recently, scholars are looking for ways to promote more effective conversations (Bushe & Marshak, 2009). Oliver and Fitzgerald (2013) write that the main purpose of Dialogic OD is “to increase the capacity of a system

for reflexive dialogues” (p. 33). That is facilitating patterns of communication that enable organizational members to become responsible for developing self-awareness and accountability for their contribution to organizational reality. Dialogic OD should not only focus on creating a container within the system, it should also develop the capacity for this container to thrive.

CMM Theory and Patterns of Communication

If the task is to develop the system’s capacity of having effective dialogues, then there are several considerations to be mindful of. First, what do those facilitated conversations that can enable the growth of that capacity look like? Second, what conversation design will invite reflexive patterns of communication? To answer these questions, it is relevant to understand

how people initiate, sustain, and transform patterns of communication (Barge, 2014). Sustained capacity transforms communication patterns in order to build the desired future of the organization.

Instead of seeing communication as only transmitting information, CMM takes a standpoint of seeing communication as central in making social worlds (Pearce, 2007). CMM theory is built on similar premises as Dialogic OD, however what CMM adds to the Dialogic OD perspective is the understanding of reflexive patterns of communication and how those patterns occur. CMM is particularly useful in the development of dialogue and the quality of conversation, because it focuses on the ongoing creation and reconstruction of meaning and action in human systems (Chen, 2014). The following questions are central to CMM theory and practice (Pearce, 2007, p. 53): What are we making together? How did that get made? How can we make better social worlds?

According to Pearce (2007), everyday lives are full of bifurcation points, or critical moments. Those moments can change the direction of conversation, and the future of the people in conversation. Jovanovic (2003) says that “our decisions about how to communicate and our choices about what to communicate really matter in the mundane moments of everyday life” (p. 71). To make wise choices for action there needs to be awareness of the connections between personal actions and cultural stories told within an organization. Exploring the stories that are told will help to capture the personal accounts of how people construct their experiences and make meaning. CMM builds reflexive connections between meaning and action, which can develop the capacity of making choices regarding what patterns are useful to invite and sustain, and what patterns need to be changed (Barge, 2014). Pearce (1999, p. 46) says that “language is fateful,” meaning that the stories we tell constitute our social lives. To change the course of our lives, we need to change the stories we tell. Developing reflexivity enables people to re-write their stories leading to changed action and behavior.

CMM draws upon Bateson's (1956) ideas of meta-communication and contexts, which were further clarified by Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967). They stated that communication always has two contexts: content and relationship, where the relationship contextualizes the content. According to Pearce (2014), in order to understand a human system one has to understand the logics of the system and the context in which it exists. CMM has further extrapolated on the idea of context by introducing a hierarchy of meanings that include speech act, episode, self/identity, relationship, and culture summarized in Figure 1. The L-shaped lines in the figure represent "in the context of" (Spencer-Brown, 1972; cited in Pearce, 1999).

The key idea of the hierarchy of meanings is that in a certain situation there are always multiple stories. The concept of hierarchy of meanings can be used to help people to interpret and take action about what is going on in their organization (Pearce, Sostrin, & Pearce, 2011). Each of the contexts in the hierarchy model can be understood by looking at the other contexts, and each context is always contextualizing other contexts. For example, specific speech acts can be interpreted within the contexts of episode, self, relationship, and culture. This order of the hierarchy is dynamic and dependent on the situation. If you change something in one context, you change the meaning of the things contextualized (Pearce, 2014).

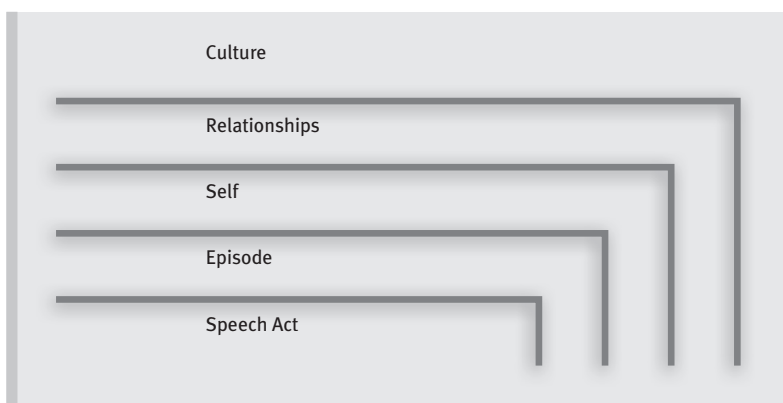


Figure 1. CMM Hierarchy of Meanings Model (Pearce, 1999, p. 36)

In other words, one can understand each organizational conversation better if one also seeks to understand how the conversation is contextualized and what kind of context it creates for further action and meaning making. For example, a conversation between a CEO and a manager can be an episode whose meaning is derived from its embeddedness in the context of their existing relationship. The meaning of the episode is taken in the context of the relationship. Alternatively, what happens in the episode can change the future course of their relationship. For example, an argument between the CEO and manager has the potential to change how they make sense of their relationship moving forward. The meaning of the relationship is taken in the context of the episode.

Understanding the interplay between different context levels and meanings means one can better understand and change the patterns of communication within an organization. The experiences of organizational members that result from these patterns become part of the stories they tell about the organization. Thus, CMM is interested in exploring these stories and simultaneously developing the reflexive awareness of organizational members (Pearce, 2014). With this awareness, members have the capacity to change the patterns of communication within the organization, thus producing meaningful organizational change. The various context

levels within the hierarchy of meanings will now be presented.

Speech Act. CMM points to the two faces of communication: coordinating actions and managing/making meanings. These come together in speech acts; what is said and done in communication with others. Speech acts include compliments, threats, insults, promises, etc. (Pearce, 2007). Being able to make wise choices of which speech acts to perform is an important factor in improving communication. During organizational changes it is crucial to mindfully engage in facilitating desired speech acts that will enable meaningful conversations and lasting organizational changes. For example in an organizational change situation the CEO informs the staff members about the reasons behind the change. The speech act refers to the specific language he/she uses to inform the staff members.

Episode. This level of stories can be described as "sequences of speech acts, punctuated with a beginning and an end, and united with a story" (Pearce, 2007, p.131). This level focuses on how episodes are made and clarifies what is happening and what kinds of patterns are taking place. According to Pearce (2007) patterns of communication are clusters of episodes, and once established, attract certain episodes and resist others. To change patterns of communication, one needs to initiate speech acts that will enable different episodes. Paying closer attention to the multiple stories that are being told of a situation can help one understand and change the patterns of communication. To follow the given example, the CEO's speech acts are interpreted within the given situation, in this case the staff debriefing. Afterwards, each staff member will tell a different story based on his or her experience of how the debriefing episode went.

Self. Identities and the idea of self are constructed in communicative processes. Pearce (2007) believes that there is a reciprocal relationship between the patterns of communication and self. Individuals become who they are because of the

patterns of communication they engage in. They are responsible for producing the patterns of communication partly by the selves that they have become. In the example case, the staff members interpret the CEO's message through their identity, including all their personal and professional history.

Relationships. Stories at this level emerge from patterns of communication, and like the context of self, relationships serve one context for the meanings being made and actions being taken in an individual's social lives. In other words, relationships are the context for the way we communicate (Pearce, 2007). Different speech acts and episodes are interpreted and enacted differently in different relationships. For example, the CEO's message is heard and interpreted differently depending on what kind of a relationship the staff members have with the CEO.

Culture. Cultural context includes the narratives reflecting the meanings attached to the different cultures individuals live in, such as national or organizational cultures. Cultural rituals and values are embedded in the meanings one makes in a certain episode and relational context. In an organizational change it is valuable to make the connections between the organizational culture and identities and personal experiences about the change. To follow the case example, the CEO's message is also put in the context of the organizational culture, and the stories of what is typically valued or disapproved within the organization. For example, stories of hierarchy and power can affect how the staff members interpret the message and how it affects their future actions.

Exploring Organizational Stories and Patterns of Communication

In the following section, the context of speech acts is presented by drawing on Hedman's experiences consulting for an organizational client experiencing workplace issues. The CMM hierarchy of meaning model was used to explore specific speech acts in the context of episodes,

self, relationship, and culture. Reflexive questioning inspired by Tomm's (1987) work was employed to build self-awareness through reflection.

Speech Act. In 2014, Hedman was consulting with an organization whose management team was feeling a lack of team spirit, resulting in poor performance. During individual interviews, the management team members expressed concerns related to their meetings, especially regarding poor preparation, unclear decision-making, inefficient use of time, and lack of participation

This facilitation work using the CMM hierarchy model demonstrates how a facilitator can structure his or her interventions by exploring communicative acts as part of what is made together. In this case, helping the team members to reflect and pay attention to the speech acts used in the management team, and how those speech acts construct episodes, selves, relationships, and cultures contributed to the team members' self-awareness and reflexivity.

during the meetings. These concerns resurfaced during a team meeting observed by Hedman. For example, when one team member took more time than what was scheduled for his topic, another team member responded by stating: "this illustrates how bad we are." There was a clear sense that team members were distracted and frustrated. The above mentioned speech act accompanied by other speech acts collected from the transcribed team meetings were used during a team development session. Hedman facilitated a session where she first described the hierarchy of meanings model and then asked the team members to discuss in pairs the speech acts by going through the different context levels. These discussions as they relate to each level are presented next.

Episodes. To understand how speech acts happen within an episode, in this case the management team's meeting, it is important to understand what typically happens during those meetings and how they got to

be that way. In this situation the speech act could be interpreted as a disappointment and complaint towards breaking meeting rules or not respecting the meeting procedures, which in turn can contribute to the experiences of inefficiency and a negative atmosphere. To explore how the speech acts fit within the meeting episode, Hedman asked questions such as: How does the speech act reflect your typical meetings? How does it contribute to future opportunities? Meetings represent only one episode in the overall communication of the management team, so a facilitator

could also explore the differences and similarities between different episodes.

Self. To further understand the meaning of specific speech acts and what possibilities for action they might provide, Hedman explored these stories by asking: What story does the speech act tell about you as a team? What kind of stories of self does it invite? She also asked them to consider how those speech acts reflected the team's vision. These kinds of questions helped the team members to build awareness about the fit between themselves and the patterns of communication.

Relationships. The speech acts also entail a relational context for why and how the team members communicate to each other the way they are. Hedman inquired further by asking about the fit between the speech acts and their relationships: How do the speech acts contribute to the team spirit and your relationships? She also helped the team members to generate possibilities for

the future by asking: To build better relationships, what kind of speech acts would you like to see in future?

Culture. The questions about the cultural context helped the management team members to understand their communication in a wider context. Hedman helped the management team members to explore the cultural context of their communication by asking questions such as: What cultural stories does the speech act invite? What kind of organizational culture do they construct? Exploring the cultural context built awareness of the connection between the patterns of communication within the organizational culture and within the management team.

Interconnected stories. After inquiring into different contexts, Hedman summarized her observations about the pair discussions with the group. Then, she facilitated a group discussion to address the interplay between different contexts and stories that had been revealed within the management team. This facilitation was designed with the intention to promote a spirit of reflexive dialogue among team members.

Pearce (2007) says that there are always multiple stories being told in an organization that are unequal, thus, some contexts are more powerful than others. Facilitated reflexive dialogue helped the management team members to build connections between the different context levels and to reflect on how these contexts play out in their communication. It also helped them identify which context was most powerfully influencing their story as a team. For instance, the development interventions had so far focused on the episodic context of management team meetings, as it was perceived as the most dominating context. However, based on Hedman's observations of team members' discussions of their speech acts in relation to the different contexts, she questioned whether it would be helpful to focus on another context level. This question provoked the team members to have a further conversation about the ways they are working together, leading to a decision to continue

with interventions focusing on developing their relationships. This facilitation work using the CMM hierarchy model demonstrates how a facilitator can structure his or her interventions by exploring communicative acts as part of what is made together. In this case, helping the team members to reflect and pay attention to the speech acts used in the management team, and how those speech acts construct episodes, selves, relationships, and cultures contributed to the team members' self-awareness and reflexivity.

Further Developing Meaningful Conversations

Facilitators lead individuals through the system of reflexive dialogue as well as help develop within this system patterns of communication that will facilitate organizational change. This article has presented CMM and described the hierarchy of meanings that are present in the everyday organizational discourse. In recognition of this, we recommend specific consulting practices for the Dialogic OD community. To more fully develop the reflexive awareness of organizational individuals and groups, facilitators can use questions that are crafted in consideration of organizational stories relating to specific speech acts, the episodes in which they occur, identities, relationships, or cultures. An understanding of how to craft questions that address the interplay of the stories will help facilitators fulfill the intent of Dialogic OD (Oliver & Fitzgerald, 2013).

Understanding how to craft these questions is only the first step towards fulfilling this goal. We point to two future research efforts in order to move Dialogic OD towards building meaningful conversations. The first step needed is additional research into the choices that facilitators make in the moment when exploring stories with organizational individuals or groups. What questions do they ask when exploring each level of organizational stories and how do they use the CMM hierarchy of meanings present within the organization to build reflexive awareness?

The second step for future research is to investigate the manner in which CMM

might be applied in facilitated large-group interventions to develop the capacity of individuals and groups to change the patterns of communication in the organization. The goal of applying CMM to the Dialogic OD approach is so that organizations may be able to employ the reflexive awareness developed with the guidance of the facilitator, in future organizational change efforts on their own. The aim of using CMM to inform consultancy practice in Dialogic OD is so that it can be further established in organizational practices. We believe that developing in organizational members the capacity to change patterns of communication on their own, fulfills Dialogic OD's aim of promoting meaningful conversations.

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