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**Mind the Gap**  
**Gap Factors in Intercultural Business Communication: A Study of German-Indian**  
**Semi-virtual Tech/Engineering Teams**

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## 0 Introduction

It has become something of a truism to describe today's world as "global" in nature, an almost self-evident condition in which people from far-flung regions around the globe are interconnected in ways too numerous to mention. Many of these everyday connections are social rather than professional in nature. However, a brief look at the sheer volume of publications on the subject of culture-dependent factors in international cooperation reveals a relatively recent trend: Intercultural cooperation is a phenomenon that affects an increasing number of people at the heart of their everyday working lives. In addition to mergers, acquisitions or other forms of reorganization, there has been an increasing trend towards collaborating across borders.

For the vast majority, this does not involve relocating abroad or even travelling to other countries; rather, it is an operational workplace environment involving regular communicative interaction with 'colleagues' in far-flung corners of the globe. As became evident during this study, intercultural cooperation for most employees has proved to be a matter of happenstance, a professional given rather than a personal choice. Sparked by actual experience in a needs-based organizational context, a growing awareness has emerged that professional competence requires alignment with intercultural competence<sup>1</sup>, whether it pertains to organizational development (e.g., Adler 2002, 2008; Hofstede 1997), intercultural communication (e.g., Bolten 2008; Busch 2015), global leadership (e.g., Groeschke 2015) or virtual teamwork (e.g., Greenberg, Greenberg & Antonucci 2007).

A vital ingredient in the success of a global business environment – especially when geographically dispersed – is managing communication and relationships across the geographical divide (Bolten 2017). This thesis deals with communication in a cooperation involving engineering/IT teams working on what can be loosely described as a work-split model, albeit with the additional element of being located separately in Germany and India. In particular, the thesis intends to shed light on the nature of communication gaps, i.e., features left **unexpressed** by the interactants, the conceivable cultural underpinnings, and the impact of virtuality on the same.

### 0.1 Background to Research

Even prior to the advent of the 'globalisation' catchphrase, companies in the Western world – including Germany – had already discovered the economic potential of manufacturing in so-called 'low-cost locations' abroad. The more recent global developments of the 1990s created a globally interwoven business environment in which the traditional sourcing of tangible goods has been augmented with knowledge-

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<sup>1</sup> A Google search yielded approx. 13200000 results for the term 'intercultural competence' (01.11.2020)

based development services. Based on the realization that 'low-cost locations' such as India are in a position to offer knowledge-intensive engineering and related IT services previously associated with industrialised nations, it has grown into a comprehensive industry (Budhwar et al. 2006; Carmel & Tjia 2005).

The sector has gained such a high degree of relevance to the Indian economy<sup>2</sup> that the Reserve Bank of India has conducted an annual survey on Computer Software and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES) exports since 2002-03. According to NASSCOM, the sector is currently generating an estimated annual revenue of around USD 168 billion, including exports of USD 126 billion, which contributes around 8% to India's GDP. The industry is also one of the largest organized sector employers, generating nearly 14 million direct and indirect jobs. It is further estimated that the industry has the potential to contribute up to 350 billion USD, thus accounting for around 10% of India's GDP by 2025 (National Policy on Software Products 2019)<sup>3</sup>.

Although the US and Canada continue to remain the top destinations for software exports, the rationale of a low-cost perspective, scalability and a seemingly inexhaustible pool of engineering graduates<sup>4</sup> has led to substantial growth in German technology companies tapping the Indian market for knowledge-intensive software and engineering services in the field of development. Although business models also utilize Indian providers of engineering services, numerous multinational companies<sup>5</sup> run their own 'captive' subsidiaries as R&D centres in India, including the four German industrial players studied here.

Unlike the outsourcing of production or projects, which may be carried out largely based on the division of labour principle, this new business scenario requires global teams that intermesh to create a finished project. The organizational design required for global collaboration in knowledge-based teams has proved to be one of the greatest challenges for today's workplace. Working in a geographically-dispersed team does not merely require transcending thousands of miles – as is the case with India and Germany – but rather it also requires productive interaction with largely unknown individuals from unfamiliar cultures in a technologically-mediated communication environment. The data for this study has been drawn from precisely this microcosmos

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<sup>2</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/25-global-companies-set-up-RD-centres-in-India-in-last-18-months/articleshow/22846741.cmsn>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.meity.gov.in/writereaddata/files/national\\_policy\\_on\\_software\\_products-2019.pdf](https://www.meity.gov.in/writereaddata/files/national_policy_on_software_products-2019.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Approx. 3.2 million in 2019 (Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/765482/india-number-of-students-enrolled-in-engineering-stream-by-discipline/#statisticContainer>)

<sup>5</sup> Approx. 1250 multinationals in the financial year 2019 (Source: <https://community.nasscom.in/communities/global-in-house-centers/gcc-3-0-a-location-analysis.html>)



of geographically-dispersed German-Indian engineering-IT<sup>6</sup> teams, interspersed with selective face-to-face encounters.

Owing to a variety of reasons including linguistic, cultural and time zone factors, not to mention the complexities of knowledge transfer involved, virtual and semi-virtual teams are more prone to miscommunication and risk of failure than both collocated teams and domestically outsourced projects (e.g., Heeks et al. 2001).

The challenge is obviously to pinpoint the obstacles to efficiency, profits and growth posed by such endeavours. The German companies studied are aware of such challenges and have taken a wide range of measures to address them. Synergy strategies include not only company-internal frameworks linked to *Cocpit* dimensions<sup>7</sup> but also intercultural cooperation strategies through sessions of intercultural training, workshops, knowledge exchange visits and intranet information. Facilitation of intercultural project teams and groups are on offer as add-on elements. To mitigate the drawbacks of impersonality in a geographically-distributed collaboration, intermittent phases of face-to-face interaction for technical training or project coordination have been introduced, ranging from 4-6 weeks up to 3 years in particular cases.

Within this aforementioned context of geographically-distributed German-Indian engineering teams, I have spent over a decade and a half as a practitioner-consultant addressing behavioral phenomena in cross-cultural collaboration. My facilitator's role working with both national locations at a meta-communication level (Bolten 2007, p.241) led to focusing on the misunderstandings underlying behavioral and communicative patterns. As a result, the motivation for this study was not primarily ontologically directed, but aimed rather at the teleological, "intentional and goal-directed" (Marais 1988) dimension of gathering data from both sides to identify the most frequently-mentioned pitfalls in collaboration and provide a unifying framework for it. The findings result from field observation, since "in well-executed theory building research <...> intimat[ing] interaction with actual evidence often produces theory which closely mirrors reality" (Eisenhardt 1989, p. 547).

## 0.2 Caveats

Content-wise, this also constitutes the primary limitation of the study, whereby the spotlight during data gathering was implicitly directed at problematical factors in German-Indian collaboration rather than at a more balanced view. The practitioner's role as a consultant elicited problem-oriented responses, analogous to a medical

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<sup>6</sup> As engineering development has become overwhelmingly IT-driven, no further distinction will be made here.

<sup>7</sup> Coordination/control systems, objectives and values, capabilities, processes, information, and tech technology (Heeks et al. 2001).

consultation in which the patient is required to elaborate on singular ailments rather than general good health.

The participants desired a smoothly-functioning engineering world free of ambiguity. A perceived lack of time engendered a reluctance to consider that the outcomes of negotiated processes in intercultural interaction are unpredictable per se (Bolten 2016). The fuzziness and polyvalence<sup>8</sup> (Bolten 2011, 2013) underpinning intercultural interaction was perceived as a potential threat to economic value creation.

*Wir müssen jetzt schauen, dass die Reibungsverluste möglichst geringgehalten werden. Selbstverständlich wollen wir in diesem globalen Zusammenarbeitsmodell genauso zielgerichtet und effizient unsere Ziele erreichen wie davor. (Company D/19.1.2016/HK/Germany/1)*

*Wie können wir möglichst schnell unsere Ziele erreichen? Der Erfolg ist konkret messbar. Wir wollen uns nicht in der interkulturellen Zusammenarbeit abmühen, um am Ende noch unsere Ziele zu verfehlen. (Company B/21.7.2016/HK/Germany/2)*

Scholars have highlighted the dangers of perceiving “scalable efficiency as the central and only criterion for the description of the social world” (Busch 2016, p. 45-46). Nonetheless, it is necessary to direct an analysis at the relevancies of the participants themselves. Reflecting those subjective realities acts as “a buffer against the potential for academic and theoretical imperialism which imposes intellectuals’ preoccupations on a world without respect to their indigenous resonance” (Schlegloff 1997, p. 163).

### **0.3 Aims and Objectives**

In keeping with this, the original aim of this study was a practitioner’s mission: to collate and classify the reported dissonances in the transnational social space<sup>9</sup> of Indian-German geographically-dispersed engineering teams. The starting point was to create a body of applied knowledge arising from business interaction that could be disseminated to the stakeholders. The knowledge was intended to facilitate organizational outcomes by reducing frictional losses.

Over time, as certain communicative patterns and their ensuing effects began to emerge, it led to an interest in examining and reflecting on the worldviews that they both projected and were projected upon. This desire to delve deeper and access the participants’ thoughts and feelings gradually grew to become a thesis.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Mehrwertigkeit’ (Bolten 2011)

<sup>9</sup> While Faist (1998) maintains that “transnational social spaces denote the circular flow of persons, goods, information and symbols across countries that have been triggered in the course of international labor migration and refugee flows”, it may be extended to refer to transnational social cyberspace in which the flow is virtual in nature.

From a practitioner's viewpoint and working inductively from emergent data (Glaser & Strauss 1967/2006), I postulate that in Indian-German business interaction it is not so much the **performance** or 'doing' of a communicative act that may create dissonances but rather the **absence** or 'not-doing' of certain communicative actions expected in a collaborative context.

The objective here is to scrutinize the 'not-doing' – termed 'gap factors' – to achieve the overall aim of ascertaining how gap factors in interaction and message production affect German-Indian collaboration at the team level. For this purpose, the following research questions are explored:

1. What are the factors leading to dissonances/miscommunication in virtual/semi-virtual German-Indian teams?
2. How can they be classified as 'gap factors' in communication?
3. To what extent do external and structural factors such as remote collaboration and perceived power asymmetry influence gap factors in communicative action?
4. To what extent are these gap factors influenced by the sociocultural norms of the engineering micro-cultures examined?

#### **0.4 Research Field:**

With intercultural research being interdisciplinary in nature, the theoretical foundations of the field are broad based. It subsumes cognitive anthropology (e.g., D'Andrade 1995), cross-cultural anthropology (e.g., Hall 1959, 1976), psychology (e.g., Triandis 2002), and sociology (e.g., Berger & Luckmann 1966/2011). More recently, it has been augmented by the nascent field of intercultural neuroscience (e.g., Varnum et al. 2010, Warnick & Landis 2015). Perspectives vary depending on the academic domain of the researchers concerned, leading to enhanced or diverging results.

The topics discussed in this thesis can be viewed within the broad field of cognitive anthropology, which deals with "correlations between specifically human **thought**, perception, cognition and human environment, which is for homo sapiens always a **cultural** environment." (Trajtelová 2013, p.8, bold in original). It falls within the interdisciplinary domain of cognitive science that involves philosophy, psychology, linguistics, computer science, neuroscience and anthropology (Harnish 2001).

Cognitive anthropology seeks the principles that underlie the behavior revealed through ethnographic description. Observable behavioral phenomena are recognized as expressions of more basic and fundamental underlying organizational order and principles (Blount 2011). The cognitive anthropology approach engages with the application of knowledge in everyday life and towards habitual actions in the sense of tacit knowledge (Wassman & Bender 2015).

The cultural element enters the framework when cultural models are seen as cognitive schemas (D'Andrade 1995). It is apparent in Savard & Mizoguchi's (2019) definition of culture as

an evolving (in both time and space) cognitive structure composed of such schemes that influence the behavior of each of the members of a given group, the manner in which the members of the group interpret the behavior of other persons and groups, and the processes of interpretation and representation that allow them to interact with their environment.

When cognitive anthropology deals with business organizations, it is termed business anthropology<sup>10</sup>. It is a practice-oriented scholastic field in which anthropological theories and methods are applied to identify and solve everyday business problems. Business anthropologists tend to deal with the following questions:

Who are the leaders and who are the followers in the business? How many different groups of people exist in the business? What common beliefs, values, and attitudes do members of each group inside the business hold? What does the existing political hierarchy, according to which power and authority are wielded and responsibility is delegated, look like? How is information passed through among the members of each group? How do group members relate to and communicate with each other? What causes disputes among group members, among groups, and how are these resolved? (Tian 2010, p. 72)

Almost exactly in line with the above brief, this dissertation examines the socially and culturally habituated beliefs of two technical communities of practice (CoPs), the power relations between them, their patterns of communicative action, and the influence of these patterns on interaction. Relationship building and information sharing are examined against the gap factors mentioned, with conflict approaches playing a role in the process. The final wash is provided by the intercultural and virtual setting in which the business interaction takes place.

The study draws, to varying degrees, from intercultural theory (e.g., Hall 1959, 1976), organizational anthropology (e.g., Hofstede 1991) and organizational psychology (e.g., Lave & Wenger 1991). The specifics of communicative action lead to communication theory (e.g., Barnlund 1989), linguistic anthropology (e.g., Duranti 1997; Lakoff 1987), sociolinguistics (e.g., Tannen 1987), intercultural communication (e.g., Gudykunst 1993, 1997, 2003) and intercultural pragmatics (e.g., Kecskes 2014).

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<sup>10</sup> It is a relatively new paradigm that stemmed from the desire of organizations to gain measurable benefits, and gained traction in the 1980s.

Intercultural communication is a correspondingly varied and evolving field representing the interwoven strands of culture, communication and social interaction. This has been examined with an array of inter- and transdisciplinary approaches from the fields of intercultural and contrastive pragmatics, interactional sociolinguistics, ethnography of communication, ethnomethodology as well as discourse analysis (Busch 2009).

## 0.5 Definition of Terms

**0.5.1 Intercultural Communication.** ‘Culture’ is a wide-ranging term in academic discourse, yet as the root form of the term ‘intercultural’ it is important to consider its definition within this field of study. “The biggest problem with the word culture is that nobody seems to know exactly what it means, or rather, that it means very different things to different people” (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p.3).

Culture may be seen as a shared pool of cultural knowledge that has been socially learned (Romney, Weller & Batchelder 1986). According to consensus theory, items that are relatively homogeneously known by all respondents constitute this shared culture (ibid). Numerous analogies for the concept co-exist, such as the comparison of culture with an iceberg (Hall 1976), with a hologram<sup>11</sup> (Magala and Howe 2012), with the cohesion that exists in the surface tension of water (Hansen 2009, p. 6), or with a fuzzy sand dune composed of changeable ‘shifting sands’ above and a firm ‘sediment’ below (Bolten 2014).

Given that it is in constant use – including by the participants represented in this dissertation – it would be unacceptably selective to completely ignore this term. Even if culture is seen as a construct free of objective reality (cf. Kronenfeld 2008), it is also a subjectively identifiable reality<sup>12</sup> for the individuals concerned. Therefore, for the purposes of this research, culture may be summarised as a cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, meanings, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Porter 1972), which are nonetheless dynamic, exemplified through reciprocal practices (Bolten 2008) and represent normality for the group concerned (cf. Berger & Luckmann 1966/2011).

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<sup>11</sup> “Reality as a hologram is founded in our cognitive processes and the way we conceptualize, remember or imagine something has a holographic structure” (Timalsina 2015, p.102). Particularly intriguing is a hologram’s unique property of being seen as a whole in any of its constituent parts (ibid).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ‘Cultural realism’ (Kumaravadivelu 2008). The social reality of everyday world is perceived by human beings as shaped in dynamic but consistent terms, and is interpreted subjectively in the light of cultural reasoning (cf. Berger & Luckmann 2011). Models of selfhood and self-construal are seen through a cultural lens in different groups, even if simple contrasts do not do justice to the diversity within regions and models (cf. Vignoles et al. 2016).

In an essentialist view, culture is seen as 'nature', an essence within an individual or group, and cultural traits may be arbitrarily clustered together (Verschuere 2008). This involves attributing certain characteristics to everyone subsumed in a geographical/biological category, reifying such categories, and presuming homogeneity (cf. Phillips 2010). The reductivism inherent in this view of culture (Jensen 2006) can lead to simplistic misconceptions. At the same time, it cannot be altogether dismissed as a construct. Baumann (1996) posits that 'folk reifications' often become part of people's self-definitions and assume a life of their own. Strategic essentialism (Spivak 1988) – invoking a collective category while simultaneously criticizing it as theoretically unviable – is sometimes consciously undertaken to highlight socio-political issues.

Although the reciprocal practices discussed in this paper may take place in the dispersed realities of Germany and India, the socially constructed, "learned and shared values, behaviours and beliefs" (Bennett 1998) of two self-defined micro-cultures constitute the core of this study. These self-attributed features of 'engineering cultures' (Mahadevan 2009) accrue from the 'category membership' (De Fina, Schiffrin, Bamberg 2006; Sacks 1972; Schegloff 2007) that the participants assign themselves in their communities of practice (CoP).

All references to 'Indian' or 'German' throughout this dissertation are directed at the communities of practice studied and not at the national geographies involved. Nationality (e.g., 'the Germans') is cited by the participants for convenience, but the observations concern their CoP colleagues rather than being representative of the entire population of a country.

The term 'communication' is used in its wider sense in this paper, namely as interaction including "the particularities of human behaviour resulting from communicative action" (Bolten 2007, p. 138, *own translation*). In addition to written communication and the verbal, non-verbal, para and extra-verbal aspects (Bolten 1999) of verbal discourse, it also subsumes "preferred ways of <...> of organising thoughts" (Kecskes 2014) as well as modes of action (Hall 1959; Ricoeur 1991).

As Moosmüller (2007, p. 50) highlights, culture is both a process and a structure, a product of communication as well as a precondition for communication. Intercultural communication deals with "the communication phenomena in which participants, different in cultural backgrounds, come into direct or indirect contact with one another" (Kim 1984, p. 16). While a life world or a 'culture' is physically located in a specific natural habitat, it is simultaneously in a constant process of creation through communication (Bolten 2000).

However, not all interaction between people from different cultures is necessarily intercultural communication. “Only when their communication patterns reflect their corresponding cultural characteristics and assumptions can we treat their interaction as intercultural communication” (Levine, Park & Kim 2007, p. 209). Misunderstandings may (and do) arise in any form of communication, although intercultural communication often involves additional hurdles relating to unfamiliar perceptions, experiences, discourse patterns, etc. (cf. Chaney & Martin 2014).

Communication is an interactive, participatory process (van Ruler 2018), and intercultural communication may be defined as a process during which differing cultures are constantly creating a field in which other limits, conventions and routines apply compared with monocultural interaction (Bolten 2007, p. 140). This is reflected in the variances in the pragmatics of different ‘speech communities’<sup>13</sup> (Dell Hymes 1962, 1989) with culture treated as an explanatory variable in the process (Spencer-Oatey & Jiang 2003).

Garfinkel (1967) channels the concept of fuzziness in communication, arguing for “indexicality” or a lack of inherent meaning in communication. This term does not necessarily involve a breakdown in communication, as some misunderstandings can be procedurally managed during interaction through clarification, corrections and readjustment strategies<sup>14</sup>. However, when the communicative act is suffused by differences in cultural systems of meaning, the listener interprets an utterance in a different way from what the speaker has intended (Chiang 2009, p. 380) as he/she is unaware of the unknown underlying frame of reference.

**0.5.2 Gap Factors.** In everyday communication, what is left unsaid can be as important as what is actually said. The expression ‘the elephant in the room’ – referring to something that is unsaid but too significant to be ignored – is a part of everyday parlance. However, intercultural practice is often based on a long-standing belief that dissonances are created by communicatory faux pas, namely saying and doing the ‘wrong’ thing<sup>15</sup>.

Unlike positive and negative actions, the ‘not-doing’ of a communicative action is not something that one refrains from doing but rather it is “something that is not done, where this does not involve any contemplation on the part of the agent” (Stuart 2013, p. 412)

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<sup>13</sup> Dell Hymes draws on Gumperz’s concept of ‘linguistic community’ (1962) to describe a concept for the relation between language, speech, and social structure.

<sup>14</sup> Meaning attribution is managed in interaction by “reflexivity” with the help of common-sense knowledge (Garfinkel 1967).

<sup>15</sup> The standard FAQ in every needs analysis session was regarding “Tabuthemen’ and faux pas; the vast range of ‘do’s and don’ts’ literature in print and on the web bears ample testimony to this abiding interest.

While 'not-doing' may not even constitute an action (cf. Stuart 2013), it nonetheless leads to inferences and consequences on the part of other actor(s), whether individually or collectively. The absence of a communicative action might well be interpreted as a mindful omission and thus it might be inferred to be a wilful action (ibid). 'Not-doing' may not provide the necessary impetus for a follow-on action and thus lead to consequences unintended by any of the actors involved. Analogous to Hall's term 'omission factor' (Hall 1976, p. 48), these missing elements will be termed 'gap factor'.

Structures, conventions and routines within cultural groups become reciprocally habitualized (Berger & Luckmann 1966/2011) with corresponding expectations of being met. Failures to meet these routines also include the absence of socially-conventionalised and expected elements. The non-appearance of the expected violates the plausibility, regularity and predictability (Nicklas, Müller & Kordes 2006) of the interaction.

The norms and expectations of organizational cultures essentially follow the same logic of institutionalised reciprocity. Communication in organizations is intended "to share information and create relationships in environments designed for manageable, cooperative, goal oriented behavior" (Wilson, Goodall & Waagen 1986, p. 20). Failures to produce the only sensible course of communicative action often lead to an array of misapprehensions and even misattributions (Burgoon 1993; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998).

Hence, gap factors – i.e., communicative features that are left unexpressed, whether behaviourally or verbally – have an immediate and tangible impact on the operational outcomes of an enterprise. Although gap factors are often subjective, i.e., only perceived as relevant by those involved in the communication process<sup>16</sup> (Chudoba and Watson-Manheim 2008, p. 57), they become objectively recognizable in terms of collective outcomes.

**0.5.3 Remote or Virtual Team.** Geographically-distributed or -dispersed teams are denoted by a wide range of synonyms, including 'virtual' or 'remote' teams. They have been defined as "teams in which members reside in different cities, countries or continents <...> groups of individuals who work together interdependently to accomplish a task" (Hinds & Mortensen 2005), and groups with a varying but reasonable number of members (Köppel 2007). A remote team could therefore be composed of members sitting within the same country, possibly even just a few kilometres apart. The frequency of remote interaction is also an important factor, with

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<sup>16</sup> The authors use the construct of 'discontinuities' in this context.



virtual teams depending on electronic communication for *routine* interactions (Green & Roberts 2010; italics mine).

The dispersed teams in this study face the dual challenges of working despite spanning locations around 10,000 kilometres apart, as well as their inherent cultural particularities. This combination of factors poses a different set of challenges than those faced either by dispersed monocultural teams or single-location multicultural teams.

Intercultural remote communication has been completely reshaped and facilitated by today's technologically-mediated environment (Porter & Samovar 1994). There are few concrete impediments to an exchange of information between geographically-dispersed teams other than manageable factors such as time zone differences. Nonetheless, the absence of sustained face-to-face communication constitutes a gap factor in itself, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

**0.5.4 Participant.** The term 'participant' will be used for the interactants in this study as it best reflects the starting point of the dissertation. The term 'respondent' may be excluded as it connotes quantitative research involving survey designs requiring questionnaires. 'Informants' may be defined as individuals who share knowledge with a researcher from an insider's perspective and would consequently be better suited to ethnographic research (cf. Spradley & McCurdy 2008, p. 4).<sup>17</sup> 'Subjects' are traditionally associated with experimental or quasi-experimental designs, reacting passively at the researcher's behest (Morse 1991). Considering that those involved in this study actually took part in workshops and seminars, the term 'participant' best reflects the research reality. At the same time, they may be deemed as experts since they are privy to specialized information relating to their own interpretations, perspectives and worldviews (cf. Hopf 1993).

## 0.6 Sources

In this study, both the researcher and the participants were embedded in the milieu by virtue of employment, even if the researcher as a consultant was present on a more sporadic basis. Data gathering was undertaken epistemologically, in the natural setting of the participants, including conference or seminar venues for work-related events.

Specifically, the methods used in each source of data collection were as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> It is also used in connection with police enquiries, often with negative connotations (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/informant>).

- Monocultural consultancy workshops with participants from each group (either German or Indian) discussing the elements of the existing cooperation, historical relationship, and fact finding. Introductory, input-oriented cultural awareness seminars involving previously-inexperienced participants do not form any part of this study.

Each workshop was initiated by unstructured narrative face-to-face group interviews in the form of a preliminary 'needs analysis' with a view to identifying key issues, open questions and the more challenging features of the cooperation. The needs analysis was preceded by the question:

'Which aspects of your collaboration with India/Germany would you like to discuss?'

The issues mentioned were clarified by the participants, and photographed (see figure 1). Customized workshops were additionally preceded by an unstructured one-on-one interview with the manager responsible for requesting such a measure.

- Facilitated team meetings and workshops in the participants' natural setting. This gave rise to face-to-face self-descriptive interchanges by involving German and Indian colleagues in a social constructionist sense (Gergen 1985). They were generally accompanied by pinboard presentations (see figure 2).
- Individual face-to-face individual interviews with experienced participants at varying managerial and operational levels<sup>18</sup>.
- Phone interviews vis WhatsApp – individual and group – with the offshore counterparts of participants.
- Secondary sources in the form of email samples provided by the participants, albeit to a lesser degree.

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<sup>18</sup> Dexter (1970) argues in favor of open-ended interviews.

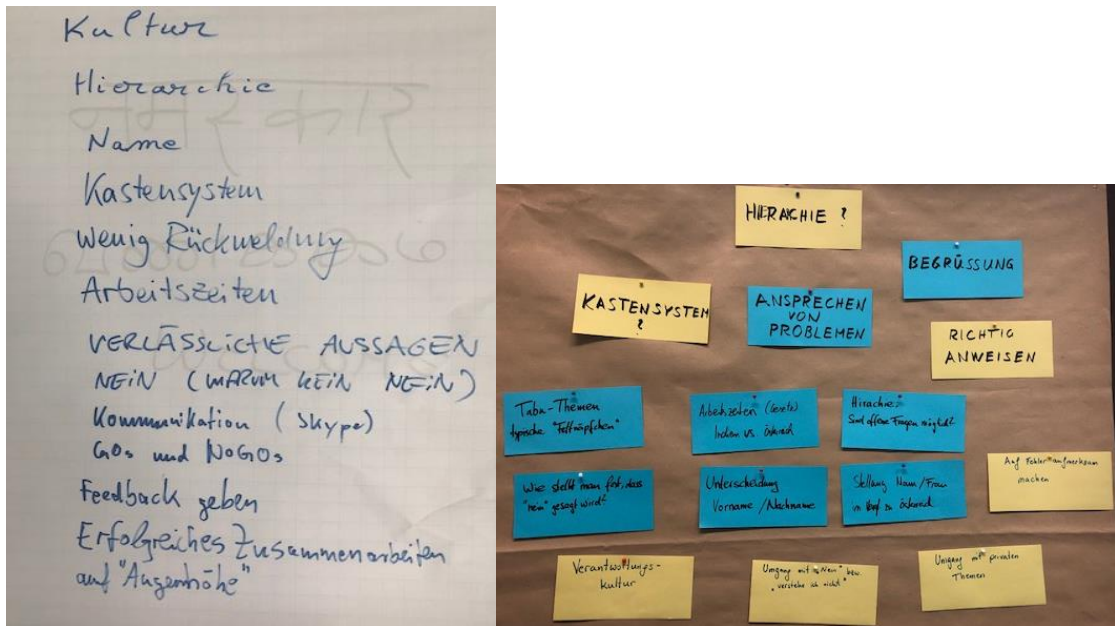


Figure 1. Germany: Topics to Discuss (Company B)



Figure 2. Describing ourselves (Company B).

### 0.7 Structure and Content

The thesis is divided into 6 Chapters. The introduction and Chapter 1 deal with the the purpose of the thesis, the research questions, methodology, definitions, research process, and literature.

Chapter 2 considers the contextual factor of ‘culture’ through the lens of social psychology theories, particularly Category Membership Analysis (Sacks 1992; Schlegloff 2007), and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Engineering communities of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger 1991) and their descriptive as well as prescriptive self-positioning in terms of identity and group prototypes are explored.

Chapter 3 addresses the structural factors underlying the study (cf. Matsumoto 2007), i.e., the influence of the two external exigencies affecting context and

reciprocity: power asymmetry and remote collaboration. Power factors in interaction accruing from the perceived service provider roles and imbalance in age and professional experience are examined in terms of role-based communication and dominant discourses. Remote, technologically-mediated communication is viewed in terms of its influence on social presence, trust, and tacit knowledge.

Chapters 4 and 5 cover the findings, i.e., the gap factors, contributed by the two communities of practice (CoP). As reciprocity is pivotal to effective cooperation, the absence of communicative markers expected from both German and Indian perspectives are elucidated and the ensuing dissonances are touched upon.

Chapter 4 outlines the emphasis on affective paradigms contributed by the Indian participants. Starting by considering emotion research, it surveys the affective gaps from an organizational perspective. Using Ashkanasy's five-level model (2003) of emotions in organizations as a structural basis, gap factors pertaining to different forms of benevolence signalling in relational practice are examined, including altruism, reciprocal hospitality, and feedback. The chapter concludes with the challenges to affective signalling posed by technologically-mediated communication.

Chapter 5 deals with the cluster of gap factors revolving around communicative transparency contributed by the German participants. Using the OCB dimension of 'initiative' (Kwantes et al. 2008), it examines concepts of affect- and cognition-based trust, psychological safety and conflict management approaches. Knowledge-withholding behaviors that impede communicative efficiency and content include accommodation and avoidance strategies using formulaic language and non-response. The gaps are also predicated on the varying interpretations of 'Bringschuld' ('push' communication) and 'Holschuld' ('pull' communication) in the two CoPs.

Chapter 6 concludes by reviewing the findings, reflecting on the insights gained and their implications for future research and practice.

Using elements of a hermeneutic spiral,<sup>19</sup> it will be attempted to describe and comprehend the complex interplay of factors embedded in an intercultural context. It is not to be seen as objective hermeneutics, but rather as a general phenomenological interpretation regarding the reconstruction of typically-meant subjective meaning that people attach to their actions (Honer & Hitzler 2015) and that of others.

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<sup>19</sup> The hermeutic circle (cf. Heidegger 1927) describes the circular process of movement between the individual parts of a text and the whole to establish understanding, although it emphasizes a return to its starting point. On the other hand, Bolten (1985) perceives the process as an open spiral that leads to enhanced understanding through self-correction (Bolten 1985).

## 0.8 Value of the Study

Given the consistent growth in global collaboration between companies in Germany in India, there has been a paucity of research material on intercultural interaction in this field. There is material to draw upon when investigating literature on Indian cultural and communicative patterns (e.g., Paranjpe 1985, 2016), as well as business research pertaining to India (Capelli et al. 2015), including professional values (e.g., Sinha 1997, 2014) and leadership (e.g., Pellegrini et al. 2010; Sahgal & Pathak 2007), largely based on the *cultural* rather than the *intercultural*, i.e., interactional, perspective.

Curiously, little research material appears to be available on the salient parameters of German communicative patterns, possibly due to the wariness with which applied anthropology is treated in German academic discourse (Moosmüller & Schönhuth 2009). German researchers on intercultural communication tend to treat them as a frame of reference (Busch 2008; Müller-Jacquier 2000) rather than a focus for pragmatic study. Most extant material on the subject seems to belong to the domain of business “etiquette” guides to working with Germans, such as the European Commission-funded website on business communication.

Compared with the volume of material on US-Indian interaction (e.g., Budhwar et al. 2006; Crowe et al. 2012; Sinha & Kanungo 1997; Suri & Abbott 2013), much less has been written on German-Indian workplace interaction, even less so from a communication perspective. Mahadevan’s findings in the field of German engineering culture (2007, 2011, 2012) have given impetus to this dissertation, as also Rathje’s study (2004) on German-Thai business interaction. Consulting journals such as the *Journal for Business Anthropology* has proved productive for applied research on geographically-distributed teams (e.g., Dibbern, Winkler & Heinzl 2006). Indian-Dutch collaboration patterns (e.g., van Marrewijk 2011) reveal parallels to those between Germany and India, as do Pines & Zaidman’s findings (2010, 2014) on Israeli-Indian high-tech teams.

In short, only a handful of researchers (e.g., Philip & Wende 2011; Suri & Abbott 2009) have focused on the nitty gritty of Indian-German communicative interaction. This constitutes the fundamental research gap that will be addressed in this thesis. Additionally, the thesis attempts to view both sides of the interactional perspective. Based on Tracy’s criteria (2010), this dissertation adds to the existing body of applied research on the subject of Indian-German business communication, evokes curiosity on communication paradigms such as ‘push-pull’ mechanisms, and is – perhaps primarily – of practical use in the field.

Asante, Miike & Yin (2014) urge broader-based directions for future research. They include “the integration of micro- and macrolevels of culture and context, the incorporation of indigenous perspectives into culture and communication studies, the examination of power and privilege and their impact on communication equality and mutuality in intercultural contexts and, the articulation of local and global ethics for humanistic connection and community building” (Asante, Miike & Yin 2014, p. 2). The first criteria are addressed broadly throughout the thesis and the issue of power imbalance specifically in Chapter 3. The need for community building in virtual settings is touched upon in the final chapter.

While focusing on contextualised communication gap factors in Indian-German collaboration in remote engineering teams, many of the findings may also be seen as transferable to any other intercultural or even interpersonal communicative context. Any encounter – including monocultural dyadic ones encountered in the field of couples’ therapy (cf. Greenberg & Goldman 2008) – offers fertile ground for detecting these perceived omissions and the ensuing dissonances.

Tannen’s (2005) ‘aha!’ moments are those instances when readers find that the researcher’s interpretation resonates with their own experience or knowledge, “when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action” (Tracy 2010, p. 845). The reader is explicitly invited to do so.

## **1 Chapter 1: Research Approaches, Methods & Literature Review**

The central task of anthropological research is to provide an understanding of common-sense life. Understanding is a process of assigning meaning and ultimately sense-making. It is a process involving both the researcher and the researchee as “citizens of a republic of everyday life” (Natanson 1962, p. XXVI), with the researcher endeavouring to capture the other’s reality. It is therefore essential to pay closer attention to both parties involved in this sense-making process.

### **1.1 Target Groups**

As postulated by Hansen (2009), “the question of validity depends on the kind of collective which is under scrutiny. Therefore, when analyzing the culture of collectives one should be aware first of the kind of collective and second of the kind of general statement one is using.” (p. 10).

The geographically-distributed teams included Indian colleagues located mainly in the city of Bangalore, along with some in Coimbatore and Trivandrum, all in South India, with the German colleagues located in the south of Germany. Three of the

companies providing data for the study were based in the field of automotive/information technology, either as OEMs or suppliers, with the accompanying features of an engineering background, with participants from the fourth company involved in general IT services. The participants came from a background of technology and a few from human resources, whose observations correlated in unexpected ways, e.g., in the use of 'pull' communication in Chapter 5.

India is by no means homogenous, with 6,748 communities<sup>20</sup> listed by the anthropological survey of India<sup>21</sup>. The "polysemic significance" (Natarajan 2013, p. 2) of the term 'Indian' is reflected in the writings of prominent political figures around Indian Independence. Whereas Nehru's 'Discovery of India' perceives "an unbroken thread" of 'Indian' experience that may be retrieved through mythology and philosophical history, in his autobiography Gandhi recognises the umbrella concept of 'Indianness' only in a diasporic context, once a person has left India<sup>22</sup> (ibid).

This retroactive awareness of an 'Indian' identity is shared by many of the Indian participants:

*Yes, we are all Indians abroad but it depends on so many things what we are in India. Ajay is from the North and he has a different background. We don't even eat the same food [smiles] but here [in Germany] he's from India. (Company D/12.01.2019/BT/India/3)*

The Indian politician-writer Shashi Tharoor sums up India's diversity succinctly: "the singular thing about India is that you can only speak of it in the plural. There are, in the hackneyed phrase, many Indias. Everything exists in countless variants. There is no single standard, no fixed stereotype, no 'one way'" (Tharoor 2000, p. 18).

This range was especially apparent to the more globally-experienced German participants:

*Im Vergleich zu Japan finde ich Indien in mancher Hinsicht schwieriger. Die Bandbreite in Indien ist viel größer. Man weiß nie, mit welchem ,Typus' [uses fingers to indicate inverted commas] man es zu tun hat. (Company B/13.04.2018/DB/Germany/4)*

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<sup>20</sup> The term community is used flexibly in India and generally refers to a social group considered a unit for reasons of language and place of origin

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.ansi.gov.in/people\\_india.htm](http://www.ansi.gov.in/people_india.htm) accessed on 2.1.2016.

<sup>22</sup> Nehru writes of India as an "ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously. All of these exist together in our conscious or subconscious selves, though we may not be aware of them, and they had gone to build up the complex and mysterious personality of India" (Nehru, J 1997/1946, The Discovery of India, New Delhi, p. 59).

*Es gibt viele indische Kollegen, die uns genau verstehen. Vielleicht sind sie inzwischen verdeutsch. Bei anderen weiß man nicht so recht, was hinter ihrem Verhalten steckt. (Company B/ 10.4.2018/FG/Germany/5)*

*Was mir auffällt, ist die ganz extreme Spannbreite ... wie soll man damit umgehen? Wie soll ich erkennen, mit wem ich zu tun habe, vor allem wenn es virtuell abläuft? (Company A/ 05.10.2016/CA/Germany/6)*

This awareness of India's heterogeneity magnifies the 'uniqueness of human events' (Yin 2011, p. 14) and was initially so daunting that it constituted an obstacle to the idea of this dissertation. How would it be possible to pay full justice to the voices in a country containing such a broad spectrum of micro-cultures?

"The country's national motto, emblazoned on its governmental crest, is 'Satyameva Jayate': Truth always triumphs. The question remains, however: Whose truth?" (Tharoor 2000, p. 19).

However, the job-related 'fieldwork first' paradigm (Yin 2011, p. 15) preceding the research questions helped to shape the research direction:

'Fieldwork first' makes sense because qualitative research attempts to capture real-life conditions, embracing the perspective of the people who are part of these conditions. Following this line of reasoning, a qualitative researcher would prefer that the real-life conditions and others' perspectives help to define the subsequent study questions and design (Yin 2011, p. 66).

Geographical borders are generally poor containers of a culture and the extent of differences within a country is often greater than those between countries (Kirkman, Taras & Steel 2016). Demographic groupings such as occupation and socioeconomic status more effectively capture similarities and differences in work-related values between people (ibid).

In keeping with this, regional, linguistic, religious and other affiliations receded into the background for the participants at both locations, to be superseded by the professional focus. It was also helpful in narrowing down the multiplicity of cultural affiliations (Bolten 2015, 2016; Breinig & Lösch 2006; Verdooren 2014) to the practices of a community of engineers.

The designation 'German' is used as an umbrella term for all of those based in Germany and conditioned by German professional practices, including some French nationals and those with Turkish or other family backgrounds. While fewer than 15% of the Germans in the study had visited India for business trips, all had experienced a period of remote collaboration with India ranging between 12 months and 14 years, including phases of personal interaction ranging from 3 months to 3 years with visiting Indian colleagues, if not their own current teammates. All of the Indians in the study



were of Indian origin and had worked in Germany for periods of on-site initiation and training, ranging from three months to three years.

Due to the extended timeframe of over four years, over 750 participants formed the basis for the research, from both the German parent companies and their Indian subsidiaries. The sample might be considered a purposive sample<sup>23</sup> (Mack et al. 2005; Oppong 2013), with ex-ante-identified criteria based on the research topic, i.e., only those with professional involvement as players or stakeholders were assigned. Although the base was not selectively chosen, it emerged from the participants' work base.

The sample size, volume of data and the range of the sampling minimize sampling error and offer a wider picture and greater degree of credibility in qualitative research (DePaulo 2000). It is also favourable in helping to qualify the outliers or one-shot illusory correlations (Hamilton & Gifford 1976), which lead to reporting rare but disproportionately memorable behaviors. In fact, this phenomenon was touched upon by some participants:

*It's not that every German speaks so bluntly, but it happens more often than at home in India. Even if some things happen quite rarely, it is such a shock that it stays in the mind for a long time. (Company A/08.12.2016/ VR/India/7)*

*Diese Verhaltensmuster fallen auf, weil sie für uns so schwer nachvollziehbar sind. Es heißt nicht, dass sie ständig und bei allen indischen Kollegen vorkommen. (Company B/11.11.2016/SS/Germany/8)*

The focus groups across all four companies were comparable in terms of age, gender, and educational background. The participants were largely male (approx. 90%), with the average ages roughly corresponding to the demographics of both countries of 46.1 in Germany and 27 in India<sup>24</sup>. Aside from a few isolated cases, the Indian participants were between 25 and 32 years of age and the German average was eight years to a decade older<sup>25</sup>.

The background and role of the researcher is also relevant to qualitative research. Attention must be "drawn to the embeddedness of the expert in circumstances and milieus; to the heterogeneity of relevant others; to membership in global communities and local networks; to arenas and circles the expert is involved in and orientation is derived from (Schuetze 2002)" (Meuser and Nagel 2009, p. 25).

<sup>23</sup> It also proved to be a convenience sample, as it involved the participants most accessible to the practitioner.

<sup>24</sup> [www.cia.gov.worldfactbook](http://www.cia.gov/worldfactbook), accessed on 8.1.2016

<sup>25</sup> The age difference and the corresponding degree of work experience are to be considered as contributing factors and even pivotal to specific behavioral phenomena. It is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

As a facilitator, being embedded in the participants' milieu implicates the tension created by the oscillation of being simultaneously an insider and an outsider. It is "the tension between what we might call participant and analytic perspectives" (Hammersley 2006, p. 60).

The participants did not perceive the data gathering as serving disinterested academic research but rather on contractual expectations. Data was provided for the explicit purpose of gaining insights into unfamiliar behavioral phenomena and creating strategies for effective communication. Consequently, as is often the case in contracted research, there was a high degree of willingness to share information, as it was seen as serving the interests of the participant-interviewees.

*Wir möchten ein besseres Verständnis für die Fallstricke in der Zusammenarbeit. Trotz Scrum gibt es immer wieder Fallen: wenn man nicht nachfragt, kommt nichts. Probleme werden verschwiegen. Daher besteht ein aktiver Wunsch nach einer besseren Kommunikation (Company B/ 23.03.2017/SH/Germany/9)*

Littig (2009, p. 106) proposes that research interviewees can be categorized by interviewees as co-experts or experts from another knowledge culture, lay people, people in positions of authority, accomplices or potential critics.

In the current role of a practitioner-consultant, I was primarily seen as an external expert who was assigned an explanatory role. However, as I was neither part of the organization nor an expert in engineering technology, the role might be termed "co-expert" or "expert from a different knowledge culture" with certain elements of the "accomplice" (Bogner & Menz 2009, p. 68).

My familiarity with the milieu – i.e., the languages spoken, the institutional structures and specialized terminology – led to an implicit assumption of shared or at least similar normative frames of reference. It created a degree of trust that "promotes the respondent's capability to remember and motivates self-reflection" (Witzel 2000)<sup>26</sup>.

This minimized the need for what was considered socially acceptable communication during the interviews.

*Bei Ihnen ist es anders – ich kann mich ‚deutsch‘ ausdrücken [smiles]*  
(Company A/15.03.2018/ AP/Germany/10)

*Es gibt viele Probleme, die wir den indischen Kollegen nicht so mitteilen können.* (Company B/20.20.2018/ JB/Germany/11)

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<sup>26</sup> Warren (1988) includes the factor of gender and proposes that female interviewees usually receive more feedback than men, because they are more able to access the inner world of feelings (Warren 1988, p. 44) and are perceived as less threatening.

*A little whitewashing is normal in such situations. Maybe we Indians do this more than the Germans – what do you say? (Company D/12.01.2019/IRS/India/12)*

All these factors assisted in my focus of inquiry: “What is the social action in which you are interested and how does this analysis promise to focus on some aspect of social life that is worth understanding?” (Scollon, Scollon & Wang 2003).

## 1.2 Research Process

Table 1

*Overview: Research Process (based on Mayring 2014, p. 15; Polsa 2013, p. 291; Spradley 1980, p.33-34; Yin 2011)*

Field-based research as participant-observer Descriptive Observation	seminars, workshops, interviews, observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• generating pre-understanding</li> <li>• consideration of hypothetical research questions during this stage</li> <li>• bracketing for preconceptions</li> </ul>
Data collection cycle	Transcripts based on oral participant input, workshop documentation, some corporate artefacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant and membership validation, e.g., in team workshops</li> </ul>
Analysis of data: Focused Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarising and reducing context-sensitive data</li> <li>• Thematic analysis</li> <li>• Examining iteratively from self-perception and other-perception perspectives</li> <li>• Multiple interpretations</li> <li>• Inductive category formation</li> </ul>
Reviewing theoretical literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linking context-specific aims to relevant theory</li> </ul>
Explication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitions of the selected items</li> <li>• Establishing connections</li> <li>• Determining additional explication</li> <li>• Elements of micro- and macro-context analysis</li> </ul>
Data collection cycle (iterative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widening the interview and observational base</li> </ul>

Classification and structuring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definitions of category systems</li> <li>• Coding</li> </ul>
Elaboration of theoretical literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extending the perspective with a broader base of literature, e.g., organizational psychology</li> <li>• Re-examining data against theoretical underpinnings (both supportive and otherwise)</li> </ul>
Data collection cycle (iterative)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Widening the interview base</li> <li>• Considering inconsistencies</li> </ul>
Analysis of qualitative data (Selective Observation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyzing dividing lines, similarities</li> <li>• Diachronic analysis: Comparing against previous data</li> <li>• Triangulation by comparing multiple sources</li> </ul>
Conclusion of study (but not of fieldwork – cycles of data collection continue)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iterative working through</li> <li>• Revising as necessary</li> <li>• Extending theory applications</li> </ul>

As is apparent from the above research process, the initial descriptive observation years in the field had already revealed the prevalence of certain recurring themes. These required examination in terms of interconnections and latency of meaning and explanation. It involved Mayring's (2014, p. 66) three steps of determining the units to be analyzed, paraphrasing and reducing through selection, and collating as a category system. All this was part of my practitioner's brief.

Once the academic focus emerged, the literature review was initiated based on the existing data collection and analysis<sup>27</sup>, and then successively enlarged. Further cycles of data collection and analysis were beneficial to the sense-making process.

As a result, there are three broad research approaches to the dissertation: the qualitative, the inductive and the interactional approach. These will be addressed before proceeding to the specifics of data gathering, analysis, and literature review.

### 1.3 Research Approaches

**1.3.1 Qualitative Approach.** Research methods have mainly addressed the concept of equivalences or the degree of comparability across a range of samples (e.g., Craig & Douglas 2005, Singh 1995, Usunier and Lee 2005), based on either a quantitative or qualitative paradigm.

<sup>27</sup> Delaying the literature review is also recommended by Hamill and Sinclair (2010).

Each approach has its own strengths and drawbacks. Reliability, validity, generalizability and objectivity are fundamental concerns for quantitative researchers. These criteria are more difficult to apply in qualitative research, with some researchers arguing that a qualitative researcher's tool chest should be geared towards trustworthiness and encompass issues such as credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Sinkovics, Penz & Ghauri 2008).

Business research is traditionally predisposed to favour quantitative approaches involving analytical techniques such as those rooted in Boolean algebra and fuzzy set theory (Ragin 1987, 2000; cited in Mayntz 2004). Being professionally conversant with numerical data, organizations opt for quantitative research that appears to facilitate measurability and thus contribute to statistically generalizable findings (Tracy 2010, p. 838).

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are not mutually exclusive and may be legitimately deployed depending on the topic to be considered, but also in tandem to complement and verify findings (Gläser & Laudel 2010, p. 27). Boyatzis' (1998) positioning of thematic analysis as a method for encoding qualitative information offers a bridge between the two in terms of process reliability (Flick 2014).

As the data for this study stemmed from a practitioner's fieldwork, qualitative data was necessarily favoured over quantitative data. Qualitative research deals with the conditions, strategies and consequences of processes initiated by the protagonists themselves and which also have an impact on them (Brüsemeister 2000, p. 45, *own translation*). Using the qualitative approach is particularly suited to analyzing concrete data in a temporal and local context as it starts with participants' professional lives (Duranti 1997; Flick 2014; Swann et al., 2004).

Qualitative research "captures how practitioners cope with situated problems and provides implications that may help participants develop normative principles about how to act" (Tracy 1995, cited Tracy 2010). That sums up my brief as a practitioner - to serve the interests of the participants by first identifying and then assisting to resolve the imponderables in professional interaction.

If the researcher is to accomplish "methodisch kontrolliertes Fremdverstehen" (Schütz 1974) or a methodologically-controlled understanding of others, it requires a process of co-construction, and an understanding of both the self and the other. The iterative loops in qualitative research facilitate reflexivity since the research is mutually shaped by the researcher and the participants.

It encourages the researcher-practitioner to reflect on how his/her values and interests impinge upon the research (Primeau 2003)<sup>28</sup>. It requires “a process of consciously stepping back from action in order to theorize what is taking place, and also stepping up to be an active part of that contextualised action” (Attia & Edge 2017).

Participant reflexivity can be defined as “the reflexive considerations of research participants that are stimulated by their involvement in research” (Cassell, Radcliffe & Malik 2020). It is achieved by “taking findings back to the field and determining whether the participants recognize them as true or accurate” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 242). This process was particularly evident in team workshops in which each group reflected on the degree of recognition accorded to the observations of the other.

**1.3.2 Inductive Approach.** Qualitative methods operating in a deductive mode use existing theories to examine applicability across contexts. They are purposeful in nature and can be based on a narrower base of theory (Polsa 2013). Exploring unknown or unexpected phenomena lends itself well to the inductive mode as it is better suited to staging context-sensitive factors holistically (ibid).

Patterns of purely deductive-inductive logic may be considered the two extreme points of a continuum in which the pole constituting inductive logic does not absolutely predicate a knowledge of general theory (Kovacs and Spens 2005, p. 5).

The concept of abductive reasoning<sup>29</sup> (Peirce 1931 based on Aristotle) is positioned mid-way along this continuum. Instead of rule-case-result (deductive) and case-result-rule (inductive), abductive reasoning proposes a rule-result-case ordering (Kovacs & Spens 2005). It is extended to include a circular or oscillating pattern of reasoning in which existing literature and evidence are simultaneously examined to generate a theory that fits the empirical setting (Polsa 2013).

The concept of emic and etic perspectives is not uncommon in research<sup>30</sup>. In an emic approach, the data gathered by a practitioner stems from interaction with the participants to reflect ‘an insider perspective so that activities are understood from the standpoint of group members’ (Swann et al 2004, p. 101). Etic approaches start with existing conceptual frameworks and examine their applicability over a range of settings.

For a study deriving from professional practice, deductive, etic methodologies are less applicable than an inductive, emic approach. A practitioner explicitly hired for a

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<sup>28</sup> “There is no untethered spirit existing in the minds of researchers which will enable them neutrally and inertly to lay some cognitive framework over the data they collect to allow them to draw ‘theory’ dispassionately from this data” (Thomas 2007, p. 132).

<sup>29</sup> Peirce favoured the term “retroduction” for abduction (Kovacs and Spens, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Pike (1967) originally formulated the distinction in the context of linguistics, with member-relevant *phonemic* accounts and researcher-relevant *phonetic* accounts of sounds in language.

specific purpose<sup>31</sup> does more justice to participants' concerns by following a principle of 'theoretical openness'<sup>32</sup> (Hoffmann-Riem 1980). Leaving a priori hypotheses out of the equation renders a study more participant-driven as the theories are distilled from a compendium of knowledge provided by the interactants themselves.

"Accounts, descriptions, and analyses (are) expressed in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by the native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviours are being studied" (Lett 1990, p. 130).

This approach lies at the core of grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (2011) propose that "allowing substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on their own, enables the analyst to ascertain which, if any, existing formal theory may help him generate his substantive theories" (p. 34).

An effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas. Similarities and convergences with the literature can be established after the analytic core of categories has emerged (Glaser & Strauss 2011, p. 37).

The approach is not without its drawbacks, as unfamiliarity with pre-existing research might lead to redundancies.

Koole and ten Thije (2001) argue that an inductive analysis of interaction is essential when identifying group characteristics as well as the terms in which they are defined. This is of particular significance in this study which discusses culture from a membership categorization perspective (see Chapter 2).

**1.3.3 Interactional Approach.** The enigma of the similarity-difference paradigm seems to be long standing<sup>33</sup>. Although the nature of this study reinforced a propensity to address differences, an exclusively contrastive (sic-et-non) approach does not provide a view of the multiple realities of the participants.

Culture is used selectively for that which seems most salient to the outsider, namely difference. This use gives a truncated account of what others are

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<sup>31</sup> Burawoy (2015) terms this 'policy sociology', created at the behest of a client.

<sup>32</sup> ,theoretische Offenheit'.

<sup>33</sup> As evinced by the Sophist Protagoras in one of Plato's eponymous works, "...there is always some point of view in which everything is like every other thing; white is in a certain way like black, and hard is like soft, and the most extreme opposites have some qualities in common; even the parts of the face ..... are still in a certain point of view similar, and one of them is like another of them. And you may prove that they are like one another on the same principle that all things are like one another; and yet things which are like in some particular ought not to be called alike, nor things which are unlike in some particular, however slight, unlike" (Plato 2017, The Complete Works, Mosaic Books).

thinking and doing. It does not represent their grounds for action, but only those grounds that are contrastive... (Barth 1995, p. 65).

Gumperz (1982) argues that contrastive approaches that merely compare cultures individually are not a sound basis for predicting what will happen in interaction. This is reflected in the terminology used when studying cultures.

For instance, Bolten (2008) makes the distinction between the terms 'multicultural' and 'intercultural'<sup>34</sup>: 'multicultural' is a structural term, while 'intercultural' is processual. A multicultural team is composed of members from different life worlds that are at least partly unconnected in network affiliations. 'Interculturality' is generated in interaction, without which a team remains in a state of multicultural<sup>35</sup>, working alongside each other but apart. Interculturality is an ongoing interactive process generating structures that constitute the initial stages of a tentative culturality. In turn, these have an impact on the nature of continued relationships (Bolten 2008, p.70).

An interactional approach focuses on "authentic data, not only within one's group or society, but derived from groups in contact, in confrontation with the 'cultural other'" (Hinnenkamp 2009, p. 194). Culture emerges in interaction to create a life world that forms the context for every future interaction. This communicative life world is both the means and the end, the process and the product, the resource and the background of communicative action (Habermas 1981, 1987). The interculturalist approach thus focuses on the transactionality and reciprocity at the root of cultural practices (Groeschke 2015, p. 2).

"Relations are not the properties of agents, but of the relational systems of agents built up from connected pairs of interacting agents" (Scott 2017, p. 4). Reciprocal relationships are networks of varying intensities and, analogous to neural networks, they are permissive of external impulses that cause new reciprocal dynamics to emerge (Bolten 2013).

Whimster (2018) perceives parallels to Werner Heisenberg's formulation of quantum mechanics (1927) concerning the movement of an electron from one orbit to another. "Sub-atomic particles 'are described not by their position at every moment but only by their position at particular instants: the instants in which they interact with

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<sup>34</sup> „Multikulturell“ wird in diesem Zusammenhang als Strukturbegriff verwendet, „interkulturell“ als Prozessbegriff: Ein Team ist multikulturell strukturiert, wenn seine Mitglieder in unterschiedlichen und als solche zumindest partiell nicht ohne weiteres anschlussfähigen lebensweltlichen Netzwerkzusammenhängen sozialisiert sind. Es generiert Interkulturalität – als Prozess gedacht – sobald aus der Diversität der multi-kulturellen Handlungsvoraussetzungen der Einzelnen gemeinsam konstruierte bzw. akzeptierte Handlungskontexte erwachsen. Gelingt dies nicht, wird das Team den Schritt vom multikulturellen Nebeneinander zum interkulturellen Miteinander ebenfalls nicht schaffen“ (Bolten 2008, p.70).

<sup>35</sup> Some scholars also use the term 'cross-cultural' (e.g., Spencer-Oatey 2000).



something else.” He cites Rovelli (2016, p.100): “Electrons don’t always exist. They exist when they interact. They materialize in a place when they collide with something else”.

Similarly, Quantum Bayesianism posits that when anticipating how things behave in a quantum world, one’s own actions affect the system and change its properties in inherently uncertain ways. “One system – one event – can have as many different wave functions as observers. After they have communicated with one another and modified their private wave functions to account for the newly acquired knowledge, a coherent worldview emerges” (von Baeyer 2017).

A boundary between a contrastive and an interactional approach is not clearly delineated. From an emic perspective, reflection is a dynamic, inherent process during interaction that may then set off a contrastive perception if the parameters of internal comparability do not appear to match. Social collectives are linked by an array of reciprocal relationships and ensuing interactions are characterized by both familiarity (culturality) and unfamiliarity (interculturality) (Bolten 2013). The focus of this dissertation led – to use Bolten’s analogy – to zooming in onto the unfamiliar in German-Indian business interaction rather than the familiar, examining the rougher edges of a coastline rather than the smooth contour seen from a distance.

According to Tajfel and Turner, an analysis of intercultural interaction is influenced by three categories of variables: first, the internalization of group membership; second, a situation that enables evaluating the relevant relational attributes; and finally, the groups perceiving themselves as relevant comparison groups (Tajfel & Turner 1979, p. 41). It started from each group’s subjective ascription of meaning and the role of pre-existing contexts in the construction of social practices (Flick 2014, p. 60). The experience of the groups in interaction revealed the situations in which the empirical actors constructed dichotomies of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (cf. Cramton & Hinds 2005).

The core focus lay in the pockets where the two groups seemed to lack alignment. Business organizations appear to subscribe to a functionalist theory (c.f. Baba 2012) in which an equilibrium state to preserve smoothly operating institutions is to be maintained. A lack of alignment has the potential to impede efficiency and achieving desired corporate outcomes. Consequently, the input from the participants proved to be problem-centred (Witzel 2000) and therefore contrastive.

Many participants started out from a universalist perspective (Groeschke 2015) that interaction in technology is a culture-free zone, only to discover that differing ways of thinking and communicating were actually in a position to hamper the progress of a project.

*We are all just colleagues, no? Working for the same project? Why these differences and troubles I can't understand. (Company D/01.04.2018/AG/India/13)*

*Jahrelang haben wir mit externen, deutschen Dienstleistern gearbeitet und es lief problemlos. Wir haben uns einfach verstanden, d.h. die Erwartungen waren klar und die Kommunikation hat sich einfach gestaltet. Auf einmal sehen wir bei den Indern die Notwendigkeit, alles genau beschreiben zu müssen und dann auch noch zu tracken. (Company B/25.04.2017/TS/Germany/14)*

The main issue at hand was not the existence of differences per se but rather the obstacles that they posed to effective communicative interaction<sup>36</sup>:

*Es kommt in meiner Gruppe sehr viel zum Thema Kommunikation und vieles, was in der Zusammenarbeit knirscht. Es kommen die Standard-Themen, die Ihnen bestimmt bekannt sind und womit ich am Anfang auch zu kämpfen hatte:*

*Warum sind die Lieferungen verspätet?*

*Warum melden sich die indischen Kollegen nicht?*

*Warum fragen sie nicht, wenn sie unsicher sind? (Company B/21.07.2017/AR/Germany (Group Leader)/15)*

The interactional perspective is of particular relevance in communication. Communication is not only a vehicle for transmitting factual information, but a reciprocal meaning-making process among interpretants (Peirce 1932). Categories of meaning and intelligibility are “logically dependent for their sense on social interaction between men” (Winch 1958, p. 133). Therefore, the way in which communicative differences are perceived and interpreted in interaction is of paramount importance to the outcomes.

Tannen and Wallat (1987) discuss the range of factors that are needed to understand an interaction, including verbal and non-verbal communication, its negotiation, and the importance of the context, both preceding and following it. The dialectic perspective also subsumes the multivocal (Bakhtin 1981), the relational (Baxter 1990), and the processual (Bolten 2007) nature of knowledge production in a communicative context. Every facet of the “unfinalizable, open and varied nature” (Baxter 1990, p. 131) of social interaction constitutes a focal point for discussion.

Some scholars go by the fundamental assumption that “during intercultural communication, the message sent *is usually not* the message received” (Neuliep 2009,

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<sup>36</sup> Interest in other topics was also expressed. For example, the German participants were curious about the influence of the caste system, the rules of etiquette, or the languages of India. The Indian participants were intrigued by World War II, table manners, and family/leisure time in Germany.

p. 29, italics in the original) and that “intercultural communication necessarily involves a clash of communicator style” (ibid, p. 31). On the other hand, Blommaert (1998) argues against “the abnormalization of intercultural communication” as being “based on a gross hypostasis of ‘culture’ as the all-eclipsing contextual factor” and speaks of “a massive overestimation of the degree and nature of differences” (p. 3).

Not every intercultural encounter – even those marked by dissimilarities – is bound to lead to significant miscommunication. Besides, compared with the enormous volume of communicative interaction accruing over years of collaboration, the differences are undoubtedly fewer than the commonalities in terms of number:

*Im Großen und Ganzen läuft es recht gut. Aber immer wieder kommt es zu Situationen, die aus unserer Sicht nur schwer zu deuten sind.* Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/16

It cannot be assumed that interaction will take place based on given cultural conventions as they may or may not be applied by the actors concerned (Busch 2009).

*So unterschiedlich sind wir gar nicht. Wir gewichten nur unterschiedlich manchmal. Aber ich muss immer wieder daran denken, damit das Projekt funktioniert.* (Company A/15.03.2018/GD/Germany/17)

*I worked in Germany for 8 months and I must say once you get to know them better, they are not so different. But still they're not the same as Indians, you know.* (Company A/03.04.2018/SA/India/18)

*I've got used to working with Germans – 12 years now - and it's only occasionally that I notice that they react differently to some things. Or rather I know they'll react in a certain way and I'm sort of prepared for it. It doesn't surprise me anymore.* (Company B/06.04.2018/BA/India/19)

However, differences are on par with similarities in the differences-similarities dialectic (Martin & Nakayama 2010) and those salient to interaction pose valid grounds for investigation. Variances in communicative patterns may not always result in a breakdown of communication, but its ‘rich explanatory potential’ (Coupland et al. 1991, p. 3) is worth exploring.

## 1.4 Methods

**1.4.1 Data Collection.** As a participant-observer, this study follows “a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection” (Denzin 1989, p. 157-158).

In keeping with Toulmin's "hidden agenda of modernity" (1990) there are four focuses in this research emphasized by Packer (2011): a focus on oral traditions such as narratives, language, and communication, a focus on the specific rather than the universal, a focus on local contexts, and a focus on the timely, i.e., on the current state.

The field-based data was gathered with the aim of studying and analyzing the methods used by interactants in everyday life to make them visible and reportable, i.e., "accountable," as organizations of commonplace everyday activities (Garfinkel 1967).

A singular, conventionalised method is not practicable when melding a practitioner's output of 'fieldwork first' (Yin 2011) into academic theory. A mix of ethnographic material including participant observation in workshops, individual and group interviews and some email responses required integrating into an academic framework. To a lesser extent, a few creative representations such as line drawings were integrated into the data presented, albeit always in conjunction with verbal explication.

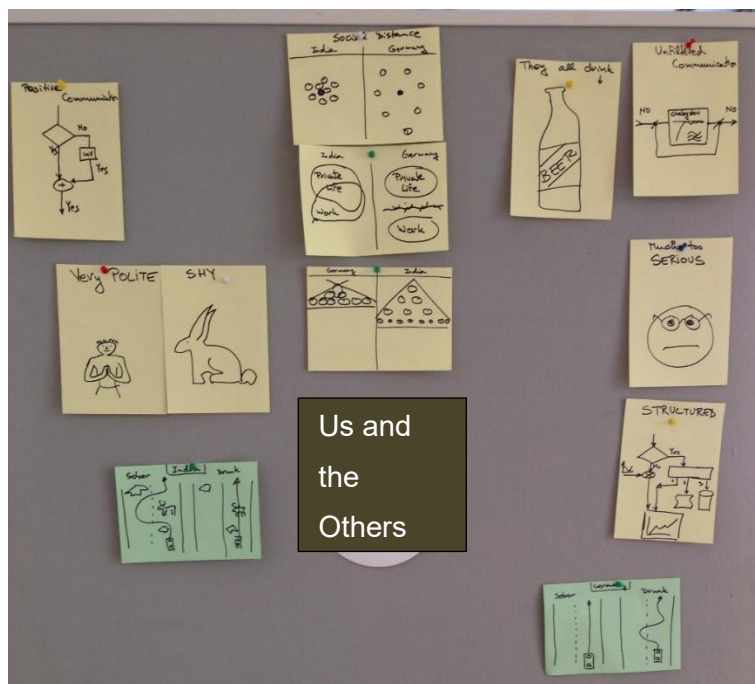


Figure 3. India: How we perceive ourselves and the Germans (Company D).

Each of these methods offered varying kinds of potential for generating research material. Monocultural workshops and interviews provided input with a greater degree of authenticity and explicitness as they reduced the fear of social transgressions. While intercultural workshops provided less density of information, the interchange of information created a dynamic leading to unexpected insights. They also contributed to verifying or refuting certain assumptions. Due to the multiplicity, a hybrid approach emerged, amalgamating elements of discourse analysis, interaction analysis

and some documentary analysis from the narrative standpoint of the focus groups concerned.

The fieldwork-driven tools fortuitously provided to some degree the “requisite variety” (Weick 2007, p. 16) of data sources and samples, which “refers to the need for a tool or instrument to be *at least as* complex, flexible, and multifaceted as the phenomena being studied” (Tracy 2010, p. 841, italics in original). This also corresponds to some degree to Ellingson’s notion of crystallized research that includes “interweaving, blending, or otherwise drawing upon more than one genre of expressing data” (Ellingson 2009, p. 11). The interplay of various data sources also generated ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz 1973) of the patterns perceived.

‘Rich data’ (Tracy 2010) emerges with triangulation, which involves the use of more than one approach, data source or theory. The triangulation method with three levels of aggregate, interactive and collectivity (Denzin 1978, p. 295) was aimed for through individual and group findings in a setting of collective interaction.

The data collection accrued contiguously in numerous cycles over the years from ongoing professional practice. An iterative cyclical approach permits reconstructing data from previous rounds as a form of diachronic analysis. It aids reliability in offering a more solid base for generating findings. Each cycle integrated both survey and interpretation phases, with each round of sampling being compared against the previous one until a ‘theoretical saturation point’ was reached (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967)<sup>37</sup>.

**1.4.2 Data Analysis.** As posited by Strauss & Corbin (1990, p. 6), data collection and analysis in grounded theory are interrelated and the analysis begins as soon as the first bit of data is collected. An analysis is to be viewed as the movement from the particular to the general (McCracken 1988) in order to obtain an overview of the overall narrative. The codes may be seen as the strings in a web that are connected by the researcher to reveal the coherence of the web’s ‘meaning structure’ (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

The first years in the field starting over a decade ago correspond to Spradley’s (1980) initial phase of descriptive observation, in which it is necessary to fathom the complexity of the domain. A gradual approach is particularly beneficial when considering Hitzler’s two tiers of understanding for a researcher: first, understanding arising from the subjective perception of an everyday occurrence and the ensuing construction of meaning; and secondly, a ‘hermeneutic reflection’ on the preconditions

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<sup>37</sup> After over a decade, it was intuited that the inclusion of additional new data could no longer be expected to contribute further to theory development (cf. Froschauer and Lueger 2009).

and methods of understanding, which reconstructs the construction of the first tier (Hitzler 1993).

Gradually the next stage of focused observation evolved in which more concrete lines of enquiry became visible and were focused on. It culminated in selective observation focusing on further evidence rather than starting afresh on a new line of enquiry (Spradley 1980, p. 33-34).

Two types of analyses were primarily employed in managing the assortment of raw data accruing from these methods of data collection: thematic analysis and interactional analysis.

Thematic analysis is a “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 6) and it is the most common form of encoding qualitative data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012). It enables the use of “a wide variety of types of information in a systematic manner that increases their accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, events, situations and organizations” (Boyatzis 1998, p. 5). Pattern matching is the first step leading to – and driving – the second step of explanation building (Yin 2003).

The recurring themes were then codified for closer scrutiny. The interpretation of these codes can include comparing theme frequencies, identifying theme co-occurrence, and displaying relationships between different themes (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012).

The language used in speech and writing was seen as discourse analysis or a form of ‘social practice’ (Wodak 1996, p. 15) by extending it to the ideas and philosophies behind its use. It included “additional elements of interest—who uses the language, how, why, and when” (Mazur 2004, p. 1074). The tangible artefacts for studying social practices in communication are ‘texts’ in an extended sense: pinboard and flipchart presentations, a few email examples, but primarily utterances.<sup>38</sup> Despite dealing with communicative practices, this study is not intended as an exercise in

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<sup>38</sup> Denn das, was dem Soziologen normalerweise begegnet, wenn er seinen Gegenstand aufsucht, ist nicht ein Text. Vielmehr stößt er vor allem und zunächst einmal auf soziale Praktiken – auch, und zwar in hohem Maße, auf kommunikative Praktiken – und auf Artefakte von Praktiken. Diese Artefakte können, müssen aber durchaus nicht, Texte sein. Aber auch Soziologen brauchen, um in kontrollierbarer Form interpretieren zu können, mehr als nur flüchtige Daten. Sie brauchen, wie alle anderen Interpreten auch, fixierte, hin- und herwendbare, immer wieder in objektivierter Form vergegenwärtigbare Daten – vorzugsweise also doch (im weitesten Sinne) Texte. Denn nur in der und durch die Interpretation fixierter Daten, von "Texten" im weitesten Sinne also, gewinnen wir valide Erkenntnisse über und valide Einsichten in den Forschungsgegenstand (also dazu, welche Bedeutungen fixierte Daten bzw. "Texte" transportieren) und erlangen eine hinlängliche Kontrolle der Prozeduren der Erkenntnisgewinnung (also der Frage, wie wir wissen, was wir zu wissen bzw. zu verstehen meinen, wenn wir fixierte Daten rezipieren bzw. "Texte lesen"). (Hitzler 2000).

linguistics. Therefore, the conventions of quotations in conversation analysis have not been employed in this thesis.

Interaction analysis has been defined as “a set of approaches that focus on language-in-use to understand how people jointly construct the meanings of their interactions.” (Allen 2017). For the purposes of this study, some elements of interactional sociolinguistics analysis (e.g., power in discourse) and conversation analysis (e.g., dialogic patterns in ‘push-pull’ communication) have been selectively combined. Cumulatively, they come into play as psychological and sociocultural factors within the framework of organizational communication.

Despite efforts to avoid assumptions on the part of the researcher, it is impossible to entirely detach one’s persona, social embeddedness and the resulting subjectivities from the findings (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Ideally, consistency, reliability and validity<sup>39</sup> are enhanced when carried out or evaluated by a team<sup>40</sup> (Abels and Behrens 2009, p. 151). Though feedback with participants and other practitioners was used to calibrate for a measure of investigator triangulation, team evaluation was only possible in about 10% of cases in the form of co-moderated workshops.

Ultimately, as Ricoeur (1971, p. 549) maintains, validation has more affinity with the “logic of uncertainty and qualitative probability” than with empirical verification. It is the “genius of guessing”, namely finding the most probable interpretation among a range of interpretations (ibid).

## 1.5 Concept of Interviews

The primary method for gathering input for this study was in the form of open-ended interview-discussions in focus groups and with individuals. Participation was self-driven through voluntary enrolment rather than a mandatory measure imposed by management. This framework helped to overcome the classic hurdles of “limited preparedness to answer questions because of a lack of trust, the interviewee’s desire to get the interview over with as quickly as possible, and a reluctance to do anything to support the research project” (Bogner and Menz 2009, p. 66). Three aspects of this method will be discussed in the following pages: open-endedness, the concept of focus groups in interviewing, and what constitutes an ‘expert’ opinion.

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<sup>39</sup> Scholars make a distinction between validity and reliability. Internal validity refers to the validity of the measurement and test itself, while external validity refers to the ability to generalize the findings to the target population. On the other hand, reliability reflects the consistency of results when the experiment is replicated under the same conditions (Gravetter and Forzano 2009). External validity holds relevance in this study, as the methods used were not primarily directed towards data collection. There is also a school of thought that validity and reliability are only relevant concepts for quantitative research (Heide et al.2018).

<sup>40</sup> See investigator triangulation (Denzin 1978).

Their purpose is to gain “knowledge of action and experience, which has been derived from practice, is reflexively accessible, and can be spontaneously communicated” (Bogner & Menz 2009, p. 46-47). This tangible input in the form of what is heard and said permits documentation and interpretation (Nazarkiewicz 2013). It is then incumbent on the researcher “to try to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, p. 3).

The methodological deployment of interviews as a research tool has been critiqued by some scholars and even completely ignored by others<sup>41</sup>. They are questioned on the grounds that “they make questionable inferences from what is said in particular interview contexts to events, attitudes and/or behaviour beyond those contexts.” (Hammersley 2006, p. 9). It is argued that a more reliable source would be – for example – observational data emerging from naturally-occurring situations. However, this skepticism underestimates the value of participants’ perspectives and over-emphasizes the accuracy of inferences from observed behavior (ibid).

Bogner and Menz (2005, 2009, p. 101) categorize three different types of expert interviews:

- exploratory interviews for relatively unknown fields;
- systemising interviews to reconstruct knowledge in a specific field; and
- theory-generating expert interviews, targeted at both specialist explicit knowledge and tacit interpretative knowledge gained through professional practice. The aim is to reconstruct social interpretative patterns and subjective action orientation criteria.

Qualitative research often involves an iterative intermeshing of the three types carried out in phases. “Phases do not occur as discrete, sequential, hierarchical steps; they are iterative, interactive and non-linear” (Baptiste 2001). The first exploratory phase was to identify the elements impeding efficiency and communication through interviews. This first stage of identification naturally led to a systemization, with the theory generation as an academic conclusion to the above.

**1.5.1 Open-ended interview.** Open-ended interviews are considered a participant-centered tool in qualitative research (Trier-Bienick 2012). Although they require interviewer preparation and the thematic competence for productive interviewing (Packer 2011), they offer a range of benefits.

Open-ended interviews permit an interlinked sequence of follow-up questions arising naturally from the conversational exchange, thus promoting both detail and flexibility (Gläser and Laudel 2010). As knowledge collection is procedural in nature

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<sup>41</sup> It is completely overlooked by some scholars on qualitative research, such as Flick (Bogner 2009), or viewed with scepticism by others, such as Dexter (Littig 2009).



and subsumes a high degree of tacit knowledge (Bogner 2009), open-ended interviews are helpful when reconstructing patterns of knowledge. The interviewee is encouraged to narrate episodes that act as key points of reference for an emerging awareness of insights (Meuser and Nagel 2009). They reduce speculation on the imagined thoughts of the interlocutors by showing how the protagonists perceive and interpret their environment and communicative action (Nazarkiewicz 2013, p. 44). They are particularly instrumental when diagnosing the current state and rationale for communicative events (Packer 2011).

The individual and group interviews were initiated by a broad, open-ended question regarding issues in need of explication. The question was directed at operational outcomes rather than the concept of cultural membership. This revealed an exploratory overview of the specifics in the work context. In Mayring's (2014, p. 64) analogy, this would correspond to the high ground from which a rock to be studied is perceived in its entirety. Depending on the response, more detail was elicited through follow-up questions and other methods, such as group interchanges and individual interviews. The follow-up questions would reflect Mayring's examination of portions of the rock.

As workshops typically ranged from 1 to 2 days, they allowed participants sufficient time and opportunity to give shape to their positions (Trinczek 1995). The individual interviews were of shorter duration, ranging between 45 minutes and 2 hours, with the interviewee deciding when to conclude the interview.

**1.5.2 Focus Group Interview.** The workshop setting of the practitioner's work provided the focus groups to be interviewed. The topic and the objective of the workshops was to find solutions to the intercultural challenges faced by the participants in workplace practice.

Focus- group interviews offer insights into communication structures and established patterns of behavior found in actual organizational relationships (Froschauer and Lueger 2009). In semi-structured, guided, open-ended formats they allow the researcher to probe and follow up on new topics of interest while continuing to add, clarify and validate information within the focus group experience (Marshall & Rossman 2011).

At the same time, interaction effects in the form of within-group agreement require consideration. Within-group agreement postulates that responses from group members are more similar than would be expected by chance, whereas between-group variances more marked (Bliese 2000). In this case, the large number of focus-groups studied indicated a high degree of similarity, even between groups.

To prevent cross-fertilisation of the same idea in the monocultural groups, the participants in the group interviews first noted down their fields of interest individually. Subsequently, they shared and compared them in pairs or groups of three, and presented them in the condensed form of key points such as 'Feedback: hard to get' or 'Communication: How to address touchy topics' in a plenary session on a flipchart or pinboard:



Figure 4. Germany: Topics to Discuss (Company A).

The opening task designed as a needs analysis was in itself problem- or gap-centred, with the focus on thematic units<sup>42</sup>, or a pre-selection of underlying organizational mechanisms.

For a more granular explanation with verbal explication during the presentation, open-ended, follow-up questions were employed: e.g., "You mentioned that feedback is hard to get. Can you explain and provide specific examples from your everyday work?"

This elicited a more detailed response, as exemplified below:

*Wenn ich etwas sage oder etwas erkläre, verhalten sie (die Inder) sich immer in einer passiven Rolle und es gibt gar kein Feedback. Es hat bisher auch kein technisches Feedback gegeben, es ging einfach immer nur in einer Richtung. Was hat das zu bedeuten? Verstecken sie sich hinter der Hierarchie bei einer Telco? Wenn sie hier in Deutschland sind, funktioniert es besser, dort in Indien tauchen sie wieder hinter der Hierarchie ab. Das möchte ich verstehen und wissen, wie ich damit umgehen kann. (Company B/ 8.3.2017/RW/Germany/20)*

<sup>42</sup> Fuzzy-trace theory postulates that human memory largely relies on gist representations, especially when retrieving verbatim traces (Reyna & Brainerd 1991, 1995).

This led on to guided discussions between the smaller groups on topics of interest or relevance to the group and the researcher (Berg 2014).

**1.5.3 Expert Interview.** The ‘quality’ of the expertise (Gläser and Laudel 2009) is an issue that holds particular relevance in interviews. The question of who constitutes a legitimate source for data can be summed up as “what characterises the nature of an ‘expert’ and what is its distinction from a lay person?”

The claim to expertise in scientific or professional disciplines may be more easily demonstrated. This study examines more a contextual environment in which local and experiential knowledge illuminates sociocultural conditions. It constitutes expertise linked to a specific context and its professional requirements, gained not only from observation but through active participation and functional involvement in the topic (Meuser and Nagel 2009)<sup>43</sup>. In a field characterized by its practical relevance, project-like nature, and transdisciplinarity (Meuser and Nagel 2009), embedded participants represent accessible ‘crystallization points’ for insider knowledge (Bogner & Menz 2009).

It has been argued that the fact that participants are ‘there’ does not necessarily mean that they ‘know’ (Hammersley 2002, p. 75). The danger of pre-reflexively accepting the relevance of participant expertise has also been proposed (Bogner & Menz 2009).

The participants in this study are viewed as expert sources of knowledge accrued through their immediate, personal involvement in a particular organizational context (Gläser & Laudel 2010). When specific groups are being studied, expertise is “the real and substantive possession of groups of experts” acquired through their membership of those groups (Collins and Evans 2007, p. 2-3).

They are privy to ‘action knowledge’, which is the ‘technical, process and interpretative knowledge that refers to a specific field of action’ (Bogner, Littig & Menz 2009, p. 54). As ‘key informants’, they have both a high degree of insight into German-Indian collaboration and are capable of judgment (cf. Meier & Weller 2010).

Broadly speaking, only about one-tenth of the participants were drawn from the pool of the ‘elite’, i.e., top-level decision-makers (cf. Littig 2009). The majority were to be classified as ‘experts’ based on their interpretive and procedural knowledge (ibid). A certain degree of formative power is implicit in this category, indicated by the authority to establish professionally-binding definitions of problems, tasks and solutions in the occupational environment (ibid).

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Knorr-Cetina’s concept of “knowledge culture’ or knowledge as it is practiced (Knorr-Cetina 1999).

Unlike participants in quantitative research, participants in qualitative studies may even be viewed as co-researchers (cf. Woodgate, Zurba & Tennent 2017). Witzel (1982, 1985, 2000) highlights the importance of involving participants actively in the research process along with a well-informed interviewer. Intercultural team workshops were a productive means of putting the expert informant centerstage.

The interchange between all those involved through guided discussions<sup>44</sup> created a dynamic that generated a wider range of interpretation and perspectives. It augmented the density of the narrative and contributed to establishing patterns (Berg 2014).

The following example of a participant interchange in a team workshop serves as an illustration:

*You never say 'no'. Technical feasibility was asked about and there was no clear 'no'. We had no idea that you were not able to do what we wanted.*

(Company B/05.12.2016/ AS/Germany/21a)

*In a technical field you shouldn't say 'no'. It is a question of technical possibilities and a question of extending your boundaries. Innovation is not possible if you say 'no, es geht nicht' too early. (Company B/05.12.2016/ SS/India/21b)*

*'No' is one thing but if something goes wrong, we would expect someone to come and tell you about it. In India the chances of that happening are not very high. (Company B/05.12.2016/ RK/Germany/22)*

*You may not get a clear 'We have a problem' type of answer but you will hear things like 'I have a doubt'. That's our way of saying these things.*

(Company B/05.12.2016/ EJ/India/23)

For the researcher, they offered a means of interactive triangulation (Denzin 1978) by immediately comparing the validity of the data in discussions.

If there was a personal by-product of this study, it was my realisation that the participants' contributions are not merely for data-generating but are often marked by a high degree of self-reflection. Counter-arguments were not only given thoughtful consideration but were actively sought. In many cases, the viewpoints were as insightful as academic literature.

## 1.6 Critical Reflection

In a practitioner's universe, findings only hold relevance insofar as they are applicable in real-life terms. Schwandt's view of scientific realism refers to theories

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<sup>44</sup> Such a discussion mode is termed a "synergistic group effect" (Stewart & Shamdasani 1990)

regarding “the real features of the world. ‘Reality’ here refers to whatever it is in the universe (i.e., forces, structures, and so on) that causes the phenomena we perceive with our senses” (Schwandt 2015, p. 265).

The primary concern in research is that the term ‘reality’ implies a single, unified and ultimately ‘correct’ description of the same. The concept of ‘realism’ is in itself a constitutive one and numerous approaches to realism in qualitative research have been proposed<sup>45</sup>. As Maxwell (2012) highlights, these approaches co-exist in differing conditions of (un)ease, but one aspect which is a largely uncontested is that all of them accept that we cannot have any ‘objective’ or certain knowledge of the world. “Theories about the world are seen as grounded in a particular perspective and worldview, all knowledge is partial, incomplete, and fallible, and there is no possibility of attaining a single, ‘correct’ understanding of the world” (ibid, p. 5).

A second concern is the perception of realists, for instance in organizations, that causality is an explanatory concept intrinsic to understanding the nature of the world. This notion has been questioned by scholars:

Much that has been written on methods of explanation assumes that causation is a matter of regularities in relationships between events, and that without models of regularities we are left with allegedly inferior, ‘ad hoc’ narratives. (Sayer 1992, p. 2).

The implications of correlation and causation can be misattributed in risk perception. “It is tempting to assume that one pattern causes another. However, the correlation might be coincidental, or it might be a result of both patterns being caused by a third factor – a ‘confounding’ or ‘lurking’ variable” (Sutherland, Spiegelhalter & Burgman 2013).

The overarching purpose of interpretive anthropological research might be considered as the reconstruction of meaning (Hitzler 2000). At the same time, there is an understanding that the social sciences are not a field in which universally-applicable fundamental laws may be generated (cf. Glaser & Strauss 2011; Mayntz 2004). Hitzler (1993, 2000, 2002) therefore proposes the idea of “*verstehenden Verstehens von Verstehen*”, which is based on an attitude of methodical doubt when considering

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<sup>45</sup> Maxwell (2012, p. 4) has compiled a list of approaches which includes “critical” realism (Archer et al. 1998; Bhaskar 1989; Campbell 1974, 1988; Cook & Campbell 1979), “experiential” realism (Lakoff 1987), “constructive” (and, later, “perspectival”) realism (Giere 1999), “subtle” realism (Hammersley 1992), “emergent” realism (Henry, Julnes, & Mark, 1998; Mark, Henry, & Julnes, 2000), “natural” realism (Putnam, 1999), “innocent” realism (Haack, 1998, 2003), and “agential” realism (Barad, 2007) and “multi-perspectival realism” (Wimsatt, 2007). Hammersley’s “subtle realism” includes the premise that the validity of knowledge cannot be assessed with certainty, assumptions must be judged based on their plausibility and credibility, and that phenomena also exist independently of the claims of social researchers concerning them (Hammersley 2002, p. 73-74).

human interaction. It calls for a fundamentally skeptical approach to everyday understanding.

This study constitutes a selectively reduced representation of the participants' reality (cf. Mayring 2014). Representing reality makes some features of the phenomena relevant and others irrelevant (Hammersley 2002, p. 74) by selection and positioning, either in the foreground or further behind. It is an "inherently subjective endeavor" which "entails the inevitable transmission of assumptions, values, interests, emotions and theories (hereafter referred to collectively as preconceptions), within and across the research project" (Tufford & Newman 2012, p. 81).

Therefore, some voices tend to be foregrounded in favour of "selective plausibilisation" (Flick 2014): "...the writer decides not only which particular events are significant, which are merely worthy of inclusion, which are absolutely essential, and how to order these events, but also what is counted as an 'event' in the first place" (Emerson 2001, p. 48).

The features selected as pertinent to the research question have yielded a high degree of convergence, which is justifiably regarded with a degree of skepticism in academic discourse: "... just because data all converge on the same conclusion, this does not assure that this specified reality is correct." (Tracy 2010, p. 843)

Finally, the findings also need to be seen in the light of snapshots in time rather than as immutable 'truths'. "Knowledge production is an open-ended process, moving towards unknown futures, taking into account unforeseen options and developments" (Meuser and Nagel 2009, p. 29).

## **1.7 Literature Review**

Set in the interdisciplinary field of intercultural studies, the literature cited in this dissertation spans across a wide spectrum, variably depending on the themes addressed in each chapter. Each chapter deals with the scholarship pertaining specifically to it, and the various theories are tied together in a framework based on the fieldwork.

The theories that have proved to be most influential may be summed up as follows:

In Chapter 2, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978), Social Representations Theory (Moscovici 1961/1976), Category Membership Analysis (Sacks 1992; Schlegloff 2007; Busch 2015), and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Bateman & Organ 1983; Kwantes et al. 2008; Podsakoff et al. 2000) inform the understanding of the self-ascribed identity and 'culture' of the participants. The concept of a Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) provides valuable insights into the normative features that underlie the social action within a group

Chapter 3 has benefited from scholarship on power issues: e.g., Bourdieu (1983, 1991), Class (e.g., Wright 2005), post- and neo-colonial perspectives (e.g., Bhabha 2015; Ulus 2015) and power in discourse (e.g., Foucault 1972). Imbalances in institutional and/or social relationships lead to communicative asymmetry (Cook-Gumperz 2001; Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008), often based on the implicit discourse roles assigned with the mutual agreement of the interactants (Koole and ten Thije 1994). Virtuality-relevant concepts such as social presence (e.g., Short et al. 1976), Media Richness Theory (e.g., Daft & Lengel 1986) and tacit knowledge (e.g., Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995, Nonaka & Von Grogh 2009) lead into technologically-mediated communication (e.g., Androutsopoulos 2016; Beißwenger et al. 2017; Kietzmann et al 2013; Turner & Voss 2018) in today's VUCA workplace (Abidi & Joshi 2015).

The findings in Chapter 4 are initiated by concepts relating to emotion research (e.g., De Leersnyder, Boigner & Mesquita 2013, Holodyski & Fiedlmeier 2006; Izard 2009). Ashkanasy's (2003) research on emotions in organizations are the structural framework for theories on the role of affect in workplace behavior such as Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996), Affective Infusion Model (Forgas 1995), Emotional Contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson 1994), and the expression of emotion in organizations (Rafaeli & Sutton 1989). The chapter views the cultural variations in emotion expression and regulation (e.g., Muehlhoff 2019) and how they are informed by virtual TMC communication (e.g., Behrens & Kret 2019; Bruder, Fischer & Manstead 2014; Dinh et al 2014).

Chapter 5 owes its primary debt to the field of pragmatics which is defined as "a branch of linguistics that focuses on the use of language in social contexts and the ways in which people produce and comprehend meanings through language" (Kecskes 2014, p. 6). Seminal works on pragmatics include Grice's maxims (1975), Speech Act Theory (e.g., Austin 1962; Searle 1969) alongside Conversation Analysis (e.g., Sacks 1974). Seminal theories of intercultural pragmatics include Goffman's face theory (1955, 1980), extended by others (e.g., Brown and Levinson 1987; Henze 2011; Leech 2007; Lim 2017; Ting-Toomey 1998; Zaidman, Itzhaki & Shenkar 2018).

At an immediate level, the pragmatics of intercultural communication is evident in information withholding (e.g., Bergh et al. 2018; Bies 2013) which, in turn, is predicated on conflict approaches (e.g., Rahim 1983), trust concepts (e.g., Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998; Möllering 2013; Rousseau, Hansen & Tomprou 2018). They may be analyzed in terms of framing (e.g., Goffman 1980; Schulz von Thun 1981), discourse cues (e.g., Redeker 2000) and turn-taking (e.g., Levinson 2006; Schlegloff 2007).

## 2 Chapter 2: Context Analysis: Communities of Practice

### 2.1 Culture: An Introduction

As mentioned, with culture being notoriously difficult to define and interpret conceptually, semantically and even ideologically (cf. Spencer-Oatey 2012), it is tempting to altogether circumvent the academic baggage that it carries (Busch 2015). However, much of this study revolves around the self-attributed cultural identity of the participants that were put forward as a framework of reference for their own reactions and behavior. As a result, a review of the term will precede the sociopsychological approaches that flank the subject of what might be termed a “tech culture”.

Culturalist thinking based on national-cultural paradigms in business anthropology (e.g., the GLOBE study 2004; Hofstede 1984; Hall 1959, 1976; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1997) gained precedence when initiating the previously largely-ignored field of business anthropology. However, over time it has become increasingly relevant to both broaden and qualify these monolithic and static value models by including multidimensional cultural paradigms.

Studies based on "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede 1991, p. 5) do not do full justice to the spectrum, diversity and depth of human interaction (Hansen 2009, Gröschke & Strohschneider 2015). Taxonomies that are unificatory on the one hand and separatory on the other represent simplified worldviews that lead to a self-perpetuating reproduction of differences. Assumptions of homogeneity, uniform distribution among members of a group, timelessness, and culture-as-custom are among the inadequacies in the conceptualization of culture (Avruch 1998, p. 14-16).

This is not to argue the complete irrelevance of the terminology of the first generations of business anthropologists. It is counterproductive – not to mention wasteful – to jettison ideas simply on the premise of an ‘either-or’ Aristotlean logic, as there is room for acknowledging both geographical cultures and their relativity (Bolten 2016).<sup>46</sup> Standing on the shoulders of giants, this study itself germinated from and is indebted to Hall’s notion of omission factors in conjunction with the concept of high- and low-context communication.

The more recent shifts in cultural and communicative paradigms have contributed to subtler, more multidimensional facets. They have invested cultural

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<sup>46</sup> „Entsprechend geht es nicht um die Alternative eines ein- oder ausschließenden Denkens der Faktoren Prozess (Öffnung) und Struktur (Schließung), sondern um die Frage, welches Maß (z.B. an Steuerung) in einem bestimmten Kontext angemessen erscheint“ (Bolten 2016).



concepts with greater depth and fluidity, starting with the very notion of ‘culture’ itself<sup>47</sup>. The sharp edges of homogeneous cultural attribution have been blurred and enriched by paradigms such as Zadeh’s fuzzy “logic of approximate reasoning” (Zadeh 1975, p. 407) that subsume the concept of partial truth.

In the field of post-colonial studies, Bhabha’s “hybridity” concept moves away from an essentialist perspective by dealing with the liminality, the in-betweenness of the designations of cultural identity<sup>48</sup> (Bhabha 1994). Systemically, “hybridity works with, and within, the cultural design of the present to reshape our understanding of the interstices – social and psychic – that link signs of cultural similitude with emerging signifiers of alterity” (Bhabha 2015).

“Overlapping memberships” (Kronenfeld 2008) and “multicollectivity of individuals” (Hansen 2009, p. 116) postulate affiliation to partial, variously interlinked cultural memberships. It necessitates operating in differing ‘codes’ and cultural models by ‘switching’ according to functional needs (Kronenfeld 2008, p. 32).

This is part of a greater scholarly engagement with the processual, situative, and interactional nature of interculturality (e.g., Bolten 1993, 2011; Müller-Jacquier 2000). “What we mean when we say “culture is a verb” is that culture is not something that you think or possess or live inside of. It is something that you do. And the way that you do it might be different at different times and in different circumstances” (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p. 5).

Gergen’s concept proposes that all human intelligibility is generated within relationships (Gergen 2009), Protagonists are interlinked through various structural networks or “collectives” in reciprocal (or conventionalized) relationships of varying intensity (Bolten 2010). Relevance and weightage are selectively attributed depending on context and collective (ibid 2016). With intercultural interaction being “both relational and relative” (ibid 2010), its polyvalence is intensified (ibid 2016). Driven by a need to address these changes, terms such as transculturality (Welsch 1992), hyperculturality (Han 2005) and Super-Diversity (Vertovec 2007) (von Helmolt 2016) have emerged.

Bolten (2014) argues for a holistic concept of culture with reciprocity as a central tenet. Reciprocity in the hope of gain is present in all of the interrelated aspects of ‘culture’ around its etymological verb form ‘*colere*’, meaning ‘care’:

“ (1) environmental reciprocity in the sense of a responsible handling of nature (and thus also of technology), (2) social reciprocity in the sense of the ‘maintenance’ of

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<sup>47</sup> Paradigms in methodology are in a corresponding state of evolution, with an array of qualitative criteria including concepts such as crystallisation (Ellingson 2009), crossover dialog (Polsa 2013), catalytic validity (Lather 1986) and empathetic validity (Dadds 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Bhabha mentions it in migrant-colonial contexts, but it also applies to other intercultural-interactional settings.

social relationships, (3) self-reciprocity in the sense of ‘taking care’ of mind and body (education, artistic expression and enjoyment, ‘body culture’ or ‘wellness’ and (4) imaginative reciprocity as the construction and care for constructs or sense-giving authorities (e.g., the divine, ethics, fetishes)” (Bolten 2014).

Hence, the broad spectrum covered by the term ‘culture’ – ranging across the environment, human behavioral interaction and social organization, self-care, and matters pertaining to traditions and religious heritage – obviously calls for an interdisciplinary, multi-lens and multiparadigmatic approach (cf. Lowe, Magala & Hwang 2012).

Appadurai (2013) additionally sums up the more recent key developments in the cultural debate as follows:

- Elements in a cultural system make sense only in relation to one another.
- Dissensus of some sort is part and parcel of a culture.
- The boundaries of cultural systems are leaky ... traffic and osmosis are the norm, not the exception (Appadurai 2013, p. 181).

In terms of research, Bolten (2016) advocates that reservations are in order when:

- a binary approach is pursued;
- when power factors and polyvalences are ignored; and
- monocausal explanations for cultural phenomena are invoked.

In a strictly structuralist or primordialist approach, culture is examined as a pre-existing condition that reflects implicit, socially and culturally-shared knowledge, while constructivist approaches assume that culture, cultural differences and identities are created within a situation and in interaction (cf. Appadurai 1996). Ideally, a practitioner’s study gains traction from reconciling elements from both approaches. Bolten (2014) points to the reciprocal relationship between structure (‘homogeneous wholeness’) and process (‘dynamic difference’) that should be brought into focus in terms of understanding and explaining ‘culture’<sup>49</sup> in intercultural research.

Blumer’s “symbolic interactionism” indicates a step in this direction:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them <...>. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are

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<sup>49</sup> The reference is to the oscillating nature of culture and the term itself. “In our perception and conception of it we have over centuries been unable to decide between homogeneous wholeness and dynamic difference” (Treichel / Mayer 2011, p. 17 in Treichel, D & Mayer C 2011, *Lehrbuch Kultur*, Münster).

handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters (Blumer 1969, p. 2).

It “focuses on the connection between symbols (i.e., shared meanings) and interactions (i.e., verbal and nonverbal actions and communications). It essentially is a frame of reference for understanding how humans, in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds and how these worlds, in turn, shape human behavior” (LaRossa & Reitzes 2009, p. 135-136).

In acknowledgement of these many facets, it might be convenient to move away from a centralized view of the term ‘culture’ and see it in terms of a hologram, not a real entity but rather a projection, a multidimensional image that changes depending on the relative perspective of the viewer (Magala and Howe 2012).

For the participants, it was a perspective based on the everyday concrete actions through which culture is produced, rather than the broad construct of ‘culture’ (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p. XVIII). It was descriptively and prescriptively seen in terms of

a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour (Spencer-Oatey 2008, p. 3).

As the schemes of a given group arise from a shared identity, the following pages will delineate different approaches to group identity, examine the self-ascribed self-categorization of the participants, and the influence of Spencer-Oatey’s assumptions, values, beliefs, and behavioural conventions in communicative interaction.

## **2.2 Epistemology: Contributions from Social Psychology**

Some influential concepts in social psychology deserve consideration when studying the cultural reality of groups. These include – among others – social construction of reality, social identity theory, category membership analysis, and social representations theory. Even if most of these theories of collective identity or

knowledge theory<sup>50</sup> do not consistently refer to 'culture', they are nonetheless closely interwoven with the "social location of thought"<sup>51</sup> (Berger & Luckmann 1966/2011).

**2.2.1 Social Construction of Reality.** One of the seminal concepts ushering in a paradigm change when viewing culture is the social construction of reality (Kuhn 1962; Berger and Luckman 1966/2011). It reversed the view of knowledge as a reflection of the world to postulate a world that is "a by-product of community" (Sugiman et al. 2008, p. 4). It revealed a constructed world deeply embedded within social practices in everyday life. The idea of placing common-sense knowledge<sup>52</sup> as a central focus for the sociology of knowledge rather than the history of ideas was a revolutionary one.

The logic behind social construction was that society must be grasped in its duality as an "objective" and "subjective" reality: an "objective" reality seemingly independent of the individual despite being shaped through socialization, and a "subjective" reality in the consciousness of the actor when engaged in sustaining and adapting socialization in daily interaction (cf. Eberle 1992). The question of how "subjective meanings become objective facticities" (Berger & Luckmann 1966/ 2011) addresses the duality within society.

The term 'construction' subsumes both the static and dynamic aspects: static when denoting a reality as it is (appears), as well as its dynamic aspect in the process of reality construction. To understand what is going on in society (e. g. in a social setting), the sociologist has to grasp the meanings that the actors themselves employ and are embedded in (cf. Weber 1968, Schütz 1974). This gains depth in conjunction with Schütz's epistemological contribution to analyzing the act of 'Verstehen' in everyday life.<sup>53</sup>

In professional settings, the construction of reality implicates the "construction of subjective structures of meaning and knowledge into common organizational practices" (Froschauer and Lueger 2009, p. 218).

**2.2.2 Category Membership.** Categorization may be considered a universal cognitive tendency, which serves to either simplify an overwhelmingly complex world or

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<sup>50</sup> "In a brief exchange I was once privileged to have with Clifford Geertz on the topic, he commented that my view of knowledge and its role in human life did not seem to distinguish it much from what anthropologists have been calling "culture." Indeed, it does focus on many of the same data and seeks to analyze many of the same phenomena" (Barth 2002, p. 1).

<sup>51</sup> "< ...> 'situational determination' (*Standortsgebundenheit*) and 'seat in life' (*Sitz im Leben*) could be directly translated as referring to the 'social location of thought'" (Berger and Luckmann 1966/2011, p. 19).

<sup>52</sup> "It is our contention, then, that the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'" (Berger and Luckmann 1966/2011, p. 15).

<sup>53</sup> Structures of the life world (Schütz & Luckmann 1973, 1989).

render it more intelligible (Lakoff 1987). Harvey Sacks (1972, 1992) first proposed the concept of membership categorization devices in social interaction, such as conversation. Category membership focuses on the collective recognizability of people who are understood as belonging together. Categories themselves are associated with certain predicates, the prototypical actions (category-bound activities) and attributes (category-generating features) that members can be expected to perform or possess, as well as attendant rights and obligations (Hester & Eglin, 1997). Schegloff (2007) describes such categories as the “the store house and the filing system” for our “common-sense knowledge” about “what people are like [and] how they behave” (p. 469). Membership categorization devices are constructed as superordinate categories that subsume a number of relevant categories (Busch 2015).

Jayyusi (1984) suggests that the core analytic issue is:

“<...> the systematic uncovering of various cultural conventions that enable the production of sense, of practical actions and that inform the organization of social relations and the various practices of social life” (Jayyusi 1984, p. 2-3).

Such conventions include “networks of knowledge, consisting of learned routines of thinking, feeling, and interacting with other people, as well as a corpus of substantive assertions and ideas about aspects of the world”, bearing in mind that “the causal potential of culture does not reside in the racial, ethnic, or national groups, although these types of groups are carriers and agents of cultures” (Hong 2009, p. 4).

Describing a membership category involves attributing certain characteristics to the incumbents, whereby a set of elements is selected and then assembled to give shape to a recognizable form. In keeping with cognitive approaches, such categories go beyond assigning labels; rather, they are a means for organizing knowledge, perceptions, as well as carriers for maxims of conduct inherent in the categories themselves.

The reasoning behind it is practically oriented as it serves as a source of inferences about typical activities<sup>54</sup> of their members. This resource in turn assists navigation in interaction.

**2.2.3 Identity, Social Identity, and Self-Categorization.** Buckingham (2008, p. 1) describes identity as “an ambiguous and slippery term” which is something unique to each of us that we assume is more or less consistent over time. In William James’ words,

a man’s self is the sum total of all he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his

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<sup>54</sup> ‘Category-bound’ (Sacks 1992).

ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account (James 1890/2001, p. 44).

At the same time, it also implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind (Buckingham 2008, p. 1).

As a preliminary consideration, Omoiyini and White (2006) offer a number of common positions on identity in relation to which specific issues and contexts are to be examined:

- Identity is not fixed;
- Identity is constructed within established contexts and may vary from one context to another;
- These contexts are moderated and defined by intervening social variables and expressed through language(s);
- Identity is a salient factor in every communicative context whether given prominence or not;
- Identity informs social relationships and therefore also informs the communicative exchanges that characterize them;
- More than one identity may be articulated in a given context in which case there will be a dynamic of identities management (Omoniyi & White 2006, p.2)

At the same time, it also implies a relationship with a broader collective or social group of some kind (Buckingham 2008, p. 1) as our self-identities are intertwined with our membership in various communities (MacIntyre 1988).

Therefore, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel & Turner 1979) “begins with the premise that individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and that such identifications work to protect and bolster self-identity” (Islam 2014). In other words, selves are like nodal points or regions in a continuous field that encompasses a particular society, with a basic continuity between the worlds of the individuals and the society (Paranjpe 1985). Our understanding of social reality can only be achieved through shared practices within socially-embedded traditions of thought (Leeper & Leeper 2001).

Scholarly discourse offers varying definitions of what precisely constitutes a social group. A very broad concept is what may be called the extension of the self. There is general agreement that a group is more than a mere aggregation of individuals; rather, it is a delineated social unit of comparatively enduring character in which group members are reciprocally interactive and bonded together in a consciousness of membership (Forsyth 2014; Turner 1982). The social construction of

facts within groups “proceeds through institutionalization, both formal and informal” (Wagner, Mecha & Rosario Cavalho 2008, p. 47).

Tajfel (1982) delineates social identity as “that part of the individual’s self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1982, p. 2). Identity is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that qualifies as a limited definition of “social identity”:

some aspects of self-awareness are contributed by the membership of certain social groups or categories. Some of these memberships are more salient than others; and some may vary in salience in time and as a function of a variety of social situations (Tajfel 1982, p. 2-3, emphasis in the original).

In post-modern terms, this is related to polycollectives (cf. Hansen 2009a; Rathje 2009) and ‘patchwork identities’ increasingly arising from flexible, global and digitalized modes of living (cf. Zirfas 2010).

Turner’s social identification model (1982) – which is closely linked to social identity theory – defines a social group as:

two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves, or which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category. This definition stresses that members of a social group seem often to share no more than a collective perception of their own social unity and yet this seems to be sufficient for them to act as a group (Turner 1982, p. 15).

Self-categorization theory (SCT) (Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1994) has emerged from social identity theory based on the premise that there are three levels of category abstraction that can be used to categorize the self: personal identity (the self as an individual), social identity (the self as a group member) and interspecies (the self as a human being). The levels do not vary in terms of validity, as the self is both an individual and the member of a social group.

SCT proposes that the salience of social identity depends on the availability of social comparisons in a given context. In this particular study, there is a comparable national out-group that contributes to the salience of the national in-group, even if professional identity appears to be closely interwoven with national identity. In keeping with the final element in this theory, group evaluation is affected by the comparison group in this context. However, SCT postulates that self-stereotyping and perceived group homogeneity increase when a social identity is elicited.

*The real difference is that Germans have such a long tradition of automotive technology and the colleagues know such a lot. We're still on the learning curve, not at the bottom, of course, but there's still room for improvement.*

(Company D/01.04.2019/AG/ India/24)

*Eigenständig vorausschauendes Mitdenken über die Aufgabe gehört zum Selbstbild eines Erwachsenen bei uns.* (Company B/11.04.2016/RG/ Germany/25)

The creation of group identities involving self-categorization (in-group) is collated with a tendency to view one's own group with a positive bias vis-a-vis the out-group. The result is an identification with a collective, depersonalized identity based on group membership and imbued with positive aspects (e.g., Turner et al. 1987) (Islam 2014). The concept of in-group favoritism is not as germane to this chapter as one of the variables posited by Tajfel and Turner, namely that of individuals identifying with an in-group and internalizing group membership (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

**2.2.4 Social Representations Theory (SRT).** The sociology of knowledge<sup>55</sup>, category membership, self-categorization and social identity all find a place within the framework of social representations theory (SRT) (Moscovici 1961/1976), which comprises concepts and ideas to study psychosocial phenomena in societies.

It maintains that social psychological phenomena and processes can only be properly understood if they are seen as being embedded in historical, cultural and macro social conditions. It extends Durkheim's (1912<sup>56</sup>) concept of collective representations, which refer to the ideas, beliefs, and values elaborated by a collectivity, and which are not reducible to individual constituents. According to Moscovici (1963), a social representation may be understood as the collective elaboration "of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating" (p. 251). The elaborated object becomes social reality by virtue of the object's representation that the community holds (Wagner, Mecha & Rosario Cavalho 2008).

Subject and object are not regarded as functionally separate. An object is located in a context of activity since it is what it is because it is in part regarded

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<sup>55</sup> "Knowledge provides people with materials for reflection and premises for action, whereas "culture" too readily comes to embrace also those reflections and those actions. Furthermore, actions become knowledge to others only after the fact. Thus, the concept of "knowledge" situates its items in a particular and unequivocal way relative to events, actions, and social relationships" (Barth 2002, p. 1).

<sup>56</sup> Durkheim E 1912/2008, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, trans JW Swain, Dover Publications, Mineola, New York.



by the person or the group as an extension of their behaviour (Moscovici 1973, p. xi).

SRT posits that “social representations are collective phenomena pertaining to a community, which are co-constructed by individuals in their daily talk and actions” (Wagner, Mecha & Rosario Cavalho 2008, p. 8). It seeks to analyze thought not as a property of self-contained, isolated individuals, but rather to provide theoretical and empirical insights into the thoughts and behaviors of people in relation to others. “In summary, a social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behaviour of actors which constitutes an object for a social group” (ibid, p. 95).

However, it should be borne in mind that unlike traditional representations which are “rigid, locally integrated units with clear boundaries” (ibid), social representations in action can be modeled as dynamic, fuzzy units that are by definition “inseparable from the context of observation” and simultaneously provide “a pattern of correlation across the elements composing the unit” (Mandelblit & Zachar 1998, p. 230).

As with the topic of identity, social representations often become visible under “emergency conditions” (Moscovici 1961/1976), although it is incumbent on the researcher to study these institutionalized facts both in terms of pre-existing and newly-emerging representations (Wagner, Mecha & Rosario Cavalho 2008, p. 47). A social representation emerges whenever a group's identity is threatened and when communicating the novel subverts social rules (Moscovici 1976, p. 171).

The representations of a German engineering culture were sparked by the “emergency conditions” of an involuntary interaction with counterparts who did not appear to share the same construction of professional reality. This unfamiliarity requires the “symbolic coping” (Moscovici 1976) rooted in social representation theory, a task – unlike material coping – which is not customarily assigned to engineers.

With social representations, many of the strands underlying the context of culture are gathered together: socially derived, the reciprocal co-construction of common sense and beliefs within a collectivity by virtue of everyday talk and actions, with enhanced visibility under conditions of ambiguity and change, and stabilized by routines, institutionalizations and legitimations (Eberle 1992; Wagner, Mecha & Rosario Carvalho 2008).

### **2.3 Investigative Concepts in Discourse**

Social and psychological life is conducted through the crucial medium of language. In today's terms, it is difficult to imagine there was ever a view that language is simply a mechanism that transports cognitive information between individual brains.

It plays an essential role in creating, negotiating and recreating realities, as well as identities, relationships and roles.

As understanding is significantly “a linguistic construction, one obvious locus of inquiry is discourse” (Sugiman et al 2008, p. 4), it is a necessary element when examining social interaction in both inter- and intra-group terms. In this inquiry, we return once again to the triumvirate of social representation<sup>57</sup>, category membership<sup>58</sup> and identity<sup>59</sup>.

Scollon et al. (1995) cite Levinson (1990) to draw these four general conclusions regarding language, which are also applicable to communicative interaction:

1. “Language is ambiguous by nature.
2. *We must* draw inferences about meaning (italics in the original).
3. Our inferences tend to be fixed, not tentative.
4. Our inferences are drawn very quickly”. (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p. 8)

Human beings deal with the ambiguity inherent in all communicative action by drawing inferences. To be in a position to do so, especially quickly, certain frames of reference are called upon. The aforementioned closely-intertwined concepts of social representations, category membership and identity become visible in pragmatic manifestations such as behavioral or communicative practices. The self-concept deriving from social identity theory and category membership create thematic tropes that are buttressed by normative doxa evaluations.

The best-known investigative concepts for language are conversation analysis and discourse analysis. Both are qualitative in nature and study the use of written, vocal or sign language – both functional and sense-making - in its own right. Both approaches originate through a convergence of category membership (Sacks 1972/1992), interactionism (Goffman 1967) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967). They are therefore similar at a broad level, and differences only emerge in terms of angle.

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<sup>57</sup> “A social representation is the ensemble of thoughts and feelings being expressed in verbal and overt behaviour of actors which constitutes an object for a social group” (Wagner et al 2008, p. 38).

<sup>58</sup> Sacks (1992) focused on the local management of speakers’ categorisations of themselves and others, treating talk as culture-in-action. Employing an emic perspective, the analysis is focused by “ interlocutors’ orientations to the talk of others’ scrutinizing how such categories are made relevant in the turn-by-turn setup of an interaction” (Van De Mierop 2017: 191).

<sup>59</sup> According to Stokoe (2012), MCA does not share CA’s traditional interest in revealing patterns in turn-taking, sequence organization, and action formation, but is more concerned with the construction of identity and culture in particular contexts (Stokoe 2012: 278). Identity is not merely represented in discourse. It is also enacted, performed and constructed in the course of interactions involving the use of linguistic and non-linguistic resources (Antaki and Widdicombe 1998 in Busch 2013).

Conversation analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to studying everyday interpersonal interaction and its social organization. The function of language is considered in technical terms of the design of utterances and their sequential context within the turn-by-turn development of interaction.

Discourse analysis (Gilbert and Mulkay 1984) has a broader framework, showing that language is a consequence in the sense that accounts and descriptions cannot be treated as neutral representations of an objective social reality (cf. Wooffitt 2005). Scollon, Scollon and Jones (1995, 2012) define a discourse system as:

<...> a cultural 'toolkit' consisting of four main kinds of things: ideas and beliefs about the world, conventional ways of treating other people, ways of communicating using various kinds of texts, media and 'languages', and methods of learning how to use these other tools. (Scollon, Scollon & Jones 2012, p. 8)

Therefore, discourse analysis is comparatively more broadly interpretative in nature, given that it examines the social use of language. Communicative practice in all of its myriad forms reflects what has been variously termed social beliefs (Bond et al. 2004), a sociocultural value system (Kecskes 2003) or a social representation (Moscovici 1973). Moscovici's social representation theory, for instance, argues that a system of values, ideas and practices has a twofold function:

... first to establish an order which will enable individuals to orient themselves in their material and social world and to master it; and secondly to enable communication <...> by providing a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their worlds and their individual and group history (Moscovici 1973, xiii).

## 2.4 Organizational Culture

A systematic engagement with organizational theory and development as an academic principle is of comparatively recent<sup>60</sup> origin (e.g., Barley, Meyer, & Gash 1988; O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell 1991; Smircich 1983). It is part of the larger field of business anthropology<sup>61</sup> that gained attention with the goal of developing business

<sup>60</sup> However, Chester Barnard's pioneering work proposed that "organizations are cooperative systems, not the products of mechanical engineering" as early as 1938 (Morgan 1989, p. 42).

<sup>61</sup> There are three major domains in business anthropology: 1) anthropology related to *the process of producing goods and services, and the corporate organizations in which production takes place*; 2) ethnographically-informed *design of new products, services and systems for consumers and businesses*; and/or 3) anthropology related to *the behavior of consumers and the marketplace* (Baba 2006, p. 83, italics in the original).

skills related to untapped potential, or identifying and providing solutions to impediments to success.

The term 'culture' has anthropological antecedents and is therefore of central interest to business anthropologists. In organizations it is constituted by "a series of interlocking routines and habituated action patterns that bring the same people together around the same activities in the same time and place" (Westley 1990, p. 339). This provides the framework for the amorphous shape of culture and contours it within the boundaries of a particular social group (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006).

Organizational culture is a subject of much scholarly discussion; for instance, on whether it may be viewed as a property of the group or organization itself, or as something that resides within each individual as a function of cognitive and learning processes. There are further issues about culture as an exogenous or endogenous variable, process or outcome or both (cf. Deshpande and Webster 1989). Naturally, there is also the issue of how much impact national culture has on organizational culture<sup>62</sup>.

Schein's (2019, p.19) organizational culture model<sup>63</sup> tends to posit an objective reality with a definition of organizational culture as "a powerful, tacit, and often unconscious set of forces that determine both our individual and collective behavior, ways of perceiving, thought patterns and values". Practitioners are likely to identify with the following definition:

Organizational culture includes an organization's expectations, experiences, philosophy, as well as the values that guide member behavior, and is expressed in member self-image, inner workings, interactions with the outside world, and future expectations. Culture is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs, and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time and are considered valid (The Business Dictionary<sup>64</sup>).

It is a set of shared mental assumptions that guide what happens in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations (Ravasi & Schultz 2006). Put even more simply, it is "rules of the game, the way things are done around here" (Deal & Kennedy 2000).

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<sup>62</sup> Most scholars agree that though national culture has an impact on organizational culture, "the impact leaves considerable variability in the organizational culture profiles possible; national culture is influential but not determinant" (Schneider et al. 2013, p.372).

<sup>63</sup> Schein advances a theory of organizational culture at three interlinked levels with basic underlying assumptions (unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs) at the bottom, espoused values (strategies, goals, philosophies) above it and artifacts (visible organizational structures and processes) on top (Schein 2009, p.21).

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/organizational-culture.html>

At the same time, organizations are not “per se streamlined and efficient iron cages” (Fuchs 2001, p. 10-11) with an objective structure. They are continually constructed and maintained by people as they try to make sense of what is going on (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006). Accordingly, organizational culture is influenced by the culture of the environment in which it is situated, but organizations also develop and actively shape their environments (Froschauer & Lueger 2009, p. 218). Besides, there is also considerable variability in the organizational culture profiles possible as well as in individual values within organizations (Schneider, Ehrhart & Macey 2012).

## 2.5 Normative Implications

None of the findings of this study can be understood without the underpinning of assumptions and beliefs that guide behavior and expectations in group interaction. Despite the relative fluidity of an organizational culture, strategy, goals and modes of operating follow currently existing norms with evaluative dimensions of what is to be upheld and what is deviate (Sherif & Sherif 1965).

Taking this into account, it is meaningful to consider the role played by normative implications in the context of intercultural interaction. Without arguing an essentialist position on norm formation, denying the subjective existence of any prevalent norms would imply a state of amnesia in companies that are more than a century old<sup>65</sup>. In organizational behavior, commitment is defined as “the totality of internalized normative pressures to act in a way that meets organizational interests” (Wiener 1982). As a result, norms with concomitant beliefs and values hold particular relevance as the shaping forces behind communities of practice (CoP) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).

Besides having permeable borders, norms, values and beliefs are also interdependent. As an overview, the term ‘value’ may be seen as abstract conceptions of what is important and desirable (Kwantes et al. 2008), while ‘beliefs’ are more concrete and comprehensive in nature than values (Singelis et al. 2003). Values are not inherent qualities; rather, a value system represents “what is expected or hoped for, required or forbidden. .... the system of criteria by which conduct is judged and sanctions applied” (Albert 1968, p. 288). Schein (1984) additionally makes the following distinction between assumptions and values:

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<sup>65</sup> It might be a different matter if a start-up company were to be the subject of this study, in which norms are still in the process of being negotiated on a day-to-day basis. However, cultural change is very much an ongoing issue in all the companies studied, and a number of measures have been put in place precisely to counteract the potentially stultifying effects of weighty organizational cultures of long standing: ‘the elephant versus the greyhound’ (Storz 2017). The absorption of such change is likely to be a diachronic process rather than an immediate transformation.

The domain of values can be divided into (1) ultimate, non-debatable, taken-for-granted values, for which the term “assumptions” is more appropriate; and (2) debatable, overt, espoused values, for which the term “values” is more applicable. (Schein 1984, p. 3–4)

According to Schwarz (1992), there are three broad questions relating to values. The first concerns the value priorities of individuals affected by their social experiences in a social structure (including their education, age, gender, occupation, etc). The second pertains to how the value priorities held by individuals affect their behavioral orientations and choices. The third addresses the question of cross-national differences in value priorities (Schwarz 1992, p. 1-2).

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) note that (a) people of all times and in all societies have a limited number of problems for which they have to find solutions; (b) for each of the major problems only a limited number of possible solutions is available; and (c) for each problem every society has the same number of solutions available. However, each society weighs the possible solutions differently, thus creating a list of values. With social and structural change, the weighting of those values is likewise changed (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck 1961).

‘Norms’ are standards, guides and expectations for actual behavior. Sugiman et al. (2008) define a norm as “an operation to distinguish an infinite set of valid actions from an infinite set of invalid actions” (p. 136). They sidestep the moral<sup>66</sup> aspect by defining the term “valid” as its appropriateness in a given context. Norms ought to be understood as a kind of grammar of social interactions. Analogously to a grammar, a system of norms emerges, specifying what is acceptable and what is not in a society or group (Bicchieri, Muldoon & Sontuoso 2018).

Norms – both denotative and prescriptive<sup>67</sup> – work in conjunction to distinguish people’s group membership based on differential categories. The degree of adherence to these norms leads to category ascriptions (Abrams et al. 2005).

Individual knowledge is only one aspect of a shared social reality (Sugiman et al. 2008) while shared common-sense knowledge is stored in categories (cf. Moscovici 1993; Schegloff 2001; Schein 1984). Social representation accommodates a communally-shaped sense of the world in which everyday forms of knowledge are circulated and elaborated to constitute common sense (Moscovici 1993).

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<sup>66</sup> The term “morality” can be used either 1) descriptively to refer to certain codes of conduct put forward by a society or a group (such as a religion), or accepted by an individual for her own behavior, or 2) normatively to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2002/2016).

<sup>67</sup> Denotative norms provide the descriptive criteria for categorization. Prescriptive norms concern behavior, attitudes and viewpoints (Marquez et al 1998, 2001).

It is not consensual in terms of consistent agreement at the individual level; rather, it gives rise to a form of doxa<sup>68</sup>, publicly-shared beliefs legitimised by practicality and general usage and not reliant on ‘certainty’ in any scientific sense (Gardiner 2006). Such “taken-for-granted assumptions are so powerful because they are less debatable and confrontable than espoused values” (Schein 1984, p. 3-4). Put simply, such beliefs<sup>69</sup> are those “which we continuously think and stick to not because it corresponds to valid information or perception but because we steer by it, relate by it, and certainly live by it” (Moscovici 1993, p. 51).

However, this shared practical reasoning embedded within social groups is only activated in a probabilistic manner in certain contexts with varying affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences (cf. Hong 2009; Jayyusi 1991). ‘Themata’<sup>70</sup> are also in the process of evolution as they become overlaid by new information and experience (cf. Liu 2004; Markova 2003). As an example, von Engelhardt (2010) cites the transformation – at least in the Western world – in the public perception of homosexuals (positive) and corporal punishment by fathers (negative) in normative terms.

## 2.6 Communities of Practice (CoP)

In view of the many forms of group categorization, the pithy term ‘community of practice’ might be best applicable to the focal point of this study. It is an age-old concept that has gained a term (Lave & Wenger 1991; Lave 1993; Wenger 1998) to become a topic of interest in organizational research. The basic argument is that every human is engaged in multiple spheres of activity<sup>71</sup> – both personal and professional – at the core of some, and at the periphery of others. The interaction within each sphere gives rise to collectively-learned practices with the goal of maintaining and developing the community. Interestingly, this produces a ‘culture’ that is unique to each group and is dependent on its continued existence (Corder & Meyerhoff 2007).

The participants studied here share the defining characteristics of a community of practice in their fundamental constitution: “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner 2015). This implies a shared domain of interest and a commitment to it that shapes their identity, as well as a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people (ibid).

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<sup>68</sup> Common belief or popular opinion, originally postulated by Plato in “Gorgias” 380 B.C.E.

<sup>69</sup> Moscovici speaks of “irresistible” beliefs.

<sup>70</sup> “The antinomies or dyadic oppositions that lie at the root of common sense and shape how we make sense of issues in the social world” (Smith, O’Connor, Joffe 2015, p. 14).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. ‘polycollectivity’.

The second dimension to a CoP extends beyond technical competence to building relationships in which there is a mutual sharing of knowledge (Lave & Wenger 1991). This engagement with a joint enterprise makes for a sense of communal identity. Significantly, members value shared learning and care about their standing with each other (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner 2015). Even if this is not elaborated on in CoP theory, the concept of ‘standing’ is not only a matter of technical knowledge, but is also tied up with the ‘doxa’ of normative behavior. There are incidental outcomes in inter-relational learning that point to certain forms of desired behaviors<sup>72</sup>.

The third dimension is that of communal practices, one aspect of which holds particular value in the field of sociolinguistics. Members of a CoP “develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems” (ibid). This is where the element of linguistic practice comes in, including situated language use, conventionalization, power relations and language change. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize its relevance for newcomers to a community: “the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation” (p. 108-109).

## 2.7 Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Institutions tend to reify norms in the forms of rules, regulations and sanctions, although at the same time there are myriad undocumented collective norms immanent in any social group, including organizations. The term organizational citizenship behavior<sup>73</sup> (OCB) was first coined in the 1980s (cf. Bateman & Organ 1983; Smith, Organ, & Near 1983). It describes discretionary behavior that is not formally recognized and that promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ 1988, p.4, italics in the original).

By discretionary, we mean that the behaviour is not an enforceable requirement of the role or the job description, that is, the clearly specifiable terms of the person’s employment contract with the organization; the behaviour is rather a matter of personal choice, such that its omission is not generally understood as punishable.<sup>74</sup> (ibid)

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<sup>72</sup> From relationships, humans derive their conceptions of what is real, rational and good (Gergen 1982).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Greek ‘paideia’: the process by which we educate each other for citizenship.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. the German term relating to public order: “Unter ‚öffentlicher Ordnung‘ wird die Gesamtheit der ungeschriebenen Regeln verstanden, deren Befolgung nach den jeweils herrschenden sozialen und ethischen Anschauungen als unerlässliche Voraussetzung eines geordneten menschlichen Zusammenlebens innerhalb eines bestimmten Gebiets angesehen wird“ -- ‘Brokdorf-Entscheidung’ 1985, Bundesverfassungsgericht (Source: Die Zeit 8. September 2016).



Grounded in Barnard's "willingness to cooperate", OCB traditionally includes various forms of altruism (Organ 1983, 1988, 1990), voluntary helping behavior such as interpersonal help, taking time for new employees, and encouraging others when they are down. Peacemaking, helping the company's image, not complaining about trivialities, and focusing on the positive rather than the negative side of situations have also been identified as part of the OCB portfolio (Turnipseed & VandeWaa 2012).

A closer look at the OCB construct reveals several questions that need to be addressed, including concerning the potential for reward when complying with the dimensions. Podsakoff et al. (1993) have suggested reasons why OCBs are valued and taken into account when evaluating employee performance. More relevant for this study would be the impact of culture-related variables (Kwantes et al. 2008). Some studies have attempted to explore the relationship between culture-related beliefs, values, and/or orientations as well as OCB at the individual level (e.g., Farh, Earley & Lin 1997<sup>75</sup>; Moorman & Blakely 1995).

Many of the OCB dimensions mentioned are aligned with the gap factors identified by the CoPs studied and will be returned to in Chapters 4 and 5.

## 2.8 Findings: Self-positioning

Ooi (2007) urges critical assessment of the four traits of what he terms a "packaged culture",<sup>76</sup> which "mediates, asserts the uniqueness of the culture, selectively packages the culture, and claims that cultural differences matter in business". There are unarguably numerous risks involved in an unmindful adherence to the above traits. However, with respect to the last-mentioned trait, there is no denying that different patterns emerged in the two business communities based in Germany and in India.

Admittedly, any vision of the absolute objectivity of anthropological research is a chimera<sup>77</sup>. Schegloff (2007) and later Stokoe (2012) have highlighted that it is incumbent on membership categorization analysis to demonstrate that the categories are being invoked and oriented by the participants themselves rather than the researcher. This is a more manageable endeavor, one on which the following pages will be predicated.

There is no such thing as a context-free, meaning-free environment (Bempechat & Boulay 2001; Rogoff 2014). This study was conducted in an

<sup>75</sup> Farh, Earley and Lin (1997) examine the relationship between citizenship behaviors and organizational justice in two studies in a Chinese context, using two cultural characteristics (traditionality and modernity) and one individual (gender) characteristic.

<sup>76</sup> As opposed to a "lived culture" (Ooi 2007).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. "In packaging culture researchers make tacit decisions. Eventually, the packaging process involves what to accentuate, what to marginalise, how much complexity to present and to whom the knowledge is to be sold" (Ooi 2007, p. 128).

experimental setting and the responses were geared to and situated in a work context. Owing to this, participants' responses focused less on their multiple affiliations and more on their partial <sup>78</sup>affiliation to a collective. A study carried out in a sports club or theatre group by the same researcher with the same participants is unlikely to have elicited this particular collective.

The findings are therefore a reflection of this particular 'subjective' culture (cf. Triandis 2002), which is "a community's characteristic way of perceiving its social environment" (Kecskes 2014, p. 90). Self-categorization theory postulates that group behavior and beliefs appropriate to the social identity that is salient in a given context is elicited (cf. Omoniyi & White 2006). This awareness of collective identity with immanent codes and practices is accompanied by a sense of belonging that is "not only an embodied, practical state but an emotional state and imaginative manoeuvre" (Jackson, Crang & Dwyer 2004, p.7).

When deconstructing<sup>79</sup> the responses of the participants, a significant tendency of the German participants in terms of category membership comes to light. There are frequent allusions to their technology-based/engineering collective as a basis for their sense-making. On the other hand, the Indian colleagues lean towards categorizations either in terms of roles ('supplier') or more amorphously, of 'Indianness'.

As mentioned, identity in itself is hardly a static, limited concept and it is the result of both external attribution and self-positioning. "The construction and presentation of identity is a process in constant development and one of the crucial sites of negotiation is interaction" (Da Fina 2006, p. 355).

Bolten (2016) highlights<sup>80</sup> that in reaction to the new age of digitalized fluid identities pervaded by ambiguity and transience, interactants might seek refuge in the concept of an essentialist identity (Berger & Luckmann 1966/2011<sup>81</sup>). Zirfas (2010)

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<sup>78</sup> „Kollektive konstituieren sich, wie ich es nennen möchte, er eine partielle Gemeinsamkeit“ (Hansen 2009).

<sup>79</sup> 'To illuminate the self-understandings of a group of people' (Fay 1996).

<sup>80</sup> Aber selbst wenn angesichts der bestehenden globalen Vernetzungen eine Revitalisierung oder gar Legitimierung des essentialistischen Kulturbegriffs nicht glaubwürdig vermittelbar ist und damit zumindest in nachhaltiger Weise eher unwahrscheinlich erscheint: ein prozessuales Verständnis von Identität (Identität als Resultat von Akteursbeziehungen) schließt ein essentialistisches (Ich = Ich) nicht per se aus. Letzteres bietet sich gerade dann als Fluchtpunkt an, wenn Beziehungen als zu vielfältig, zu flüchtig, zu agil empfunden werden. Von daher erweist sich auch hier eine selbstreflexiv-strukturprozessuale Sichtweise als zielführend, die berücksichtigt, dass interkulturelle Prozesse immer auch Strukturen generieren, nämlich erste Formen fragiler Kulturalität, und dass diese sich umgekehrt auf die Fortschreibung der Beziehung auswirken (vgl. Rathje 2009, Bolten 2015) (Bolten 2016).

<sup>81</sup> "As long as the routines of everyday life continue without interruption they are apprehended as unproblematic. But even the unproblematic sector of everyday reality is so only until further notice, that is, until its continuity is interrupted by the appearance of a problem. When this happens, the reality of everyday life seeks to integrate the problematic sector into what is already unproblematic" (Berger & Luckmann 1966/2011, p. 38).

concurr, arguing that this is particularly emergent in conditions of cultural upheaval<sup>82</sup> such as a wave of immigration, when traditional identities appear fragile and threatened and therefore in need of defense. Erikson's (1968) notion of coherence and continuity is nostalgically referenced in periods of uncertainty.<sup>83</sup>

Thrust involuntarily into a new work model with hitherto unknown parameters, the German side possibly sought recourse to self-positioning as a homogenous, often idealized, collective, professional identity<sup>84</sup>. For the German side, the dilemma is whether to defend the hitherto seemingly stable status quo identity or permit openness with an emerging, albeit free-floating one (cf. Zirfas 2010).

*Natürlich müssen wir uns den heutigen Gegebenheiten anpassen, aber es ist schwer, Strukturen zu verändern. Das machen wir seit 40 Jahren so und sind ja damit gar nicht so schlecht gefahren. (Company B/17.10.2016/JR/Germany/26)*

The Indian side started out with a clean slate without a status quo background to be defended. The participants perceived the collaboration as one of potential to be tapped into.

*It is a fantastic opportunity to work for an MNC<sup>85</sup> for us young Indians – so much new exposure and learning going on from day one. (Company C/10.10.2016/AK/India/27)*

However, this technological identity was by no means the only one alluded to. Groups are optimally distinct when needs for inclusion and those for differentiation are both met (Brewer 2016). Identity is also seen as being both separate from and complementary to belonging (Huxel 2014; Yuval-Davis 2011). Belonging to multiple collectives (Hansen 2009; Bolten 2013) offers up a more intersectional view in which multiple identities<sup>86</sup> – primarily national identity, professional identity and gender identity – are articulated in turn, either referencing them selectively or as a complex of overlapping identities<sup>87</sup>.

*Seitdem ich mit den indischen Kollegen arbeite, verstehe ich die Kommunikation meiner Frau viel besser [laughter]. (Company B/22.11.2016/BH/Germany/28)*

<sup>82</sup> „Symptome f kulturelle Umbruchsituationen“ (Zirfas 2010, p. 10).

<sup>83</sup> Admittedly, in the absence of comparative data in conditions of cultural stability, this argument can only be speculated upon.

<sup>84</sup> This is comparable to Perelberg's (2008) idea of identity as the illusionary 'mask' in the attempt to create a coherent image of the self.

<sup>85</sup> Multinational company.

<sup>86</sup> Omoniyi (2006), Huxel (2014).

<sup>87</sup> "To uncover the circumstances in which collective identity becomes salient and why" (Mahadevan 2012).

*They behave like really tough guys. I think the emotionality of us Indians is really a problem for our German colleagues. (Company B/28.03.2019/PS/India/29)*

The above remarks reveal an intersectionality of national categories and gender.

In a number of cases the category was based on national-cultural paradigms in both groups, mostly in a professional context:

*Wir lieben unsere Autos. Ich habe gelesen, der deutsche Mann gibt mehr Geld für die Pflege seines Autos aus als für die persönliche Pflege [laughs]. (Company A/04.10.2016/JH/ Germany/30)*

*My colleagues here [in Germany] eat, drink and breathe cars, cars, cars. We're also interested in cars, but also in other things. It's just one of many interests. (Company D/07.10.2019/AT/India/31)*

Others were painted in broader 'cultural' strokes:

*Sie sind fleißig und verbindlich, aber nicht ganz so offen wie wir Europäer. (Company B/ 14.11.2016/LH/Germany/32)*

*We are not taught to say 'no' to authority from childhood, it's something we have to learn now that we are here [in Germany]. (Company C/ 10.10.2016/RD/India/33)*

*I think we are brought up differently. First, we have to be good sons to our parents, then to our bosses. (Company D/ 10.06.2017/SG/India/34)*

## **2.9 Findings: Applicability**

As all of the participants in this study were well acquainted with the intercultural cooperation, many had the meta-skills to be well aware of the dynamics involved in the creation of a cultural identity. The interplay between inherited cultural values and those acquired, and the blurring of cultural boundaries were frequently commented on – often light-heartedly – by the subjects themselves.

*Of course, I must admit after years of working for a German company and with so many German colleagues I don't know whether I work in a really Indian way anymore. [laughs] (Company B/29.03.2018/SB/India/35)*

*Man kann auch von den indischen Kollegen lernen. Von ihnen habe ich etwas mehr Gelassenheit gelernt, auch wenn wir bei der Qualität keine Kompromisse eingehen. (Company B/05.04.2019/JV/Germany/36)*

Moreover, they were also aware of their own propensity to 'essentialize' (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman 2010, p. 74) their own "culture":

*Auch in meiner Gruppe von deutschen Ingenieuren gibt es ein paar, die im Kern wie die indischen Kollegen agieren. Sie sind sprunghaft und lassen sich leicht von Kollegen ablenken. Der Unterschied ist: Diese Arbeitsweise wird bei uns nicht so gern gesehen. (Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/37)*

The impact of habituation of practices within an institution and corresponding behavioral changes (ibid) was also commented on:

*My boss in India is like a 100% German. I don't know whether he was always like this or what. Only his mother will know. [laughs] (Company D/01.04.2019/RB/India/38)*

### **2.9.1 Germany: Findings.**

All cultures have as one of their most powerful constitutive instruments a folk psychology, a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions about how human beings 'tick', what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated action to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on. (Bruner 2002, p. 89-90).

**2.9.1.1 Tech/Engineering Culture.** The German CoPs revealed a singular sense of communal identity, with the most commonly-cited frame of reference being the technology 'doctrine'<sup>88</sup> of a professional community of engineers/tech employees. This identity – or what comes to mind when one thinks of oneself (Stryker & Burke 2000; Tajfel 1981) – was so readily accessible to the participants concerned that it is only fitting to examine the descriptions foregrounded by them in detail.

*What is the 'Selbstverständnis' of an Indian engineer? Do they like going into technical details? Do they like going down to the heart of a matter and analyzing problems until a solution has been found? (Company B/26.01.2017/LC/Germany/39)*

*Als Ingenieur ist man darauf getrimmt, mathematisch, logisch, rational zu denken. (Company D 19.01.2016/K-HH/Germany/40)*

*We enjoy problems not because problems makes [sic] us happy. Maybe it is because we are engineers [laughter from group] and we like to find solutions. (Company B/05.12.2016/EK/Germany/41)*

This identity was so marked that it was also recognizable from the Indian perspective.

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<sup>88</sup> The word "doctrine" is used here in its dictionary meaning as a principle/set of principles in a branch of knowledge that is traditionally accepted as valid and authoritative (Oxford English Dictionary).

*You don't find so many engineers in India who correspond to what the Germans want. Of course, they may be clever and well-trained, but often engineering is just a job, not a vocation. You would need to interview at least 25-30 applicants to find one or two who are likely to satisfy the Germans. (Company D/ 12.01.2019/AJ/India/42)*

The term 'tech culture' or 'engineering culture' (cf. Mahadevan 2009) has accordingly been chosen by the researcher based on participants' self-categorization<sup>89</sup>. Employees in tech fields linked to engineering often used it as a linguistic convention when referencing themselves as 'Techniker' or 'Ingenieur', even if they were IT professionals or in other related fields. The participants were reflecting the prevailing models in German technology industries in which technology experts are traditionally highly valued for their specialist expertise and skills.

"In Deutschland ist die Fachdisziplin nach wie vor sehr wichtig. Wer Manager in einem Technikkonzern werden will, muss häufig Ingenieur sein und wissen, wie man jede einzelne Schraube berechnet." (C. Loch, Director of Cambridge Business School 2013)<sup>90</sup>

Unlike Mahadevan (2009), the term "engineering" is therefore extended to describe both those operatively engaged in operative technical work and those with a management role within it. No distinction will be made as the participants – even those at management levels – were qualified to be and perceived themselves as being within the same community of "engineers". Even those participants belonging to the senior-most executive levels determining corporate strategy were formally educated as engineers, including some from other STEM fields. Approximately 10% of the German participants held doctoral degrees in their subjects.

This chosen identity ties in with the German notion of corporate success based on technical expertise. The German economy is dominated by a number of manufacturing industries that might be broadly classified as industrial manufacturing, particularly related to automobiles. Of the top six German companies in terms of revenue<sup>91</sup> for 2018/2019, three are automotive OEMs, one is an automotive supplier and one an insurance company<sup>92</sup>. Consequently, it is a sector that has been central to

<sup>89</sup> 'To illuminate the self-understandings of a group of people' (Fay 1996).

<sup>90</sup> In an interview with Spiegel online: <http://www.spiegel.de/karriere/mba-studium-warum-viele-deutsche-arbeitgeber-skeptisch-sind-a-932218.html>

<sup>91</sup> <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/12917/umfrage/rangliste-der-500-groessten-unternehmen-deutschlands/>

<sup>92</sup> The study includes companies from all three categories.

economic growth to date<sup>93</sup>, even if the professions themselves may not be glamorous in the public's perception.

In a cliché that remained largely unchanged over decades, engineers in Germany<sup>94</sup> used to be seen as inarticulate, badly-dressed nerds lacking in social finesse, in a profession that elicited yawns of boredom (Die Zeit 2015). They were considered – at best – down-to-earth and unpretentious.<sup>95</sup> In actual fact, in today's globalised tech world they are well-paid professionals, globally networked in international teams and are largely responsible for the image of Germany abroad (ibid).

Correspondingly, the professional identities<sup>96</sup> constructed were idealized prototypes. Being an engineer/techie appeared to hold paramount importance to self-esteem and influenced “the narrative construction of knowledge” (Mahadevan 2009). Three of the companies studied were founded towards the end of the nineteenth century and one in the early-1900s. They have been almost consistently successful despite national and political upheavals such as the two World Wars, and they project a strong sense of stability and loyalty to their ‘structural’ and ‘anthropological identity’ (Zirfas 2010). The upheaval intuited in remote collaboration activated certain schemata; for example, identity as a structural form<sup>97</sup> – core identity, unity, coherence and continuity – to parse past success factors.

Identity as an anthropological model was another schema, i.e., identity in terms of thoughts, images, feelings, memory, social referencing. This also included concepts of self, narrations, collective imagination and concepts concerning action (Zirfas 2010, p. 14, *own translation*).

*Für uns heißt Disziplin Selbstdisziplin. Es heißt Durchziehen. Es ist schlechter Stil, etwas schludrig zu machen ... Durchhaltevermögen, Konfliktfähigkeit bis etwas erreicht wird. Company A/05.10.2016 /ML/Germany/43*

*Der Grundnenner in Deutschland ist hoch – fehlerfrei arbeiten oder nicht? Dieses technische Bewusstsein fehlt [den indischen Kollegen]. (Company B/11.05.2017/LB/Germany/44)*

*There is a significant difference between German engineering and that of others. German engineers are interested in the challenges of technology per se. American engineers are less interested in technical solutions. They care*

<sup>93</sup> Recent developments including the Coronavirus pandemic (2020) indicate a changing trend. It is uncertain whether the automobile sector itself will continue to be the driver of the German economy.

<sup>94</sup> Schmitt C. in Die Zeit 15.October 2015, p. 69.

<sup>95</sup> ‘an technischen Unis sieht man nun mal viele bodenständige Leute’: Hartmann M., industrial sociologist cited in Die Zeit 2015.

<sup>96</sup> *Who we are and what we are doing* (Gee 1999).

<sup>97</sup> The remaining ones are ‘identity as norm’ and ‘identity as competence’ (Zirfas 2010).

*more about business ideas that utilize new technologies. As an example, in the context of self-driving cars, we German engineers are very focused on achieving a high level of reliability and safety in the technological solutions we develop. Silicon Valley engineers put in a lot of effort into developing money-making models which capture the free time of the driver when he is in automated driving mode. (Company D/12.01.2019/BB/Germany/45)*

Natarajan (2013, p.4) speaks of an “unbroken thread of experience retrieved through mythology and philosophical history” in India. The term ‘mythology’ is unexpectedly applicable to the world of German engineering. It is peopled with archetypical inventors-founders and titans of industry who are referenced as ‘heroes’ in terms of what they represent: technological innovation, reliability, and quality, to name just a few. This is the idealised realm in terms of self-identity, a finding that finds corroboration in norm creation.

**2.9.1.2 Normative group prototypes.** When assessing responses, it must be borne in mind that participants expressed manifest or espoused values of their community.

But as values are hard to observe directly, it is often necessary to infer them by interviewing key members of the organization or to content-analyze artifacts such as documents and charters. However, in identifying such values, we usually note that they represent accurately only the manifest or espoused values of a culture. That is, they focus on what people say is the reason for their behaviour, what they ideally would like those reasons to be, and what are often their rationalizations for their behaviour. (Schein 1984, p. 3–4).

Light was shed on these underlying reasons during intercultural workshops in which each side attempted to explain themselves to the other. It is worth noting that the findings revealed that the German participants presented collectively-propagated norms influencing their *professional* identity, even if it was not explicitly called for. Shared engineering norms may not be formally codified in the same way as a physician’s or lawyer’s, but they are by no means amorphous or individualized. On the other hand, the Indian participants offered more generalised norms when accounting for their behavior, such as ‘flexibility’ and ‘helpfulness’.



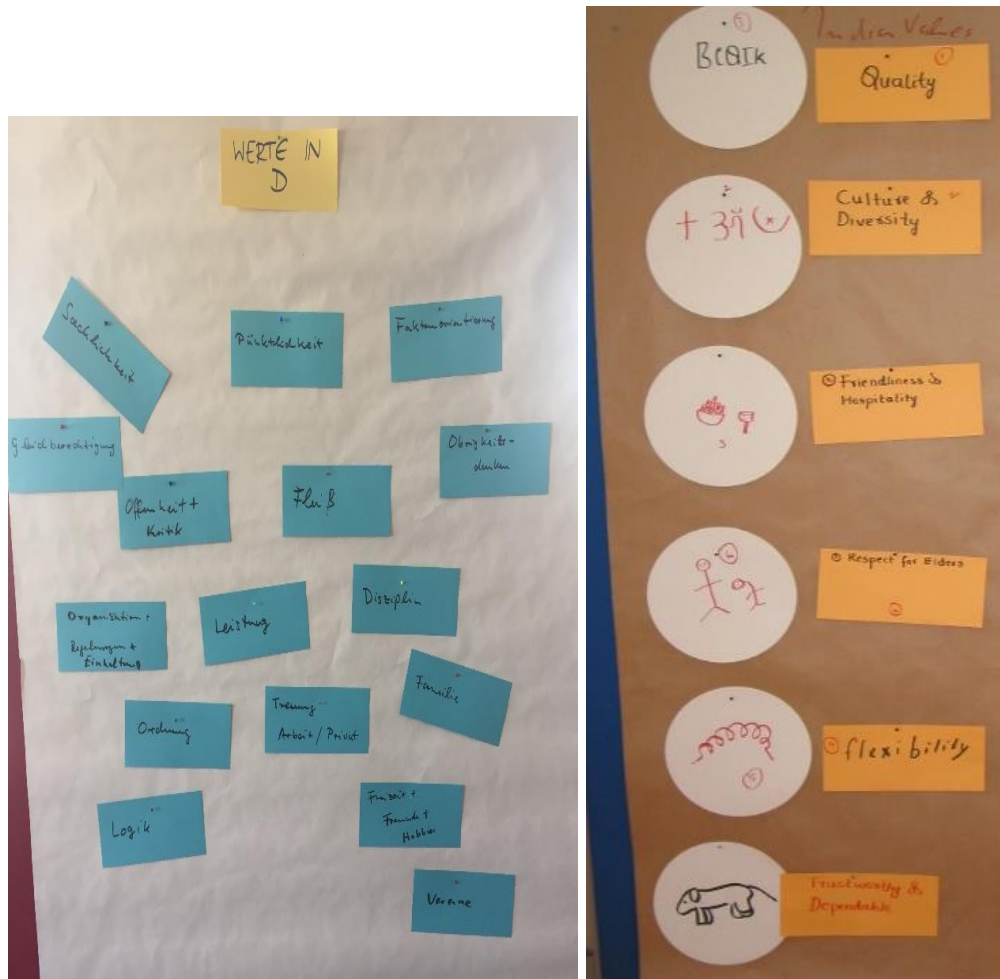


Figure 5. Germany & India: Self-expressed CoP norms and values (Company B).

To cite Mahadevan (2009):

“good engineers<sup>98</sup>, as the narrative has it, are thorough, they search for errors <...> until they have found them, get to the bottom of issues, never give up, are persistent and cannot be led astray—not even by setbacks from the outside. The ideal *engineer* is self-motivated (not by external factors like management) and loves *technology*. *Engineers* would simply love to just work, to perform *l’art pour l’art* (knowledge-driven technologies), and to develop technically elegant and perfect things” (Mahadevan 2009, italics in original).

The verbal remarks quoted were captured in a wider range of situations, including interviews with the researcher or in discussions within a monocultural group.

<sup>98</sup> Gyro Gearloose – the archetypical engineer-inventor in the Disney comics – is known as Daniel Düsentrrieb in Germany. His well-known catchphrase “Dem Ingenieur ist nichts zu schwör” was coined by the translator Erika Fuchs (VDI- Nachrichten ‘Association of German Engineers’ 2017, <http://www.vdi-nachrichten.com/Gesellschaft/Dem-Ingenieur-zu-schwor>). However, it is worth noting that it was originally based on a song written by Heinrich Seidel “Seidels Ingenieurlied” (“The Engineer’s Song”) and had been used by fraternities at technical universities, thus indicating a long tradition of this engineering narrative.

Interestingly, the values/norms were not intended exclusively for the ‘others’, but the subjects were expressing ideas based on dominant discourses, ideas that have been narratively constructed and internalized within the group<sup>99</sup>.

The following artefact represents a charter that affirms a shared professional heritage. It was affixed to the wall of one of the offices in the companies studied:

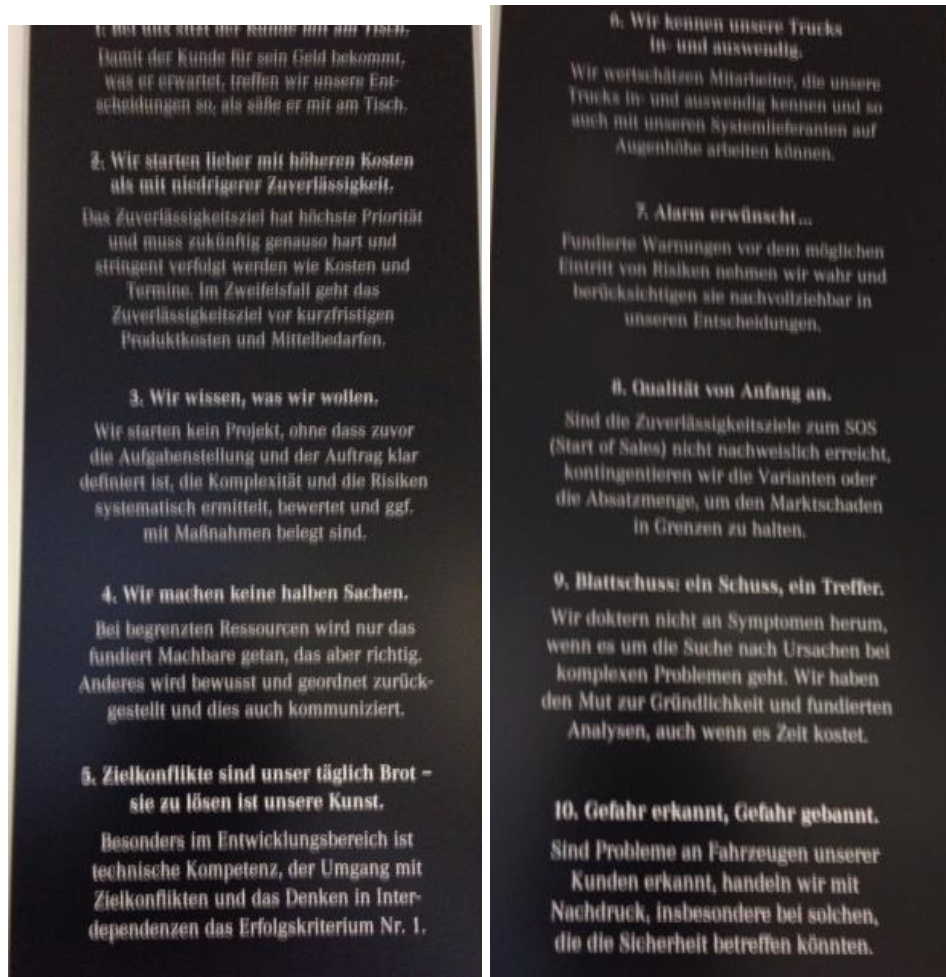


Figure 6. Germany: Department charter affixed to wall (Company D).

In the exchange context of team workshops, pinboard presentations served as cultural information to the ‘others’ regarding the tech ideal of first-hand information provided by the custodians of professional values, with the purpose of both self-explication and transmitting cultural-technological capital.

While the German engineers exhibited a strong tolerance for the idea that those residing in distant lands should pursue different culinary or social norms and conventions, a different approach in professional life appeared less reasonable. There was a predictable – even stereotypical – preoccupation with punctuality, reliability, quality and efficiency.

<sup>99</sup> “How we tell about ourselves to ourselves” (Bruner 2002, p. 100).

Hogg and Reid (2006) call attention to the nature of group entitativity and the metacontrast principle:

Group prototypes submerge variability and diversity in a single representation that characterizes an entire human group. Technically, prototypes obey the metacontrast principle – they maximize the ratio of inter-group differences to intra-group differences<sup>100</sup>. By so doing, they also enhance perceived entitativity – the property of a group that makes it appear to be a coherent and distinct entity that is homogeneous and well structured, has clear boundaries, and whose members share a common fate (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996) (Hogg & Reid 2006, p. 10)

For Hogg and Reid (2006), it is only a short step from a group prototype to group norms:

<...> group prototypes are grounded in consensual views that constitute a social reality that is reinforced over and over again (cf. Moscovici 1976). Prototypes tend to be shared – people in one group in the same context share their prototype of the in-group and relevant out-group(s). In this sense, group prototypes are group norms (Turner, 1991) (Hogg and Reid 2006, p. 11).

Prototyping of norms may be explained by social information processing theory. Based on Crick and Dodge's model (1994), Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) emphasize the importance of social information that employees obtain from other parties in organizations, including colleagues. Statements about attitude or needs use social information about past behavior and about what others think. The social environment at work provides cues concerning the salience and weightage of aspects in the work environment.

The norms of one group were by no means unacceptable to the other. They focus lay on those differences in weightage that seemed to account for dissonances. The crux of the matter – as Bolten (2016)<sup>101</sup> maintains – was where to draw the line in terms of acceptance of differing weightages.

One possible option is to reference values and norms from a functionalist perspective, purportedly conceived as a means to achieve professional goals.

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. Reference group theory, pioneered by social psychologist Herbert H. Hyman in 1942, then developed by Robert K Merton (1950s). To understand people's behaviour, you have to consider the standards of the group to which they compare themselves.

<sup>101</sup> „Wie verorte ich mich selbst angesichts bestimmter Kontextbedingungen innerhalb eines Spektrums vielfältiger und vielfältig legitimierbarer Ansichten, Beurteilungen, Handlungsoptionen? Wo verlaufen in konkreten Kontexten meine eigenen Akzeptanz- und Toleranzgrenzen?“ (Bolten 2016).

*Es ist wenig effizient, so aufwändig zu kommunizieren. Nicht nur zeitraubend, sondern auch anstrengend. (Company A/1.7.2016/MB/Germany/46)*

*Wenn ich eine Aufgabe mache, mache ich selber meine Gedanken und überlege mir den Weg. Das ist genau das was wir in der Schule lernen und später im Studium. (Company B/29.11.2016/BM/Germany/47)*

*Wir mögen keine Redundanz in der Kommunikation. Das ist auf jeden Fall kein Ingenieursdenken. Wiederholung ist ja Redundanz. (Company B/ 22.02.18/FR/Germany/48)*

Narratives<sup>102</sup> were employed for making functionalist sense:

*Ich möchte eine Anekdote erzählen. Wir waren alle [in Indien] im Tuktuk unterwegs – 3 [deutsche] Ingenieure. Es hat geklappert, aber dem Fahrer hat es nicht gejackt. Wir haben ihn gebeten, rechts ran zu fahren<sup>103</sup>, das hat er auch gemacht. Wir haben das Problem nicht identifizieren können und fuhr in die Werkstatt. Es lag am Rad und der Fehler wurde auch behoben. Was mich gewundert hat, sie haben die anderen Räder nicht überprüft – vorausschauend. Das Problem war gelöst, aber dass zukünftige Probleme entstehen können, wurde nicht bedacht. Vielleicht deswegen gibt es keine Rückfragen – sie [die Inder] denken nicht vorausschauend genug. (Company B/ 19.06.2017/GC/ Germany/49)*

The German participants were often aware of their proclivity for self-stereotyping.

*Natürlich gibt es auch bei uns Deutschen Pannen bei der Planung, aber es ist trotzdem wichtig, dass man grundsätzlich die Notwendigkeit für eine realistische Planung einsieht. (Company B/ 22.02.18/FZ/Germany/50)*

Mannheim (1936) draws attention to the human propensity for wishful thinking when conditions are less than ideal<sup>104</sup>. Sargent (2006, p.12) refers to it as an ideology that “provides the believer with a picture of the world both as it is and as it should be, and, in doing so, organizes the tremendous complexity of the world into something fairly simple and understandable”. Whereas Mannheim (1936) makes a distinction

<sup>102</sup> Such narratives give “shape to things in the real world and often bestows on them a title to reality” (Bruner 2002, p.8).

<sup>103</sup> As Indians drive on the left, it is difficult to retrospectively gauge whether this is merely a slip of the tongue, whether it was a one-way street, or whether the driver unquestioningly obeyed orders.

<sup>104</sup> ‘When the imagination finds no satisfaction in existing reality, it seeks refuge in wishfully constructed places and periods’ (Mannheim 1936, 2013, p. 184).

between ideology and utopia<sup>105</sup>, Sargent proposes that “as such, every ideology contains a utopia, and the problem with utopia arises when it becomes a system of beliefs rather than what it is in almost all cases, a critique of the actual through imagining a better alternative” (ibid).

The upheaval of globalization<sup>106</sup> has already been mentioned as a contributing factor to the clear delineation of identity. Durkheim’s (1893) elusive concept of anomie touches on feelings of disconnect in transition phases when norms held dear are no longer considered valid and new ones are yet to evolve. “The arousal created by anxiety can lead to a reliance on simplified (heuristic) information processing” (Gudykunst 2003, p. 118).

Integrated/inter-group threat theory (Stephan & Stephan 2000) suggests that there are two types of threat to groups in interaction, namely realistic and symbolic (Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison 2009). Specifically, “realistic group threats are threats to a group’s power, resources, and general welfare. Symbolic group threats are threats to a group’s religion, values, belief system, ideology, philosophy, morality, or worldview” (Stephan, Ybarra & Morrison 2009, p. 44).

The dividing line between the two is not clearly demarcated. In the study, the realistic threats to company welfare were often seen as stemming from symbolic threats to the belief system underlying good engineering. Thus, the grounds for self-stereotyping lay in the role as head office where work-related values had to be documented and transmitted to maintain standards and the reputation of the company. This explanation was proffered by both those operatively engaged and those in leadership roles.

*Wir gehen immer von Funktion und Aufgabe aus und in Indien passt das überhaupt nicht. Die für uns normalen Standards passen auf einmal nicht mehr. Wie bringe ich sie dazu, meinen Standards zu entsprechen? Ich kann es natürlich dirigistisch angehen und somit die Kreativität vernachlässigen. Das will ich nicht. (Company B/17.10.2016/J-OR/Germany/51)*

Another related explanation was the fact that as a German company, customer expectations worldwide were geared to the long-established anthropological identity of the ‘made in Germany’ label and that customers would not be willing to settle for less.

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<sup>105</sup> “Ideas which later turned out to be only distorted representations of a past or potential social order were ideological, while those which were adequately realized in the succeeding social order were relative utopias” (Mannheim 1936, 2013, p. 184).

<sup>106</sup> The ‘anxieties of the global’ (Appadurai 2000).

*Es kommt nicht von ungefähr, dass wir seit Jahrzehnten weltweit für unsere Qualität bekannt sind. Das wollen wir mit dem neuen Zusammenarbeitsmodell nicht aufs Spiel setzen. (Company D/19.1.2016/MS/Germany/52)*

*Unsere Produkte liegen im hochpreisigen Segment. Wenn wir nicht das liefern, wofür wir bekannt sind, gehen sie [die Kunden] natürlich zur billigeren Konkurrenz. (Company B/22.02.2018/PW/Germany/53)*

*Unsere weltweit hervorragende Reputation hängt von der Sicherheit und Zuverlässigkeit unserer Produkte ab. Wenn wir so eine Sache hätten wie bei Tesla<sup>107</sup> ...na dann Gute Nacht. (Company B/29.11.2016/SS/Germany/54)*

*Sie (die Kunden) erwarten halt ein deutsches Produkt – nicht mehr und nicht weniger. (Company B/11.5.2017/TP/Germany/55)*

*Ich habe die Familie eines indischen Kollegen besucht und sie haben mich angehimmelt. Nur weil in der Abteilung Sicherheitssysteme arbeite. Sie finden es toll, dass wir so viel in Sicherheit investieren. Die Entwicklung (von Sicherheit) hat offenbar auch in Indien einen hohen Stellenwert. (Company B/25.4.2017/JS/Germany/56)*

*Wir verstehen schon, dass die indischen Kollegen anders ticken, aber wie wollen wir es den deutschen Kunden klarmachen? (Company B/07.02.2019/RK/Germany/57)*

As is also evident in Mahadevan's study (2009), German engineers verbalize their love for work<sup>108</sup>.

*Manchmal kommen mir die besten Lösungen unter der Dusche. Das Problem beschäftigt mich, weil es auch ein Hobby ist. (Company B/07.02.2019/TR/Germany/58)*

*Der Beruf ist nicht nur eine Möglichkeit, Geld zu verdienen. Ich will nicht sagen, dass die indischen Kollegen nicht motiviert sind - sind auch hervorragende darunter - aber diese Leidenschaft ist bei uns besonders ausgeprägt. (Company B/10.7.17/AS/Germany/59)*

However, it might be mooted that it is linked to a pervasive centrality of professional life in Germany. Studies<sup>109</sup> commissioned by "Die Zeit" (2016, 2019)

<sup>107</sup> The reference is to a fatal accident on May 7, 2016 in which a self-driving Tesla equipped with an autopilot system failed to detect a trailer as an obstacle.

<sup>108</sup> Victor Frankl (1976) points out that the striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. For those who have rejected a religious answer to the existentialist quest, one of the most common alternatives chosen is work.

<sup>109</sup> The study was carried out in cooperation with the Centre for Sociological Research, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) and the research institute, Bonner Sozialforschungsinstitut infas (Die Zeit 9. May 2019, p. 69).

indicate that gainful employment ranks highest among priorities in life in Germany and is considered 'very important' for 86% of respondents (2019)<sup>110</sup>.

In addition, the questionnaire also reveals that 73% of the respondents have a job that that they personally really want or wanted to do (2019). The head of the study proposes that gainful employment can even be regarded as a German norm, as there are only a few countries in the world in which so many people say they would continue working even if they did not need the money (Allmendinger 2016)<sup>111</sup>. Over 90% of the respondents in the 2019 study see themselves doing the same things ten years from now. The philosopher Flaßpöhler (2011) goes one step further, postulating that many Germans are 'pleasure-workers' ('Genussarbeiter') for whom pleasure and work are completely interchangeable<sup>112</sup>.

The findings extend beyond pleasure to coalesce around a German engineer's civic philosophy, which provides a systematic way of thinking about and explaining the world lived in. It conveys purpose and a sense of meaning to life. Every now and then, the statements even hover on the edge of a dogma<sup>113</sup>.

*Das hat mit Kultur überhaupt nichts zu tun. Jeder Ingenieur muss in der Lage sein, wie ein Ingenieur zu denken und handeln - Innovationen vorantreiben, Qualität sichern, potentielle Probleme rechtzeitig erkennen usw. (Company D /10.4.2017/AG/Germany/60)*

*Benzin im Blut heißt nicht nur Autos lieben. Das bedeutet wie ein Ingenieur zu denken und zu handeln. Wie die Sache technisch funktioniert. (Company B/30.1.2019/SG/Germany/61)*

Even the few outliers who did not entirely concur with the idealization of such a philosophy did not disagree with the self-concept implied.

*Es sind die deutschen ‚Sekundärtugenden‘, die uns so erfolgreich machen – Sauberkeit, Ordnung, blablabla... Bei den Indern geht es traditioneller zu, glaube ich - Liebe, Glaube und Hoffnung.<sup>114</sup> (Company D/01.03.2019/HH/Germany/62)*

<sup>110</sup> [https://live0.zeit.de/infografik/2019/Vermaechtnis-Studie\\_Broschuere\\_2019.pdf](https://live0.zeit.de/infografik/2019/Vermaechtnis-Studie_Broschuere_2019.pdf)  
„Erwerbstätigkeit ist den einzelnen Befragten höchst wichtig, und sie gestehen auch ihren Mitbürgern zu, dass diese Erwerbsarbeit als äußerst wichtig ansehen“ (p. 10).

<sup>111</sup> „In Deutschland ist Berufstätigkeit als Norm besonders stark verankert. Nur in wenigen Ländern sagen so viele Menschen, dass sie auch arbeiten würden, wenn sie das Geld nicht benötigen“ (Allmendinger: ibid 2016).

<sup>112</sup> „Für uns Genussarbeiter ist der Genuss Arbeit und die Arbeit umgekehrt Genuss“ (Flaßpöhler 2011:9).

<sup>113</sup> “A principle or set of principles laid down by an authority as incontrovertibly true” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/dogma>).

<sup>114</sup> This participant is apparently referring to the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:13 “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

**2.9.2 Findings: India.** While sympathising with the German concerns regarding efficiency and productivity, a professional world detached from affiliative needs, social approbation, and concomitant emotional gratification appeared inexplicable to the Indian colleagues. There were no references to an engineering identity. It could be hypothesized that this is the primary, fundamental gap factor for the German colleagues in the collaboration studied, namely the lack of a conscious professional identity with a corresponding 'Ingenieursdenke'.

When describing 'the way we work', it was a general professional background in India that was being addressed without any markers to distinguish it.

*I spend most of my time in the office and it's really important to have a good atmosphere with my colleagues. It breaks the tension and helps us to work much better. (Company D/01.04.2019/PK/India/63)*

The Indian colleagues felt prepared for the attributes desired in a German work environment, often due to previous experience with Western companies or from intercultural training. Western views are not as radically foreign to Indians as the other way around.

*Most of us have worked for foreign companies before – some have even studied in the States. (Company D/10.06.2017/DA/India/64)*

*Yes, and we watch American TV shows and all that, so it's not totally new, you know. (Company D/10.06.2017/RT/India/65)*

With its wide range of cultural influences and an Anglo-Saxon educational structure, India's history goes hand in hand with what Sinha (2014) terms a "multilayered mindset". This means that 'primordial' ancient beliefs are overlaid with Islamic, colonial, Western and globalized influences. All of these constituents co-exist and their "relative salience increased or decreased with socio-economic, political and cultural events and forces" (Sinha 2014, p. 9).

In this context, the salience arose within the professional context. Just as with the German participants, the Indian colleagues were vocalizing social representations that became visible under Moscovici's (1961/1976) "emergency conditions". In the case of the Indian colleagues, the emergency conditions were twofold. One arose from the unexpectedness of the variances in thinking

*We heard about it from the batch which came back last year and also from intercultural training – how it's important to be punctual and that they communicate very directly and all of that. But still, when you start working, especially here in Germany, some things are still a bit of a surprise. (Company D/10.06.2017/RT/India/66)*



*We are all employees in the same company doing the same work. I didn't expect that I had to change my way of thinking so much. (Company A/08.12.2016/PG/India/67)*

The other was the need for self-explication verging on justification, particularly in intercultural team workshops when ascribing explanations for the (unmet) 'customer' expectations projected by their German counterparts.

They faced the challenge of managing not only unexpected outcomes in the work setting but also challenges to their self-concept upon realizing their typical approach to everyday problems and tasks did not appear to work. Positioned in a reactive 'supplier/service provider' mode, there was a tendency to resort to idealized defensive mechanisms to explain perceived inadequacies.

*You should have a dream, not just crawling. If you are optimistic you will achieve this by the blessing of God and the elders. That is why we see things in a more positive light than the German colleagues. (Company D/07.10.2019/HS/India/68)*

### **2.9.3 Asiatic Paradigms**

In recent decades, there has been tendency to question the uncritical adoption of Western explanatory models and allow the discovery of indigenous explanations into the public sphere of epistemological discourse (Gunaratne 2008; Kanungo 1990; Miike 2002; Rao & Paranjpe 2016). Gunaratne (2008) highlights that a non-Western paradigm is not a view that propagates:

...shunning old science or anything else simply because of its association with the West. Rather, its intention is to point out how we can build a humanocentric science by reviving centuries-old paradigms associated with non-Western philosophies that can lead us toward a better understanding of universal reality. (Gunaratne 2008)

Rao (2010) concurs, suggesting with Hardt and Negri (2000) that "there is a false dialectical opposition of global and local, assuming that the global entails homogenisation and undifferentiated identity whereas the local preserves heterogeneity and difference" (Hardt & Negri 2000, p. 44).

Gunaratne (2008) highlights the similarities between Chinese philosophy and Buddhist thought. These similarities<sup>115</sup> can also be extended to Hindu beliefs, as both originated in India and Hinduism and Buddhism influenced each other reciprocally in many ways (Nandan & Jangubhai 2013). Therefore, even if the Indian participants did

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<sup>115</sup> "Buddhism, in its origin at least, is an offshoot of Hinduism" (S. Radhakrishnan, 'Indian Philosophy' Vol. 1, 1948).

not self-identify as 'Asian', the findings partly correlated with themes postulated by Ho (1993) in a conceptual framework in Asian psychology,<sup>116</sup> which include reciprocity, other-directedness, and harmony.

Asia-centric paradigms might suggest a dichotomy between other-directedness and harmony, and accomplishment and productivity. Such a distinction is not apparent in this study's findings. The responses indicate that they are interlinked, with productivity as the fortunate consequence of managing relationships and maintaining harmony.

*Addressing German colleague: But doesn't saying 'no, I can't help you' hurt your relationships? How can you work together after that? How will you achieve your goals without the spirit? (Company B/09.05.2017/VL/India/69)*

Harmony manifests itself pragmatically in everyday relationships. It constitutes the fundamental principle of relationship management, establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships on which an organization's or cause's success or failure depends (Cutlip, Center & Broom 1999).

Relationality and harmony are also reflected within the dimensions of OBC in contributing to organizational effectiveness and job satisfaction. For instance, helping behavior – which is highlighted by the Indian respondents – is also mentioned by most scholars in the OBC field (cf. Borman & Motowidlo 1993; George & Brief 1992; George & Jones 1997; Organ, 1988, 1990; Smith, Organ, & Near 1983; Podsakoff et al 2000). Although Organ and Ryan's findings (1995) do not see dispositional measures as being closely correlated with OCB, more attention is paid by the Indian participants to the beneficial effects of dispositional variables such as agreeableness and positive affectivity.

Other factors considered felicitous for accomplishment are also linked to relationship management. One oft-cited example is the importance of flexibility, which is an essential factor in customer satisfaction in CRM<sup>117</sup>.

*They are sometimes so lacking in flexibility. That's not so good these days if you want to work internationally. I sometimes wonder how they manage to remain so successful. (Company B/28.03.2019/DA/India/70)*

<sup>116</sup> However, Ho does not consider India but three other Asian cultures (i.e., Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese).

<sup>117</sup> Customer Relationship Management: "Managing customer relationships effectively and efficiently boosts customer satisfaction and retention rates (Reichheld, 1996a, b; Jackson, 1994; Levine, 1993)" (Chen & Popovich 2003, p. 673).

## 2.10 Gap Factors

At least since Freud the significance of communicative acts has been recognized, as others read meaning not only into speech but also into action (Hall 1950, 1990). In an organizational setting, communication is not merely the means of performing, but also the primary process for personal, social, and professional meaning-making. It is a “process of creating, exchanging, interpreting, and storing of messages within a purposive system” (Jablin 1990, p. 157).

In his communication-based theory of organization, Taylor (1995) argues for the centrality of conversations. Organizations per se are communication systems, reflecting ‘an ecology of conversation’ (Tompkins & Wanca-Thibault 2001, p. XXIX). Communication is more than a reflection of reality, as it creates and represents the process of organising. With organizations being communicational in nature, “communication and organization are equivalent, discourse is organizing; it is the paint and the canvas, the figure and ground” (ibid).

Interpersonal interaction is a central element in interculturality (von Hemolt 2016). Diverging interpretations of intent, relations and business strategies not only affect implementation but also fundamentally influence the way in which “individuals assess the quality of the cooperation process, the reliability of their partners and of the knowledge they want to transfer and the trustworthiness of the partner” (Irrman 2005). In cases of interaction in which “cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event” (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel 2009, p. 12), there is a greater likelihood of being misled in such assessments.

**2.10.1 Habituation.** Awareness of gaps are grounded in the seminal concept of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966/2011). It first established the notion that sociocultural patterns evolve within the framework of social interaction to eventually become institutionalized as behavioral norms. Any action that is frequently repeated becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which – ipso facto – is apprehended by its performer as that pattern. In terms of the individual, the factor known as “automaticity” comes into play during which the process has become so reflexive that it is no longer part of one’s awareness (Quartz & Sejnowski 2002). This also holds good for micro-cultures such as communities of practice.

The patterns reproduced as learned processes “a set of tacit assumptions” (Hall 1973, 1990) entrenched in a rote way (cf. Habermas 1981). ‘Socially established resources’ (Gee 2014) such as conventions, norms, beliefs, expected ways of acting, thinking and organising thoughts – in short of communicating – build up gradually in cultural communities to constitute normalcy, provided through routine, plausibility and

sense (Schütz & Luckmann 1979). Using the term 'plausibility', Berger (1970) emphasizes the degree of social support involved: "<...> we obtain our notions about the world originally from other human beings, and these notions continue to be plausible to us in a very large measure because others continue to affirm them" (Berger 1970, p. 34).

The construct of social beliefs helps to explain and predict social behaviors (Bond et al. 2004). These general social beliefs or "social axioms" are "generalized beliefs about oneself, the social and physical environment, or the spiritual world" (Leung et al. 2002, p. 289).

As in expectancy theory, this research suggests that individuals draw on their beliefs about how the world works when determining how to act, and that these beliefs are therefore predictive of behavior (Leung, Bond, & Schwartz 1995).

Actors in a social group routinely pursue certain patterns in the group, fulfilling generalized expectations of behavior. Recent neurobiological research continues to suggest that such behavior – including communicative behavior – is initiated by imitative learning patterns (Tomasello 2000). Even non-human primates operate on very similar principles; for instance, young apes watch their groupmates at close range, absorbing the methods and lessons of each of their elders' actions (De Waal 2001).

In communication, this leads to the concept of dominant discourses, which are "ways of talking and thinking about something which have become naturalized to the extent that people conform to them without thinking" (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman 2010, p. 46).

These communicative repertoires can be likened to fractal geometry in natural phenomena (Bolten 2013). Similar to fractals in nature such as coastlines or river beds, they are both infinitely complex patterns and self-similar across a range of scales. Like in nature, communication fractals are created through recursive processes in an ongoing feedback loop over a period of time. Both fractal natural patterns and fractal communicative patterns arise from a particular setting – the former geographic, the latter sociocultural – and are characterized by familiarity and consequent recognizability. As with fractals in nature, the fractals in communicative patterns can be seen as a work in progress, simultaneously pre-existent and in a state of flux.

**2.10.2 Reciprocal Expectations.** The etymology of the word 'to communicate' from 'cum' and 'munus' is in itself indicative of the reciprocity involved therein: 'cum' denotes 'with' and 'munus' relates to duty or obligation (Conti 2011). Marcel Mauss (2002) sees reciprocity as a universal human principle that is both a choice and an obligation (ibid). Studies in developmental psychology indicate that communicative reciprocity is hard-wired to a high degree even in the early stages of human

development (Tomasello 2000), while cognitive science has discovered the existence of mirror neurons in primates<sup>118</sup> (Gallese & Goldmann 1998; Ferrari et al. 2003).

To coordinate interaction, meaning is required as a form of order. Creating meaningful order through action is largely based on security in expectations (Froschauer and Lueger 2009).

In general, the actors in social systems face the apparently contradictory task of constructing a level of complexity that enables them to both develop and reduce their knowledge of the environment and their capacity to create meaningful order through action. This order is based on the establishment of security in expectations (for example as a result of the generalizability of behavioural expectations) and rules for interpreting observations within a horizon of meaning (ibid 2009, p. 219).

“Expectations of persistence, regularity, order and stability in the everyday and routine moral world” (Garfinkel 1967, p. 173) is the basis of meaningful interaction. More significantly, without reciprocal predictability the trust-building process is compromised (Bolten 2008).

**2.10.3 Expectancy in Practice.** It is of interest to note that expectations may be identified in neuro-biological terms based on fMRI data (Palaniyappan & Liddle 2012), which show a correlation between risk prediction error and blood oxygen level dependent on the response in the insula and inferior frontal gyrus. For example, a psychosis “can be explained on the basis of a mismatch between prior expectations and incoming sensory information leading to a prediction error” (ibid, p. 17).

Quartz and Sejnowski (2002) point to our brain’s ability to implicitly learn important patterns for predictive purposes. Berns et al.’s (1997) experiments employing brain-imaging technologies confirmed a 1964 test revealing that the human brain “can detect, and correctly respond to, regular patterns in the environment without conscious awareness of them”. After just thirty minutes of practice, a simple computer game flashing what appeared to be a random sequence of lights led to the subjects reacting predictively ahead of the light flash. In actual fact, the sequence was a mix of random and repeated, with the anticipatory response only occurring during the repeated sequence, something of which the subjects were unaware (Quartz & Sejnowski 2002). Brain neurobiology appears to dovetail with this predilection, as implicitly-learned patterns lead to the expectancy of a particular reaction.

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<sup>118</sup> Gallese et al’s (1998) discovery of mirror neurons in monkeys, which has been subsequently extended to human beings, might point in a similar direction. Their experiments show that the same neurons in the brain are activated regardless of whether the subject is performing an action or whether the same action is being performed by another individual.

In mirror-neuron theory, this has given rise to a hypothesis about predictive mind-reading abilities (Gallese & Goldman 1998). In Gallese's own words (2001):

In our daily life we are constantly exposed to the actions of the individuals inhabiting our social world. We are not only able to describe these actions, to understand their content, and predict their consequences, but we can also attribute intentions to the agents of the same actions. We can immediately tell whether a given observed act or behaviour is the result of a purposeful attitude or rather the unpredicted consequence of some accidental event, totally unrelated to the agent's will. In other words, we are able to understand the behaviour of others in terms of their mental states. I will designate this ability as mind-reading. (Gallese 2001, p. 33)

Apparently, mirror neurons would seem to argue a fundamental predisposition to making assumptions on the predicted behavior of the other, which leads implicitly to certain expectations.

Burdoon's (1988) expectations violations theory proposes that:

<...> emotional experience and expression can profitably be understood according to what experiences and expressions are expected in interpersonal relationships, the extent to which enacted expressions deviate positively or negatively from expectancies, the degree to which other types of expectancy violations engender emotional expressions, and the effects of deviating from entrenched patterns of emotional expression. (Burdoon 1988, p. 30)

It attempts to explain reactions to what is perceived as unexpected behavior in peer interaction, and the various meanings that people attribute to the violation of the predicted reaction. Expectancies are based upon a variety of factors, including personal and contextual needs, and behaviors running counter to sociocultural norms – the “landscape of practices” (Wenger 1998) – play a particularly significant role in the appraisal of the perceived violation (cf. Searle 1963, 2010<sup>119</sup>).

**2.10.4 From Expectancies to Gaps.** Expectations – including their violations – cover a number of factors, with the omission of expected reactions playing as vital a role as their commission. Should an expected response fail to materialize, a gap in the reciprocal process is perceived. In any “symbolically mediated interaction in which the employment of symbols is fixed by meaning conventions” (Habermas 1981, 1987), the

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<sup>119</sup> “If someone violates the norms of the community, various sorts of sanctions can be imposed on the violator” (Searle 2010, p. 155). When a norm is violated, members often perceive this deviant behavior as potentially threatening to the group identity, and therefore deal with the deviance in order to reduce the threat (Jetten & Hornsey 2014).

similarities and differences of the actors may facilitate or impede interaction, although the range of differences is likely to be greater in intercultural interaction<sup>120</sup>.

The cognitive dissonance generated by a gap factor on the part of the recipients is triggered either synchronically by immediate awareness or intuited diachronically. A tangible detection of 'something missing' may be the absence of an expected response (Germans about Indians) or the lack of benevolence signalling, such as positive feedback (Indians about Germans).

In many cases, participants were initially unable to conceptualise or verbalize the reasons behind their unease. They emerged with experience and upon reflection, such as the German omission of mitigating language in negative feedback or Indian gaps in proactive communication.

*They behaved rather strangely. We were all talking about it the next day, even though we expected it because they are not Indians, no? How can they be like us? We are also not like them. (Company B/19.09.2019/US/India/71a)*

*We can't be free and easy with them in the usual way. Really, I don't know why. Maybe it is because of the way they sometimes sound [pause] I'm almost scared [laughs]. (Company A/03.04.2018/SB/India/71b)*

*Somehow the communication is different with Germans. Some things are just not understood by them. The thing is, I can't really say exactly what it is. I don't mean it critically. It can also be good, you know. (Company B/28.03.2019/NO/India/72)*

*Ja, es ist klar, dass die Andersartigkeit eine Rolle spielt. Die Inder kommunizieren schon anders wie wir. (Company B/25.06.2019/HK/Germany/73)*

*Am Anfang war ich völlig verunsichert. Bei jeder Reaktion die unklar war, konnte ich nur vermuten, dass etwas Kulturelles dahintersteckt. (Company B/30.01.2019/WD/Germany/74)*

*So würden wir als Deutsche natürlich nicht reagieren. (Company B/07.02.2019/RK/Germany/75)*

The omissions may accrue from a variety of background motives, both purposefully to elicit a specific response or unintentionally. Some of the gap factors observed by the Germans about their colleagues in India fall into the category of intentional or deliberate omissions, such as non-response or the use of a qualified 'yes' to signal a 'no'. The category of unintentional omissions includes the 'things too

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<sup>120</sup> In Habermas' classic example, when a member of a tribe shouts 'Attack!' it is accompanied by an expectation that the expression will be interpreted correctly and appropriate action taken by the others within hearing distance.

obvious to mention”<sup>121</sup> from the sender’s viewpoint, or those that are unknown or non-essential from the sender’s perspective and therefore not worthy of inclusion.

In his socio-cognitive approach to pragmatics, Istvan Kecskes (2014: 47) posits that even if an utterance is a full proposition from the speaker’s perspective, it may well be ‘underspecified’ from the hearer’s perspective. Perceptually a communication gap is thus created for the recipient of the message. Those perceived by the Indians about their German counterparts such as a lack of ‘guidance’ or mitigating language in critical situations might be categorized as unintentional gaps.

An aversive state of dissonance (Festinger 1957)<sup>122</sup> can be triggered in any unfamiliarity, including stress due to expectations that do not correspond to reality (Ning, Guan & Liu, 2018). In an intercultural encounter, the predictability of communicative outcomes is hampered by inherent complexity and the perceived ambiguity of utterances and behavior (Busch 2008). Consequently, the intentions and actions of others appear to be inconsistent or even arbitrary.

Even if well prepared for the unexpected, gaps, either cognitive or affective, appear with varying frequency. With each gap, one more marker of familiarity and identifiability<sup>123</sup> is eliminated. To continue the metaphor of fractals, the communication landscape of an intercultural encounter becomes one lacking in the known street signs and landmarks such as linguistic cues. Ingenuity and cultural inventiveness are called for on the part of the interlocutors when they attempt to read meaning into what others do (Hall 1973)<sup>124</sup>.

*Wir verstehen uns gut, aber dennoch gibt es Verhaltensweisen, die mir manchmal rätselhaft vorkommen. (Company A/08.03.2018/MD/Germany/76)*

*Ich kenne viele inzwischen persönlich, aber manchmal weiß ich überhaupt nicht, was ich von einer Email-Mitteilung halten soll. An meinen Englisch-Kenntnissen liegt es sicher nicht. Es ist oft mühsam, den Sinn der zusammengesetzten Worte zu erschließen. (Company B/14.05.2019/CT/Germany/77)*

*Inzwischen habe ich viele indische Freunde. Wir waren zusammen essen, über unterschiedliche Kulturen geredet. Die Körpersprache ist herzlich*

<sup>121</sup> Nigel Barley “The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes from a Mud Hut”, 1983.

<sup>122</sup> Festinger (1957) describes dissonance as two cognitions that are relevant to but psychologically inconsistent with one another. This concept has since acquired numerous offshoots and secondary patterns; for example, Aronson (1997) posited that dissonance is created when an individual behaves in a way that is contrary to his/her sense of self.

<sup>123</sup> Symbolic expressions guided by rules, that is, with “the implicit expectation that they can be recognized by others as expressions conforming to a rule” (Habermas 1981, 1987, p.22).

<sup>124</sup> As beliefs and communication are inextricable, “the differences in the socio-cultural value system may result in differences in cognitive mapping and, as a consequence, in lexicalisation” (Kecskes 2013).



*und freundlich, aber ich habe Schwierigkeiten zu erkennen, genau was mein Gegenüber gefühlt bzw. gedacht hat. (Company B/19.06.2017/MK/Germany/78)*

It also leads to uncertainty about anticipating responses to a given course of action.

*Wie bekomme ich die erforderliche Reaktion oder Antwort von dem indischen Kollegen? Warum versteht er mich nicht? (Company B/17.01.2017/MK/Germany/Email/79)*

*It's hard to know how to ask questions and to whom. Sometimes if we ask, we get really detailed and good answers. My direct colleague is like that-very helpful. But with some others they tell me ki<sup>125</sup> 'look it up yourself' or 'ask your Indian colleagues'. (Company D/10.06.2017/DA/India/80)*

Particularly from a German engineering perspective, the uncertainty of outcomes led to dismay and a scientific quest for explanations, predictions, and corresponding control.

*Ich habe das Gefühl, mit meiner Art und Weise anzuecken und weil ich keine Rückmeldung bekomme und wenig Feingefühl habe, verstehe ich die Signale nicht. Dazu möchte ich unbedingt ein paar Tipps bekommen. (Company B/22.06.2017/VG/Germany/81)*

*Wir hatten beispielsweise ein Call, wo wir dachten, es ist super gelaufen. Es wurde bedankt und es wurde Einverständnis signalisiert, aber wir haben im Nachhinein festgestellt, dass es gar nicht der Fall war. Die Maßnahme konnte nicht umgesetzt werden – das würden wir gerne in der Zukunft vermeiden. (Company A/30.05.2017/FR/Germany/82)*

Cupach & Spitzberg (2007) posit that relational maintenance in couples is threatened by "the dark side of communication", a concept that is also applicable to groups or dyadic interaction. Dysfunctional behaviors that threaten interpersonal relationships include such phenomena as honesty vs. deception, relational turbulence, troubles talk, face threat and regulation of infidelity (ibid).

In intercultural interaction the above terms are related to the sociocultural interpretation of doxa. The conflict avoidant communication often favored by Indians was sometimes seen as deception in Germany, the lack of mitigating language on the German side during troubles talk sometimes constituted a face threat for the Indian side.

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<sup>125</sup> 'Ki' is a Hindi word meaning 'that'.

*Warum nicht einfach 'Nein' sagen? Es ist doch einfacher und schneller.*

(Company A/ 04.10.2016/SB/Germany/83)

*It would be nice for us sometimes to hear that we're doing good work, wouldn't it? (Company C/ 10.10.2016/SR/India/84)*

## 2.11 Implications

Numerous approaches have attempted to deal with the fragility of human interaction in prior research. It is often assumed that with familiarity (Allport's contact hypothesis 1954) and as part of the normal success-and-failure process (Kecskes 2014), interactants will develop a feel for the other's thinking patterns and align themselves accordingly.

Goffmann argues that 'frames'<sup>126</sup> or typifications need to be recognized in order that a situation is properly understood (Goffman 1956, 1974, 1983). In interaction, Garfinkel's (2002) focus is more on practices rather than concepts, arguing for 'instructable' and 'instructed action' that can be learnt by watching or being shown.

This corresponds with findings in neurobiology indicating that a mismatch between expectations and incoming input is not an immutable state. Expectancy violations such as gap factors do not remain etched in stone when social interaction over a period of time is given. The insula of the brain plays an active role not only in evaluating but also in updating the probabilities of an outcome (Palaniyappan & Liddle 2012). With time, what was once 'crisis maintenance' requiring explicit measures in interaction becomes closer to implicit 'routine maintenance' (Hjelm 2014).

*Indische Manager und Mitarbeiter arbeiten anders. Wenn man es verstanden hat, funktioniert's. Es ist nur eine Frage der Zeit und der Anpassung. (Company A/28.02.2018/NR/Germany/85)*

In Kecskes' sociocognitive approach, communication is a dynamic process driven by 'blending', whereby individuals are both constrained by and shape societal conditions. Sociocultural norms are individually interpreted, often on the spot, within specific contexts based on prior experience (Kecskes 2014). Blending "incorporates the dynamic interplay of crossing (parts that are distinguishable) and merging (parts that are indistinguishable)" (Kecskes 2014, p. 49). These emergent, synchronic features are coupled with diachronic development, leading to a constant evolution in the process of brain-world interaction.

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<sup>126</sup> Framing is not merely a macro-approach favoured by Hofstede and others but it may be described as a filtering process for aligning values and codes of conduct in specific encounters (Roberts and Sarangi 2005).

Similarly, Kronenfeld (2008) refers to the co-existence of routinized (non-calculated) decisions and actually-calculated real decisions. Routines based on cultural precedents such as traditions lead to implicit decisions, while decisions based on individual routines are created through negotiation in situ (Kronenfeld 2008, p. 51). Turns and conversational moves arise from routine but are interactionally and locally managed.

Taking all of the above into account, a flexibly routinized coherence of business practices should be expected to emerge. Disappointingly, in many of the cases under review, familiarisation and the de-localisation of practices (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997 in Mahadevan 2009) did not appear to morph into coherence<sup>127</sup>. Even if the reasoning behind the behavior becomes accessible, an a posteriori gap in understanding paradoxically persists.

*Bei meinen Mitarbeitern merke ich diese Kurve. Am Anfang der Zusammenarbeit sind sie überfordert und unglücklich, dann mit zunehmender Vertrautheit geht die Kurve hoch, gipfelt nach einem Besuch vor Ort ... aber dann allmählich geht die Kurve wieder nach unten, weil sie merken, dass man sie doch nicht so gut versteht wie gedacht. (Company B/21.07.2017/AR/Germany/86)*

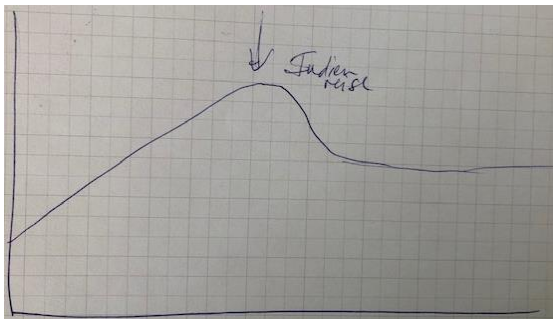


Figure 7. Company B/21.07.2017/AR/Germany.

*I've worked with many cultures, also Germans for a long time. But I must say one thing – it's still harder to work with them than with any other country. If you can satisfy a German you can satisfy anybody. (Company D/12.01.2019/RS/India/87)*

*Es ist eine junge Gruppe [in Indien], für jede Schandtät zu haben. Sie habe Freude am agilen Arbeitsprozess. Wir haben regen Austausch und gute Beziehungen. Teamevents auch – Cricket gespielt und so weiter. Trotzdem verstehe ich vieles nicht - ein höfliches Nein erkennen, religionsbedingte*

<sup>127</sup> As opposed to 'cohesion', which is closed and bivalent, 'coherence' is open and polyvalent (Bolten 2013).

*Fettnäpfchen und vor allem konstruktive Kritik aus deren Sicht. (Company B/22.06.2017/RG/Germany/88)*

The mind is endowed with a natural ability to fill in the blanks by looking for “best fit” answers (Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998). “Internal contexting makes it possible for human beings to perform the exceedingly important function of automatically correcting for distortions or omissions of information in messages” (Hall 1976/ 1989, p. 117). It reveals a scenario in which the fractal patterns do not diverge completely over time, but they still show sufficient small irregularities (or ‘cracks’), which can nonetheless be indicative of irregularities at much larger scales (Monahan 2016, p. 64).

Aside from few researchers such as Bolten (2007), this specific issue has not merited the attention that it deserves. The question of why, contrary to established expectations and despite a learning curve shaped by experiences of trial and error, the familiarity paradigm does not lead to sustained coherence has not been adequately addressed.

Certain hypotheses may be ventured in this connection, some of them structural in nature. The first structural one is the obvious obstacle of remote communication discussed in the following chapter. Working in a virtual environment interspersed by brief episodes of face-to-face interaction does not appear to foster a transnational, unified collective envisioned by many, at least in the short to medium term.

The second structural obstacle is the turnover rate on the Indian side, due to both a higher rate of employee growth as well as attrition and changes within the company. The constant flow of young inductees (who were often new to both workplaces) created a diversity of experiences with the Indian colleagues, which contributed to unpredictability in every new encounter.

*Ich arbeite seit 6 oder 7 Jahren mit den indischen Kollegen zusammen und habe Kontakt über Skype, Email, Telefon etc. Aber es sind immer unterschiedliche Inder und es ist schwer zu sagen, wie man mit ihnen umgehen muss. Vor allem wenn es Frauen sind. (Company B/ 31.1.2017/CF/ Germany/89)*

*Und je besser sie waren, desto schneller haben sie die Firma verlassen. Es ist inzwischen etwas besser geworden, seitdem sie interessantere Aufgaben bekommen und so weiter, aber die Firma (in Indien) wächst und das Wachstum bedeutet, dass wir immer wieder mit neuen Kollegen zu tun haben. (Company B/ 24.01.2017/JW/Germany/90)*

The third structural issue was that interacting not just biculturally but multiculturally demanded a high degree of situational interpretation and conscious coping with ambiguity.

*Wir arbeiten nicht nur mit Indern, sondern auch mit Kollegen aus Ungarn, Korea und USA. Wie soll man jedes Mal auf die jeweiligen Eigenheiten und Eigenarten reagieren?* (Company B/ 14.11.2016/HV/Germany/91)

Apart from structures, psycho-social elements also play a part. The brain's ability to fill in the blanks is often based on sensory experiments. The oft-cited (e.g., Hall 1989; Farb 1993; Fisher 2014) experiments conducted by Richard and Roslyn Warren, for instance, showed that missing phonemes do not hamper listeners' ability to follow verbal utterances. Likewise, neurobiological studies have shown that the visually impaired are in a position to compensate for gaps in line drawings (Ramachandran 1998).

In these gap experiments, parts of words were excised from the shared language of everyday communication. It did not involve correcting for vital chunks of missing information or of behavioral patterns. Recognising complexity is more of a challenge. Brain researcher Ramachandran's (1998, p. 89-103) experiments on vision seem to indicate that guessing works best with regularities such as simple geometric patterns but gaps remain if the objects are more complex. If we translate these findings on vision to those on behavior, one might hypothesize that some perceptual gaps become easier to fill in, while significant anomalies remain inexplicable gaps causing cognitive dissonance.

A further conjecture might lie at the deep-structure level of beliefs. The action routines or transnational practices established suggest a superficial sense of conformity that is absent at the deep-structure level of beliefs and values. Cultural constructs change diachronically while cultural representation and speech production by individuals change synchronically (Kecskes 2014). For a while, these two realities co-exist until the mismatches begin to impede routines in action (Bolten 2007 p. 141-142).

"Every act of perception < ... > involves an act of judgement by the brain" (Ramachandran 1998, p. 67). Beliefs may be recognized, but they are not necessarily preferred as a standard of reference<sup>128</sup>. Beliefs are predicated on common sense<sup>129</sup> and marked by a habituated conviction that it is better to act in certain ways than in

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<sup>128</sup> "To accept and understand what is familiar, to grow accustomed to it and make a habit of it, is one thing; but it is quite another to prefer it as the standard of reference and to measure all that happens, and is perceived, against it" (Moscovici 2000, p. 37).

<sup>129</sup> 'Alltagsverstand' (Hitzler 1993).

others (Hitzler 1993). Each participant conveys a conviction about the ideal state from his/her own perspective.

*Es ist doch viel sinnvoller, die Probleme rechtzeitig zu melden und sie nicht zu beschönigen.* (Company B/ 21.04.2017/AW/Germany/92)

*They can be really critical. I wonder why they don't filter their thoughts a little more before they say something – that's the thing.* (Company C/ 10.10.2016/SR/India/93)

With the concept of common sense, the train of thought has led back to the initial considerations of this chapter, the social construction of professional reality, self-categorization and expectations in communities of practice. Inductively speaking, we have returned to the culture problematic and Weber's role of ideas in social action (Lizardo 2016, p. 104).

### **3 Chapter 3: Structural Factors: Power Relations and Virtuality**

Besides the CoP self-categorization and identity issues addressed in the previous chapter, context also exerts a powerful influence on both individual and group behavior<sup>130</sup>. It is sometimes neglected when qualitative research focuses more on meanings and experiences (cf. Silverman 2010).

As Matsumoto (2007) highlights, as inherently social animals, humans live in a succession of multiple situational contexts and seek to ascribe meaning to each unique one (Matsumoto 2007, p. 1294-1295).

He sums up the interplay between all of these factors as follows:

I suggest that individual behavior is the product of the interaction between culturally dependent social roles and individually different role identities. Social roles are comprised of expectations and normative behaviors that emerge from the psychological meanings attributed to situational contexts; these meanings are cultural. Culture, in turn, emerges from the interaction of basic human nature with specific ecological contexts in which groups exist through a process of environmental adaptation (Matsumoto 2007, p. 1286)

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<sup>130</sup> The importance of context is also addressed in the field of critical studies which puts a particular object of study in a wider cultural, economic and political context (Alvesson & Deetz 2000). Starting from the proposition that ideology has a dominating influence on human behavior (Marcuse, Adorno, Fromm), it has developed to consider issues of power, context, socio-economic relations and historical/structural forces (Nakayama & Halualani 2010), additionally complemented by factors such as the sociology of emotion, neoinstitutionalism and the reproduction of inequality (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003). In intercultural studies, it deals with "issues of power, context, socio-economic relations and historical/structural forces as constituting and shaping culture and intercultural communication encounters, relationships, and contexts" (Nakayama & Halualani 2010, p. 1-2).

Thus, there are two major aspects to Matsumoto's emergence of culture: interactants and settings. Humans seek to ascribe meaning to others in social interaction to aid the social coordination that is essential for survival. One way of accomplishing it is through focusing on the relationship between the individual and the group, while the other is through establishing and maintaining hierarchies (ibid, p. 1295-1296).

This chapter examines two macro-elements against which gap factors in interaction arise based on the interaction-setting concept: power asymmetry and remote, technology-mediated collaboration. These intersect dynamically and cross-sectionally within the culture and communication of communities of practice, always bearing in mind that the levels of saliency of each macro-element in a given interaction varies depending on situational circumstances and individual experience.

### **3.1 Power Asymmetry: Frameworks**

No form of interaction takes place in a power-free context and the facets of power are multidimensional. Behavior, which includes pragmatic practices and strategic choices in interaction, is governed – among other things – in the environment of power differentials among the interactants (cf. Orbe 1998). It is therefore essential to view the impact of power relations on the collaboration model of this study.

Power relations are a two-way process. To achieve their goals, power-holders must have at their disposal the means to instigate the others to the desired behavior (Habermas & McCarthy 1977). The means of instigation are varied, and include behavioral strategies. The recipients, in turn, strategically adopt certain communication behaviors to confront dominant structures (Orbe 1998)<sup>131</sup>. In work interaction, this can lead to very different understandings of what constitutes agency and the choice of strategies for shaping communication.

The sources of power in interaction are innumerable. They are evident in all walks of life ranging from kinship to institutionalized activity. The most fundamental source of economic power is ownership and an uneven distribution of resources where the have-nots are subordinate to those who possess the resource in question (Allwood 1980). Expertise and structural hierarchies may be seen as belonging to this category. Power can also emanate from intangible properties such as prestige, charisma, tacit knowledge, and dominant behavior (Allwood 1980). The term "class" is frequently associated with these indices, as it invokes understandings not only of socioeconomic inequality but also of other power factors.

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<sup>131</sup> The loci of power "consciously or unconsciously, create and maintain communication systems that reflect, reinforce, and promote their field of experiences" (Orbe 1998, p. 11).

According to Gelman et al. (1994), power viewed through an essential lens reflects an implicit assumption people have about the structure of the world and how it is represented in our categories (cf. Mahalingam 2003). It is a cognitive bias that enables the creation of social categories<sup>132</sup> which are perceived as universal, intrinsic and immutable (Hirschfeld 1998). From a social constructivist standpoint, essentialism can be viewed as a mechanism for preserving social, political, and economic power (West 1993).

Loden and Rosener identify two basic levels of group-related power. The primary dimensions of one are age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities and race, which are more permanent in nature (Loden & Rosener 1991).<sup>133</sup> The secondary dimensions are those related to educational background, geographic location, and socioeconomic status, which are amenable to change (ibid). Status and age are more germane to the power issues raised in this study, though not so much in essentialist terms as in terms of roles, professional experience, and acquired knowledge<sup>134</sup>.

The better-known typologies of power and hierarchy – particularly in corporate culture – are those based on the macro approaches first suggested by Hofstede (1984) and then built upon by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997), Schwarz (1987, 1992), GLOBE (1991, 2004) and others. Despite generalizations, they continue to provide an underlying terminology and a framework of reference in intercultural research.

Hofstede (1984) defines power distance as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) think of organizations in two dimensions, those of equality/hierarchy and orientation to the person/orientation to the task. This enables them to define four types of corporate culture – the family, the Eiffel Tower, the guided missile and the incubator – which reveal varying degrees of hierarchy. They are significantly complemented by including a second dimension, namely the nature of and the patterns within hierarchical relationships. The GLOBE study's nine (later five) meta-dimensions (2004) do not

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<sup>132</sup> Hirschfeld (1998) depressingly argues for the essentialist standpoint, positing that the idea of race is a mental representation, "a deeply-rooted bad idea", which is evident even in three-year-old children and one for which we have a prepared susceptibility (Hirschfeld 1998, p. XI-XII).

<sup>133</sup> Caste societies in India reflect many of these ascriptive categorizations, as the system is based on a hierarchy of status groupings (i.e., castes) that are ranked by ethnic purity, wealth, and access to goods or services (Grusky 1998).

<sup>134</sup> In any case, the distinction between primary and secondary dimensions cannot be rigorously maintained, as the primary dimensions of age and experience are closely interlinked to that of geographic location. Besides, in today's fluidly mobile societies, location is an easily changeable factor. What might be considered an essentialist factor is place of origin rather than geographical location.



differ substantially from Hofstede's, although the study makes a distinction between organizational and societal culture, as well as between dimensions in terms of practices ("as is"), and values ("should be"), particularly in leadership practices.

Schwartz (1992) posits that power is one of the universal human values and distinguishes between power values and achievement values, which focus on social esteem.

Achievement values (e.g., successful, ambitious) emphasize the active demonstration of competence in concrete interaction, whereas power values (e.g., authority, wealth) emphasize the attainment or preservation of a dominant position within the more general social system. (Schwartz 1992, p. 9)

The fluidity and processuality of power are thus given due consideration here (cf. Rathje 2006, Bolten 2011).

It would be far too simplistic to see power as a binary model of dyads. It is negotiated by a multiplicity of exchanges and relationships (Braddick & Walter 2001). Power factors may be perceived as a grid, a 'multivalency of power relations' (Scott 1985, 1990). Overlaps, combinations and clustering of power functions are not exceptional (Allwood 1980), neither is fuzziness in power relations.

Regardless of the exact source and nature of power, it is always manifested in reciprocal interaction. Reciprocity is the defining criterion of all social interaction and this is never completely absent, even in asymmetrical power relations (Wrong 1968). In the give-and-take of dyadic interaction, control exercised by one partner elicits a responsive act on the part of the other (ibid), often reshaping the power constellation.

Power issues are related not only to dependence but also to interdependence. Baldwin (1980) references Duvall's (1978) two basic meanings of "dependence" to elaborate:

On the one hand, 'dependence' is used in a causal sense to refer to situations in which an effect is contingent on or conditioned by something else. <...>. On the other hand, 'dependence' is also used to refer to a relationship of subordination in which one thing is supported by something else or must rely upon something else for fulfilment of a need. (Baldwin 1980, p. 475)

*Es ist ein zweischneidiges Schwert. Einerseits sind wir Kunden, weil wir Aufträge vergeben und teilweise Preise verhandeln können, aber gleichzeitig gehören wir alle zum selben Unternehmen...Wir sind auch Kollegen, die an unterschiedlichen Standorten arbeiten. (Company B/17.06.2019/PM/Germany/94)*

Economic power seems to be discernable in the instruments deployed by dominant Western companies to maintain the status quo (cf. Van Marrewijk 2011). However, other ties of mutual dependence between the parties may not always be observable (Emerson 1962, Pfeffer & Salancik 2003). Despite the density of external power parameters in Germany, the dependence was not perceived as being entirely on the Indian side in this context. The German participants revealed a “vulnerability interdependence” (Duvall 1978), implying a “need fulfilment that would be costly to forego” (Baldwin 1980, p. 476).

*Da ist so viel Abstimmungsbedarf. Ich habe das Gefühl, was ich versuche zu vermitteln, kommt gar nicht richtig an. Das Ergebnis fällt dementsprechend unerwartet aus, und das Gesamtprojekt wird gefährdet. (Company B/14.03.2016/MP/Germany/95)*

In the collaborative nature of the participants' environment it might even be meaningful to consider the parties as being controlled by the relationship itself (Emerson 1962). Power resides implicitly in the other's dependency (ibid), although the question of who has greater leverage – the supplier or the customer, the outsourcer or the outsourcee – cannot be easily answered as it is a situational, contextual and often a subjective perspective.

Therefore, without attributing any causal primacy, power relations will be discussed in the following pages from three academic perspectives: post-colonial viewpoints, class distinctions and organizational power. Organizational power will then be further sub-divided into dominant discourse, role-based and expertise-based asymmetry.

**3.1.1 Post and Neo-Colonial Viewpoints.** Bourdieu's notion of power is based on different forms of capital, namely economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu 1983, 1991). While this notion also holds true for organizations, it holds particular relevance in the institutional power of states and officialdom. It also contributes insights into the power factors of past colonialism, which informs the modern Indian mindset to some degree up to the present day.

Using cultural features to further the resources of prestige, power and dominance has always been historically part and parcel of intercultural interaction (Hinnenkamp 2009). Not only power relations between cooperating partners but also historical (ex) colonial relations influence successful cooperation (Van Marrewijk 2004). Postmodernist theory rejects legitimizing discourses of a new global 'colonialism' (e.g., Banerjee and Linstead 2004; Ibarra-Collado 2006; Jack et al. 2011).

This is echoed in the field of post-colonial (and neo-colonial) studies, which examines social and power relationships which help to sustain the iniquities of former

colonialism in a new form (e.g., Sartre 1964; Chomsky 1979; Foucault 1975). The field is not so much a unified theory of the post-colonial condition as a metatheoretical perspective that brings together a number of theoretical views (Claeye 2014). Bhabha (1994) uses the concept of 'hybridity' to "represent the colonial encounter as an on-going process of appropriation and translation, of interpretation and reinterpretation" (ibid, p. 67) but it is nonetheless embedded in unequal relations of power. This is a remnant of colonial times, as is evidenced in Malinowski's functionalist theory (1927), where an equilibrium state meant facilitating the gradual evolution of colonial peoples from their own institutions to a form of rule best suited to them (Baba 2012)<sup>135</sup>. Post-colonial arguments also consider the legacies of colonial history on organizational emotions "by demonstrating how everyday narratives, including those told to researchers, uncover a wide range of experiences of race that may go unnoticed or may not surface through more structured methods" (Ulus 2015). They are often reproduced or experienced unconsciously but their effects are manifest in individual experiences (ibid).

In the 1960s, political figures such as Kwame Nkrumah (1965) and Che Guevara (1961)<sup>136</sup> argued that the early colonialism that imposed direct geopolitical control over a nation for economic dominance has segued into today's neo-colonialism, which uses multinational corporations, capitalism, and cultural influences to achieve the same ends.

"The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (Nkrumah 1965, p. ix).

Neo-colonialist theory of the 1960s put forward a 'dependency paradigm' to argue that the investments of multinational corporations enrich a few in less developed countries but keep those countries as a whole in a situation of dependency (Halperin & Palan 2015). Such investments also serve to cultivate countries as reservoirs of cheap labour and raw materials.

From within this broad framework, the specific model of "cultural imperialism" argued that the international flows of technology transfer and media hardware coupled with the "software" flows of cultural products actually strengthened dependency and impeded true development (Sreberny 2006). The deployment of information and

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<sup>135</sup> Obviously, it was up to the colonizers to decide what solution was "best suited" to the colonized.

<sup>136</sup> Laumann, D 2005, 'Che Guevara's visit to Ghana' in *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, (9), new series, pp. 61-74. Available from: [www.jstor.org/stable/41406724](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41406724)

communication technologies – for example – reveals a “disturbing similarity of its role in this context to the machinations of colonial rule” (Gopal, Willis & Gopal 2003, p. 234).

As companies have always been powerful institutional actors whose influence reach beyond the marketplace, neo-colonial theorists argue that global organizations are the current form of neo-colonial control. Organizations are in a position to create global hierarchies of economic and cultural power in innumerable manifestations. Significantly, India had ample historical evidence of this, thanks to the East India Company, a trading company that effectively ruled the country for centuries in a quasi-sovereign role<sup>137</sup>.

Neo-colonialist pedagogy mentions educational context as a platform for exercising power and how indigenous educational ideas and practices are marginalized (Reagan 2010). The diffusion of Western ideas in education and training is seen by neo-colonial studies as an instrument of colonization, through the spread of management textbooks, for instance (Fougere & Moulettes 2009). In view of the above, it is hardly surprising that scholars such as Appadurai (2000) perceive globalization with critical mistrust:

What is the hidden dowry of globalization? Christianity?

Cyberproletarianization? New forms of structural adjustment? Americanization disguised as human rights or as MTV? Such anxieties are to be found in many national public spheres (including that of the United States) and also in the academic debates of scholars in the poorer countries. (Appadurai 2000, p. 2)

The geographies in this study (Germany and India) do not have a history of colonial relations, but it is nonetheless worth mentioning that several centuries of (white) British rule in India have not left the Indian national psyche completely untouched. Sen (2006) posits that colonial rule may have created both the colonizing and the colonized mind sets; the ongoing discussions on the subcontinent regarding themes of Western mindset domination appear to support this. The term “cyber

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<sup>137</sup> “We still talk about the British conquering India, but that phrase disguises a more sinister reality. It was not the British government that seized India at the end of the 18th century, but a dangerously unregulated private company headquartered in one small office, five windows wide, in London, and managed in India by an unstable sociopath – Clive. <....> For all the power wielded today by the world’s largest corporations – whether ExxonMobil, Walmart or Google – they are tame beasts compared with the ravaging territorial appetites of the militarised East India Company” (Dalrymple 2015, “The East India Company: The original corporate raiders”. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/04/east-india-company-original-corporate-raiders>)

coolie"<sup>138</sup> for a skilled Indian IT worker employed by Western customers suggests a neo-colonial dimension which is causing concern in public discourse in India.<sup>139</sup>

An article in *The Express Tribune* (24. January 2018) on the “colonial impact on our mindsets” bemoans the irksome fact that the “enduring legacy of British colonial rule in India is the clerical mindset they had left people with.”<sup>140</sup> Post-colonial theory claims that the education system was itself geared towards maintaining the colonizers’ power and used the metropolitan language to create a select elite (Fougere & Moulettes 2009). At the same time, this apparent ‘elite’ of ‘babooos’ (clerks) was motivated by a desire to please and demonstrated a ‘pliable’ and ‘plastic’ mentality (Sinha 2014). From a post-colonial perspective, the foundations for cultural and ideological subservience, sometimes termed internalized subordination<sup>141</sup> had been laid.

This sense of history did not go unnoticed in the discourse of the study. Without exhibiting any sense of victimhood, some Indian participants referred tangentially – often with ironic emphasis – to the effects of the ‘white man syndrome’:

*It is a great honour when the boss walks by and talks to you personally, especially if he is a white boss. (Company D/01.04.2019/HP/Germany/96)*

It found a sporadic echo on the German side:

*Ich möchte nicht wie der Kolonialherr auftreten. Das ist nicht mehr zeitgemäß. (Company B/17.10.2016/J-OR/Germany/97)*

However, the fact remains that every Indian participant was born literally one generation after the colonial era<sup>142</sup>, and the changing world order in business no longer permits explications in exclusively post- or neo-colonial terms.

**3.1.2 Class.** Class is a stratification system linked to positioning in social groups and it is cross-referenced to both organizational and post-colonial theory. However, there is a general lack of consensus about how to theorize and evaluate social class (Ash 2002)<sup>143</sup>. The socioeconomic index of the 1960s (Duncan 1961)

<sup>138</sup> Whatever the origin of the word ‘coolie’, it is a derogatory term for a labourer with no other markers of identity or human desires. (cf. Rudrappa 2009).

<sup>139</sup> “Code Load on Cyber Coolies” in *Outlook* February 27, 2017 is just one example of the widespread journalistic use of the term. <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/code-load-on-cyber-coolies/298490>

<sup>140</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1533047/colonial-impact-mindsets/>

<sup>141</sup> Internalized subordination is a term used more widely in social justice and critical social theory perspectives (e.g., Pyke K.D.2010. What is internalized racial oppression and why don’t we study it? In *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 53, Issue 4, pp. 551–572).

<sup>142</sup> i.e., even their parents were nearly always born post-Independence (1947).

<sup>143</sup> “<...>individuals are placed in a social hierarchy despite the lack of a consensus as to what concrete, quantifiable independent variables contribute to determining social class” (Ash 2002, p.402).

assigns social class drawing on data concerning education, occupation, and income. Labov (1972, 1997) examines class linguistics from a social distribution and stratification perspective.

As an indicator of socioeconomic class most sociologists opt for either prestige scales based on popular evaluations of occupational standing, or socioeconomic scales constructed as weighted averages of occupational income and education (Grusky 2001). Such an analysis offers a measurable score on which to base individuals' place in the occupational hierarchy, although it is also confounded by theoretical and methodological issues (Mallinson 2007).

There are other theoretical approaches to class analysis. Wright (2003) reviews five such approaches: (1) class as subjective location, (2) class as objective position within distributions, (3) class as the relational explanation of economic life chance, (4) class as a dimension of historical variation in systems of inequality, and (5) class as a foundation of economic oppression and exploitation (Wright 2003, p.152)<sup>144</sup>.

Wright postulates that class as an objective position is indexed to wealth or income and considers how people are objectively located in distributions of material inequality (ibid 2005). On the other hand, class as a subjective social location deals with the question of how people – individually and collectively – locate themselves and others within a social structure of inequality. This corresponds to a strong degree with what Grusky (2001) terms class awareness and class identification. The assignment of class membership is thus rendered subjective, either at the individual level or as a shared understanding of ranking. Approach 3 – class as the relational explanation of economic life chance – is less immediately tangible as it deals with the relationship of people to income-generating resources or assets. It is a relational rather than a gradational concept.

For Weber (1925), a “class situation” is given when (1) a number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets (cited in Appelrouth & Edles 2008, p. 168). This strongly indicates economic interest, which argues for class situation as market situation at an organizational level.

Grusky (2001) posits that in meaningful class categories, class members are not only aware of their membership ('class awareness') but also identify with their class

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<sup>144</sup> Wright's (2015) later classification of approaches “firmly embedded in the Marxist tradition” into 1) individual attributes, 2) opportunity hoarding and 3) domination/exploitation will not be addressed directly here.

(‘class identification’) and occasionally act on its behalf (i.e., ‘class action’). These concepts are closely linked to MCA, with a greater focus on stratification.

“Groups are created by processes of assignment, both self-assignment and the actions of others in categorizing persons as parties to relationships that confer rights and define obligations to fellow members” (Banton 1997, p. 13)

One aspect of class is the economic disparity between the Germany and its offshore partner in India. Differing access to resources such as good salaries and an advanced infrastructure can also create status differences (Levina and Vaast 2008).

As is evident in the term LCL or ‘low-cost location’, all of the companies studied ventured into the Indian market as a cost-saving measure, at least initially. The cost consideration and corresponding terminology provided the structural backing for class awareness and class identification based on economic interest.

*Wir sind aus Kostengründen in Indien unterwegs, und ich frage mich manchmal, ob die Mehraufwand für Reisen, Training und Kommunikation miteinkalkuliert wurde. (Company A/27.02.2018/BH/Germany/98)*

*They talk a lot about costs. I feel that in a crisis they are much more likely to cut down on staff here than there. That’s why it is called the parent company or the head office, of course, but nonetheless... (Company B/28.03.2019/BA/India/manager/99)*

### **3.1.3 Power in Organizations**

Power is a natural process in the fabric of organizational life (Haugaard & Clegg 2012; Lunenburg 2012), most obviously manifest in organizational hierarchies. Functional accounts of hierarchy propose that hierarchy increases group coordination and reduces conflict. By contrast, dysfunctional accounts claim that hierarchy impairs performance by preventing low-ranking team members from contributing potentially valuable perspectives and insights (Anicich, Swaab & Galinsky 2015).

Global market transactions are more likely to be pursued by formal organizations, which are also where class relations are formed, reproduced and reaffirmed (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003). Today, the discussion of power issues in globalization appears increasingly centered on multinational companies (Baba 2012).

Discussions on the role of multinationals in globalization tend to be acrimonious. “Postmodern” organization theory perceives “modernism” as a methodological source of abuse of an ideological abuse of power (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006) as they perpetuate the dominant narrative. ‘Organizations’ are:

seen as the site of the enactment of power plays and the postmodern ‘paradigm’ regards organization theory as dedicated to the deconstruction of organizations as copies of dominant managerialist ‘texts’ (or history of attempts

to overcome these dominant narratives – from Lyotard to Wikileaks). Postmodernist researchers tend to attempt to extract and ‘liberate’ views marginalized by these controlling ideologies from ideological constraints (Lowe, Magala & Hwang 2012).

Bourdieu speaks of the symbolic power vested in the symbolic capital of institutions and its power to make groups.

“Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition and it is obtained only as the outcome of a long process of institutionalization.” (Bourdieu 1989, p. 23).

As the project lead in this study was usually located in Germany, it determined the following to varying degrees:

(i) the purpose or goal of the activity (ii) the set of roles belonging to the activity (iii) the behavior and the instruments with which the activity is pursued (iv) contextual factors such as time and place of activity and beliefs and values attached to the activity (v) the results of the activity (vi) the conventional procedures relating and determining (i) – (v) (Allwood 1980, p. 5).

In addition, such structures generate the organizational power that provides access to legitimacy, rewards, and coercion (French & Raven 1959).

Power relations between center and periphery have not only been addressed in post-colonial studies (e.g., Claeys 2014; Mishra & Hodge 1991) but also in organizational literature (e.g., Miroshnik 2013). Bourdieu’s concept of ‘social space’ presents itself in the form of agents endowed with different properties that are systematically linked among themselves in varying constellations of power. As in Foucault’s work on prisons, disciplinary power and the mechanisms of control can regulate the behavior of individuals in a social body<sup>145</sup> such as a foreign wholly-owned subsidiary.

In intercultural collaboration, strategies can be classified into three broad groups: dominance of the parent company, decentralized, almost autonomous polycentric structures, and combinations of the two (cf. Adler 1986, Marrewijk 2014). The organizations studied showed all three in varying forms on an operational level, but structurally speaking, all of the German companies studied were the parent company and the Indian company the ‘captive’ subsidiaries.

Additionally, they were perceived as ‘customers’ to varying degrees. These differential positions of organizational power are particularly significant in the context of

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<sup>145</sup> This is not to imply that companies are prisons, even if they do share a few institutional mechanisms, such as organization of space and time. Obviously, the degree of enforcement in companies is by no means comparable to that of prisons.



this study. As a result, a sub-category of organizational power, dominant discourse (or who has got the say) will be discussed in greater detail in the following pages.

**3.1.4 Dominant Discourse.** Discourse analysis is not merely a linguistic concept; rather, it represents a field in itself, to be found in a wide range of cognate disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology and psychology. Fairclough (1989) posited that social situations are shaped by power dynamics, with the facets of 'power in discourse' and 'power behind discourse'. The former considers how power is reflected in the use of language itself while the latter focuses on the power dynamics between the interlocutors. It therefore includes both communication and language practices as well as ideas, representations and a complex system of meanings which have effects on the social world (Taylor 2013).

The first of two academic lines dealing with discourse analyzes language material, including talk, documents, online material and news media, to throw light on social phenomena and to access a collective. The second academic line starts with people and social phenomena and moves on to language. In either case they investigate interactions and social practices, meaning-making and larger meaning systems, and contests and conflicts around collective identities, social norms and subjectification (ibid).

Critical psychology (Hepburn 2011; Fox, Prilleltensky & Austin 2009) addresses the question of conflating the construction of reality with power.

When claims to truth are understood as social constructions, significant questions are opened on whose truth is given priority, who is silenced, who gains by the dominant discourse, who loses, and what ideologies and societal practices are sustained by the taken for granted realities (Sugiman et al 2008, p. 4).

Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power are among the most influential when analyzing power in society. Foucault is best known for giving discourse a groundbreaking wider context as a system of representation to include the production of knowledge through language, interactions and social practices. He uses the term 'discourse' to denote a historically contingent social system that produces knowledge and meaning. Discourse has material effects, producing what he calls 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972, p. 49).

For Foucault, discourse is a social fact produced by the effects of power within a social order. Ideas structure these social spaces with power prescribing what constitutes the criteria for legitimating knowledge and truth within the discursive

order<sup>146</sup>. It is articulated variously, “sometimes giving preeminence to power relations and obedience (as in those disciplines of a monastic or penitential type), sometimes to finalize activities (as in the disciplines of workshops and hospitals), sometimes to relationships of communication (as in the disciplines of apprenticeships)” (Foucault 1982, p. 788). Foucault sees the rules and categories as being a historical, a priori given, leading to structural issues of dominance and subservience.

Bourdieu (1989) does not explicitly link the term ‘discourse’ to the term ‘symbolic power’. It is nonetheless implicit in his concept of ‘doxa’, which – although socially constructed – is perceived and accepted as the natural order. “Objective relations of power tend to reproduce themselves in relations of symbolic power. In the symbolic struggle for the production of common sense or, more precisely, for the monopoly over legitimate naming, agents put into action the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles and which may be juridically guaranteed” (Bourdieu 1989, p. 21). A master narrative within discourse may thus be a construct based on culturally-shared stories that gain currency with the frequency of their use (McLean et al. 2018).

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that examines discourse as social practice in relation to power. “Since discourse is so socially consequential<sup>147</sup>, it gives rise to important issues of power. Discursive practices may have major ideological effects – that is, that they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations.... through the way in which they represent things and position people” (Wodak & Fairclough 1997, p. 258). Habermas indicates the danger of language as “also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power” (Habermas 1967, p. 259).

Through its focus on the relationship between philosophy and language, the linguistic turn has lent an additional, historical view to the debate. It has sharpened historians' sense of the importance of normative vocabularies and their manipulation (Braddick and Walter 2001, p. 3).

Although Arendt's (1958) concept of power addresses socio-political issues, it may be applied to the dynamics of any collective or membership category, including organizations. It emphasizes that power is always something exercised in common, not by an individual: “Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains

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<sup>146</sup> “..whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say...that we are dealing with a discursive formation” (Foucault 1972, p.38).

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Habermas argues that there is good reason to conceive language as “a kind of metainstitution on which all social institutions depend” (Habermas 1988, p.259).

in existence only so long as the group keeps together” (Arendt 1958, p. 44). In Arendt’s view, it is the communicatively generated power based on people’s support that lends power to the institutions of a country, not administratively employed power.

The discourse generated by the beliefs of an engineering collective acquires its power through the collective. As modern collectives have abandoned an unquestioning acceptance of sacred beliefs, they tend towards “the authority of an achieved consensus” (Habermas 1987).

[The] authority of the holy is gradually replaced by the authority of an achieved consensus. This means a freeing of communicative action from sacrally protected normative contexts. The disenchantment and disempowering of the domain of the sacred takes place by way of a linguistification of the ritually secured, basic normative agreement; going along with this is a release of the rationality potential of communicative action. (Habermas 1981/1987, p. 77).

These beliefs are also generated by organizations and institutions and they are instrumental in defining discourse. Scott (2008) proposes that “institutions are social structures that <...> [are] composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that <...> provide stability and meaning to social life.” (Scott 2008, p. 48). “They are cognitive in that they provide vital templates for framing individual perceptions and decisions”. Some of the beliefs and assumptions are explicit and relatively superficial, while others are deeply entrenched assumptions and conceptions of the ‘way the world is’” (Scott 2010, p. 7).

Normative elements stress the social embeddedness of political and economic behavior, with the actors as “social persons who care deeply about their relations to others and adherence to the guidelines provided by their own identity. Such concerns are often reflected in a commitment to one’s office or role” (ibid, p.6). Regulative elements “are more formalized, more explicit, more easily planned and strategically manipulated. The need for clear directives or rules, the alignment of incentives, and the importance of surveillance is stressed” (ibid).

All of these themes of interpretation, norms, legitimacy and regulation – whether formal or informal – carry subtexts infused with varying nuances of institutional power, and the emphasis placed on each element can vary depending on the approach.

Administrative power arises from the regulative view:

<...> official discourse imposes a point of view, that of the institution, especially via questionnaires, official forms, and so on. This point of view is instituted as legitimate point of view, that is, a point of view that everyone has to recognize at least within the boundaries of a definite society. The representative of the state is the repository of common sense (Haugaard 2002, p. 241).

The 'officialdom' in organizations determines processes and regulations with regional modifications for each location, but the essentials such as quality standards, testing processes and specifications are determined at the interface with the external client/customer which takes place in Germany. Thus, the relativity inherent in every perspective from a particular point in social space is not part of the discourse equation.

Additionally, institutional power can also take the form of discursive resources which are linked to the affective impact of ideas and representations on the social world. Emotional associations and social implications are part of the shared knowledge in a society<sup>148</sup> (Taylor 2013). It leads to the production of master narratives, which are in principle constructs based on culturally-shared stories which gain currency with the frequency of their use (McLean et al. 2018). As an interaction does not emerge from, and is not projected onto, a completely blank slate, there is a pre-existing backdrop that forms the basis for discourse: a 'history', so to speak.

As discussed in Chapter 2, brand reputation as a German product and the corresponding market expectations were a powerful factor in determining the dominance of certain historic discourses in a Foucaultian sense, regardless of the collaborative strategy. The 'made in Germany' label confers legitimacy over specific kinds of discourse, as well as definitions of rules of conduct and criteria of validity. The ultimate quality of the collaborative effort was judged by "drawing the line between favourable and unfavourable patterns and legitimizing and delegitimizing potential speakers" (Meuser and Nagel 2009, p. 28).

There is an interplay of all of these varied elements in the power paradigms of intercultural interaction. In remote contexts, communication is often too impersonal and sporadic to permit the usual process of negotiation and re-negotiation in meaning and behavior. Interaction continues to revolve around the power paradigm, and asymmetrical role-based discourse is used as the default setting to avoid potential inappropriacy.

An absolutist position<sup>149</sup> assuming that power phenomena are essentially universal is not being proposed here. Despite widespread patterns, the contours of power relations are neither uniformly evident nor sharply distinct.

Norms imply ambivalence about universalistic principles, with both dominant and subsidiary norms co-existing. This suggests a probabilistic, rather than a deterministic view of adherence to dominant norms of behavior, and the

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<sup>148</sup> Taylor suggests the example of a "good" mother, and this is certainly applicable in organizational terms to what constitutes a "good" engineer/employee.

<sup>149</sup> Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen (1992).

identification of specific contingencies where subsidiary norms prevail. (Thornton and Ocasio 1999, p. 106)

Behavioral conformity and the acceptance of dominant discourses do not necessarily signal acquiescence or ideological commitment to the stated order (Braddick and Walter 2001, p. 6). Though the dominant discourse of the parent company in Germany was broadly accepted by the Indian counterparts, some work strategies such as agility were regarded in a critical light. However, in keeping with power conventions in India, explicit criticism of German approaches was engaged in only at higher managerial levels or in one-on-one exchanges.

*They are not willing to learn from other working styles. Germans are very monochronic<sup>150</sup> and I know we could learn a little more about time-management, but they don't understand the value of [being] polychronic. They're supposed to be a global company. How are they going to handle the rest of the world, tell me that. Most countries out there are much more polychronic. It's quicker, it's more flexible. No, they want everyone to change and be like them. (Company B/28.03.2018/AB/India/manager/100)*

*They criticize what they call our confusion, but just look at the way we work. If you go, say, to a chemist in India you will not find a queue but a crowd at the counter and the chemist is giving them all the right things they are asking for. In Germany they stand in line but it's only a few customers, so it doesn't matter, but otherwise .... (Company D/12.01.2016/MS/India/manager/101)*

*They talk all the time about agility and agile processes, so it's obviously something new to them. We have always been agile, you know, so it's nothing special [smiles]. (Company B/28.03.2019/BA/India/manager/102)*

At the same time, the evolving synergy of Bolten's 'interculture' (2007) infuses the concept of communities of practice, which are built around the members' own understanding of what is important (Wenger 1998). They are fundamentally self-organizing systems that negotiate community through norm formation. Besides, from a social constructionist perspective (Misra & Gergen 1993), culture is not a static given but is created daily through interactions between individuals and their surroundings. With personal interaction, an 'interculture' that accommodates power factors becomes an achievable ideal, at least at the micro level.

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<sup>150</sup> Monochronic time management favors a step-by-step, one-thing-at-a-time approach to characterize efficiency. Polychronicity has been defined as the extent to which people prefer to engage in two or more tasks or events simultaneously (Bluedorn et al., 1992; Kaufman et al., 1991a; Slocombe and Bluedorn, 1999).

*...es ist aber sehr hilfreich, wenn man sie [die Inder] persönlich kennt. Sie kommen von sich aus und stellen Fragen, die Barrieren sind nicht mehr da. (Company B/21.04.2017/PE/Germany/103)*

*In meinen 12 Jahren habe ich recht gute Erfahrungen mit den Indern machen dürfen. Positive Erfahrungen, aber festgestellt, erst nachdem sie hier vor Ort waren. Wir haben einen Inder, der seit 6 Jahren kommt und geht. Mit ihm läuft die Zusammenarbeit prima. (Company B/22.06.2017/TS/Germany/104)*

Allport (1954) held that the presence of four features of the contact situation reduce prejudice: equal status between the groups in the situation; common goals; inter-group cooperation; and the support of authorities, law, or custom (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006). However, from an Indian participants' viewpoint, the lack of equal status was not perceived as detrimental to cooperation; rather, it was taken as axiomatic, and explanations were proffered for the existing status quo. Two of these power factors in favour of dominant discourse will now be examined in greater detail: the roles assigned in the organizational context <sup>151</sup>, and the expertise gap ensuing from age and resulting experience.

**3.1.5 The Function of Roles.** Power relations based on the organizational roles assigned to interactants, even if these roles are implicit in nature (Koole & ten Thije 1994), influence class relations. The structural roles – in this case based on the customer-supplier/parent company-subsidary paradigm – merit a closer look, particularly when the considering communication patterns of the Indian CoPs. Roles are a significant indicator of social class, power relations and a host of other factors.

Thus I may walk down the street and see a road-sweeper, a housewife, a child, an OAP, a milkman. I know from what they are doing what their social role is, and I know, because I live in this society, that that role is defined by what sociologists call 'variables' of occupation, gender, age and kinship. Although this notion of role has developed within a tradition of sociology that views social structure as neutral (not founded upon power and inequality), it is nonetheless valuable because it allows us to distinguish, theoretically at least, between what people do and what they are. However, we seldom in practice stop at that, and role usually forms the basis for other inferences we make about people we encounter (Dyer 2006, p. 354).

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<sup>151</sup> This includes the pressures and constraints emanating from the situations in which people are located (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003).

“What people do and what people are” leads back to the concept of categories and categorical knowledge. The machinery of MCA explicating the categorization process with which human beings organize social relations reveals how inference-rich categories are. This means that “a great deal of the knowledge that members of a society have about the society is stored in terms of these categories” (Sacks 1992, p. 40-41)<sup>152</sup>. Each of these categories carries with it a set of category-bound activities, predicates, or ‘rights and obligations’ that are expectable for a category incumbent to perform or possess<sup>153</sup> (Stokoe 2012).

Categories can be ‘duplicatively organised’ (Sacks 1992), such as ‘mommy’ and ‘baby’ in his well-known example. These paired relationships – or standardised relational pairs (SRPs) – are bound together with duties and obligations in relation to the other. From the category of ‘mother’, we can impute the motives, expectations and rights that are conventionally associated with such a category (Stokoe 2012).

Paired relationships are rarely equitable, even in ideal conditions. Category-bound expectations tend to assign power differentials, such as in the relational pair of customer-supplier. Traditionally, power relations have always been tilted in favor of the customer, as is evinced by everyday truisms such as ‘The customer is king’. In India service orientation has been taken a notch further with the sales motto ‘The customer is god’<sup>154</sup>. The notion of customer empowerment and its contribution to value creation is of relatively recent origin (Agrawal & Rahman 2015) and it indicates how entrenched notions of power can evolve.

The idea of category-boundedness and associated roles along with in-built power relations harks back to the ancient concept of ‘Dharma’ in Indian philosophy.

<sup>152</sup> Tainio (2002) suggests that the category of ‘wife’, for instance, infers ‘being heterosexual’ and ‘running a household’ (Tainio 2002 in Stokoe & Smithson 2002:87). This example is well suited to address the shifting nature of categories. Given today’s diversity of genders and gender roles, both inferences would be repudiated by many as a restricted and restrictive view of normative behavior.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. Scott’s normative elements.



<sup>154</sup>

Source: Amazon India: 29.January 2018

### 3.1.6 The Concept of 'Dharma'

There is a tendency on the part of Asia-centric theorists such as Gunaratne or Sinha to predicate interculturality on the philosophy of ancient teachings deriving from Confucius, Buddha or Vedanta. Miike (2012) highlights that a challenge to Asia-centric communication paradigm is the dilemma between "great traditions" and "little traditions", i.e., between ancient wisdom and its everyday applications. He cautions against devoting effort to philosophical discourses while neglecting "to ask to what extent the common people understand these philosophies and in what ways they are influenced by them" (Miike 2002, p. 15).

The India of today is composed of two parts: one that is traditional and inward looking, and the other that is unconventional and outward looking (Gupta and Singh 2014). With India straddling two worlds, there is a certain need to examine the everyday relevance of ancient philosophies that co-exist along with modern organizational theories.

The concept of 'dharma' is one example of how traditional thinking is extant in modern India in a modified form. It is one cornerstone in the edifice of the Indian worldview which sheds light on role-based behavior in public and personal life.

The framework of 'dharma' is a central tenet of Hinduism, which provides navigation through the thickets of human interaction. Based on the role assigned to each individual, it determines the tasks, responsibilities, behavior and even the ethics immanent in a role. It might be termed the class handbook based on Grusky's (2001) class awareness and class identification.

Monier-Williams's Sanskrit-English Dictionary<sup>155</sup> lists around seventeen meanings of the term 'dharma'. These include prescribed conduct, duty, right, justice, virtue, morality, religion, religious merit, and good work according to a right or rules (Coward et al. 2007). In contemporary Indian languages, 'dharma' often means charity as well. Being such a broad concept, it is often simply translated as 'duty' or as a code of conduct, precepts of righteousness and social behavior (Walker 1968 in Rao A. 2004).

The question of what constitutes a code of conduct or 'right action' is not entirely homogenous. On the one hand, 'sāmānya dharma' puts forward a universal code extolling a catalogue of eight virtues: "compassion to all creatures, patience, lack

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<sup>155</sup> Monier-Williams, M. (1899). A Sanskrit-English dictionary: Etymologically and philologically arranged with special reference to Cognate Indo-European languages. Oxford, Clarendon Press.



of envy, purification, tranquillity, having an auspicious disposition, generosity and lack of greed” (Coward 2007, p. 85)<sup>156</sup>.

At the same time, there is the parallel concept of ‘sva dharma’ - a specific, context-dependent dharma, which enjoins a code of behavior depending on caste/varna<sup>157</sup>, gender, and stage of life. This is expressed in the Sanskrit saying ‘Dharma dharma yatha sakti kritah’ which is translatable as: “Dharma is (right) action which agrees with one’s knowledge and power” (Bodhananda 2010).

Dharma projects a shifting kaleidoscope of social categorizations, a discourse which assigns everyone a situational identity (cf. Bourdieu 1989) based, among others, on birth, knowledge and status. What is expected of an individual emerges at the intersection of these parameters, both arising from and contributing to self-image and the image of one’s position in social space (cf. Bourdieu 1989).

Additionally, there is a code of conduct appropriate to major occupational categories and stages in life called ‘varṇāśrama dharma’. Each individual finds his/her place and purpose within this framework. In an interactive world, it necessitates right conduct in each social context and making the right choices synchronically in interaction.<sup>158</sup> Sen (2005) highlights the plurality of Indian identity which is not monolithic, but one in which people have/make choices about what is significant to attach to their identity in each distinct context.

To summarize, applied ‘dharma’ is a fluid construct which varies depending on the context of the interaction while considering age, social status and given role<sup>159</sup> of all of the interlocutors. The essence of dharma lies in managing contextual power in social practice, i.e., through context sensitivity (Sinha & Kanungo 1997). Behavior is

<sup>156</sup> Depending on the source, some ancient texts list ten virtues which apply uniformly and constitute sāmānya dharma. Among them are contentment, forgiveness and disciplining one’s mind. The others are not stealing, inner and outer cleanliness, controlling lust and greed, cultivating curiosity and lust for knowledge, seeking self-knowledge and insight, truthfulness, and controlling anger (Rao & Paranjpe 2016).

<sup>157</sup> The distinction between ‘caste’ and ‘varna’ is the subject of much discussion, as the term ‘varna’ has fallen into disuse in everyday discourse to be replaced by the term ‘caste’. Most sources agree that ‘varna’ describes a four-class model of society based on functions which later expanded to become innumerable ‘castes’ with the emphasis on heredity. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/varna-Hinduism>). The subject of caste and its pernicious impact on Indian society represents an entire field of study in itself. In a colonial context, Cohn (1987) argues that the caste system was complex and fluid prior to British rule, and that the British misinterpreted and oversimplified its features into the stereotypical boxes that the Indians were subsequently expected to conform to (Tharoor 2016). This is a thought-provoking example of how ignoring fuzziness and overlapping boundaries in culture can lead to a schematic worldview which in turn influences the behavior of interactants themselves.

<sup>158</sup> The ethical dilemmas implicit in complex interactional settings is the primary subject of enquiry in the ancient epic “The Mahabharata”.

<sup>159</sup> One classic example is the injunction against killing, which applies to all except – for practical reasons –soldiers or those in related professions that entail protection from enemies.

chosen for appropriacy based on time ('kal'), place ('desh') and person ('patra') and what is deemed appropriate for a given time, place and person may not be appropriate for another time, place or person (ibid).

'Dharma' in this study's context is not to be seen as an ancient code that requires adhering to. It underlies the habituated practices and propriety considerations of organizational interaction expressed by the participants. It is reflected in how customer-supplier relationships are managed, or the roles and responsibilities within the instructor-learner relational context.

The relative status of the interlocutors is an important factor (Balasubramanian 2019) requiring, for instance, that respect is shown towards 'superiors', whether it be for reasons of relative age, position or expertise.

*Meine Mitarbeiterin Brigitte und ich waren bei den Auftragnehmern in Indien, um die Anforderungen des Projekts durchzuarbeiten. Da Brigitte sich monatelang mit dem Thema befasst hat, hat sie die Diskussion mit den indischen Kollegen geführt, während ich die Ergebnisse gleichzeitig in mein Laptop reingetippt habe. Wir haben festgestellt, dass es für etwas Verwirrung gesorgt hat. Danach wurde ich sogar indirekt darauf angesprochen, ob Brigitte meine Mitarbeiterin sei. Es hat wohl dem indischen Hierarchiesinn nicht so entsprochen. (Company B/22.06.2017/TS/Germany/105)*

*Ich habe das Gefühl, sie machen nur das was sie dürfen, sie achten mehr auf die Grenzen, die von den Vorgesetzten gesetzt werden. (Company A/09.03.2018/SS2/Germany/106)*

'Dharma' postulates a contextual nature of duty and does not universalize the tenets of 'right' behavior. It is not aligned with the maxim of Kant's Categorical Imperative: "Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a Universal Law of Nature" (Kant 1785 in Ellington 1993, p. 30). Kant (1797/2003) assumed that in principle each mature, reflective individual, guided by the Categorical Imperative, could reach the same conclusions about what duty requires.

Kant was often cited by the German participants in this context:

*Was ich von der Zusammenarbeit und der Zeit in Indien mitgenommen habe: die Inder leben weniger nach dem kategorischen Imperativ. Uns wird schon im Kindergarten beigebracht, du kann's nicht tun, was würde passieren, wenn alle es tun würden? Es wurde mir tatsächlich bewusst, dass Kant es nicht erfunden hat, sondern es ist etwas was in uns Deutschen drin ist. Diese Vorstellung von Kant scheint in Indien keinen Sinn zu machen. (Company B/07.02.2019/JS/Germany/107)*

**3.1.7 Knowledge and Power: The Age and Expertise Gap.** As discussed, the concept of hierarchy in 'dharma' and Indian social organizations (Sinha 1990) corresponds to the Power Distance dimension put forward by Hofstede (1984). The acceptance of power differentials reveals itself in the behaviors elicited in the presence of seniority as represented through age:

*We are taught to show respect to elders, we would never use 'du' for our elders, it would not be respectful.* (Company D/07.10.2019/AL/India/108)

*We have to respect our elders' commands from childhood onwards, so it becomes a habit later.* (Company A/08.12.2016/MK/ India/109)

*The young ones without any exposure to the West are often a bit scared of white bosses, especially if they are older.* (Company B/09.05.2017/CV/ India/110)

*Sie gehen anders mit meinem älteren Kollegen um als mit mir. Ich werde geduldet, er wird unterstützt, sie sind bei ihm zutraulicher. Spielt das Alter eine so große Rolle?* (Company A/31.05.2017/MK/Germany/trainee aged 22/111)

Having dwelt on what might be termed Schwarz's "power values" (1992) based on age, authority or wealth, we will now turn to the "achievement values" of power demonstrated through acquired competence.

From a primordialist perspective, knowledge of all kinds – not only cultural knowledge – is a pre-existing condition. Shared forms of knowledge including norms and values confer a culture's majorities (in-group members) power over those without the requisite pre-existing knowledge (Busch 2012, p. 10). Cultural dominance defines what knowledge is, what is worth managing, who should possess it, and who should hoard it (De Long & Fahey 2000)<sup>160</sup>. It is ultimately what determines the nature of prevailing discourse in communities of practice, whether in a social, technical or organizational sense.

The power resource represented in the much-quoted saying "knowledge is power"<sup>161</sup> coined by Francis Bacon in 1597 has been re-examined in a wide variety of contexts from Thomas Hobbes to Michel Foucault (Rodríguez Garcia 2001). Foucault (1977) posits that there is no power relation "without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations" (Foucault 1977, p. 27). He argues that the power of

<sup>160</sup> The routes along which knowledge travels become particularly obvious in virtual team communication. „Beim virtuellen Arbeiten ist derjenige mächtig, der gibt, also in ein Netzwerk einspeist, und nicht derjenige, der nimmt.“ Grabmeier <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/beruf-chance/beruf/virtuelle-teams-arbeiten-mit-kollegen-in-indien-15474185.html> FAZ online 5.3.2018.

<sup>161</sup> scientia potestas est.

knowledge is implicated in the questions of whether and in what circumstances knowledge is to be applied or not. Once applied, the application of knowledge/power becomes 'the truth', whereby the 'micro-physics of power' in the form of tactics, mechanisms and effects has the ability to shape society (ibid).

In historical terms, Braddick and Walter (2001) explicate how inequalities in literacy and access to the written word can render a folk inarticulate. In modern terms, power and knowledge are most clearly seen in the creation and self-reproduction of a professional class of experts in science and communication whose main interest is to keep control over official institutions of learning (Rodríguez Garcia 2001).

Post-modern/post-colonial studies emphasize the knowledge domination of industrialized nations, also in the realm of academic research. It stems from the high cultural standing of science and technology, particularly of technology in the post-modern era<sup>162</sup> (Forman 2007). Not only are academic systems imported but indigenous knowledge is relegated to the periphery<sup>163</sup>. To be recognized, it requires validation of quality from the power centers of the industrialized West (Altbach 2003).

Traditionally, from an Indian perspective, virtue and knowledge are inextricably connected.<sup>164</sup> Brahmins – who were considered individuals born into the highest caste – were traditionally expected to be priests and scholars (Sankaran, Sekerdej & von Hecker 2017).

"The (ancient scripture) Rgveda (8.30.3) says "Do not take us far away from the path prescribed by Manu which has come down to us from our forefathers." However then how do we know what the ancient path prescribed by Manu was? The Satapatha Brahmana (8.6.3.18) says 'Manus are those who are learned'<sup>165</sup>" (Deshpande 1993, p. 63).

Hence, the keeper of knowledge was accorded a place of respect as a fount of both wisdom and virtue. It is revealed in the duplicative organization in the relational pairing of teacher-learner ('guru-shiksha').

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<sup>162</sup> "That is, in modernity the primacy of science to and for technology permitted the word 'science' to mean science and technology, but never—or almost never—permitted the word 'technology' to denote science as well. In postmodernity, with technology acquiring primacy, the word 'technology' gradually becomes capable of including science in its denotative compass."

<sup>163</sup> Bishop (1995) questions the assumption of mathematics as a culture-free zone and posits that "Western mathematics" has imposed its dominance over other indigenous mathematical systems like those of the Navajo or Papua New Guineans.

<sup>164</sup> There are several paths to salvation in Hindu doctrine; the Bhagvad Gita mentions three, one of which is 'jnana marga' or the path of knowledge, the use of long and systematic contemplative training to gain a supraintellectual insight into one's identity with the Infinite (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hinduism/Karma-samsara-and-moksha#ref50477>).

<sup>165</sup> Sanskrit translation: 'Ye vidvamsas te manavah'.

In the land of the guru, the teacher (acharya) was once upon a time venerated as a demigod (deva). From the village schoolmaster to the university don, in India teachers have traditionally been accorded the highest esteem, even if it was not matched by commensurate economic rewards (Jayaram 2003, p. 199).

It is not intended to argue an absolute continuity or permanent relevance of ancient texts to the present day, and the unquestioned veneration of the teacher has undoubtedly undergone a sea-change in Indian academia. The veneration for persons seen as repositories of knowledge is nonetheless still in evidence<sup>166</sup>.

*I have learnt so much in the last two years. My former boss was like a God for me. He knew so much and taught me so much [pause] you cannot imagine.*  
(Company D/07.10.2019/AL/India/112)

The term 'parent' company is in itself indicative of the seniority principle for the Indian participants, as respect towards parents and the teacher are enshrined in the Sanskrit saying "Matha pitha guru deivam" which may be literally translated as "mother, father, teacher, God"<sup>167</sup>.

Learning and education remain an integral part of the aspirational modern-day Indian. Particularly in the field of technology, there is a strong sense of needing to catch up with the industrialized nations, in this case Germany. It is a classic case of the master narrative of modernization theory which places a premium on the western experience of industrialization (Jones 2006, p. 12) Technology and science are seen as a path to modernity and development, and eagerly adopted by more traditional societies in the quest for 'progress'.

*There's a huge demand for learning in India. Even for really young people, there is a dim sense that it will lead on to higher things, whatever these higher things may be, and so educational institutions thrive.* (Company D/19.09.2019/VJ/India/113)

Studies on offshoring have dealt with the offshore unit's lack of domain knowledge (e.g., Carmel and Agarwal 2002; Gregory, Prifling & Beck 2009). Similarly, in this study, technology transfer was largely a one-way process from the parent company in Germany.

Besides technical knowledge, norms, work processes and requirements emerged from the parent companies in Germany. The ongoing process of knowledge

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<sup>166</sup> Paranjpe (2009) suggests that the cultural ideal that dominated the search for knowledge for centuries in India was that of a saint rather than a hero (Sinha 2014).

<sup>167</sup> As with most ancient texts, it offers scope for interpretation, although it is generally accepted that this does not represent a fixed hierarchy of power with the mother at its apex, but rather a natural progression in terms of focus over the course of a lifetime.

transfer on all these fronts served to underscore the instructor-learner relationship. Every one of the Indian colleagues had at a certain point undergone some form of 'training', either on-site or offshore, with the German side in the instructive role.

The knowledge transfer effected at regular intervals assisted in redressing the balance to some degree, and there were even rare instances in this study of a deeper pool of expertise in certain fields at the Indian CoP end.

*Wir [our team] haben die umgekehrte Situation. Wir brauchen das Input der indischen Kollegen, weil sie viel mehr Expertise in diesem Bereich haben.*

(Company A/27.02.2018/HB/Germany/114)

Although the cooperating teams had reached varying degrees of maturity, there was at least a perceptual inclination by the technical Indian CoPs to believe that technical expertise was largely higher at the German end.

*I don't think we're less well-educated than the Germans or less smart, but there are reasons why my German colleagues are technically so well-versed in their subjects. For one thing they are closer to the customers in Germany, then then they are so much older and have worked in the field for years and years. We need a change every so often.* (Company A/08.12.2016/ST/India/115)

*They really believe in in-depth knowledge, working, working, working, going deep, deep, deep. We are like birds going from branch to branch looking for the best place to settle down and picking up all the fruits on the way.* (Company D/10.06.2017/RT/India/116)

*Their domain knowledge in this sector has a longer tradition to fall back on. We are getting there fast but there are still certain gaps to be filled.*

(Company A/03.04.2018/RL/India/117)

Without implying superiority, the importance of expertise in absolute terms was echoed by the German side.

*Wir legen großen Wert auf Fachwissen. Viele meiner Kollegen haben einen Dokortitel. Früher war es sogar eine Voraussetzung. Heute ist es nicht mehr so, aber für manche Positionen sind Doktoren schon besser geeignet.*

(Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/118)

A cross-referencing of roles sometimes led to uncertainties on expected behavioral patterns:

*Es ist schwierig mit der Kommunikation. In meinem Team sind sie [die indischen Kollegen] die Kunden, aber wir sind die Knowhowträger.* (Company B/13.04.2018/SH/Germany/119)

An extension of the expertise role is to be found in the age and experience differentials of the study. As mentioned earlier, in keeping with the demographics of each country, the average Indian employee in this study was almost a generation younger than his/her German counterpart. The factor of age was concomitant with more experience on the German side.

The tendency to conflate experience with expertise in India leads to employees for a promotion being judged on the combined bases of merit and seniority (Virmani and Guptan 1991).

*Wir wachsen stark in Indien, haben in meiner Zeit sehr viel acquired - 50 bis 60 junge Mitarbeiter in einem Jahr. Ich hatte viel zu kämpfen mit dem Thema Erfahrung gegen Leistung. Es wird hoch gewichtet, auch beim Gehalt. Die indischen Kollegen kamen damit: 'Ich habe 9,3 Jahre Erfahrung, der andere nur 7. Warum wird er bevorzugt?'. Mehr Erfahrung ist am Band tendenziell besser, aber in der Entwicklung ist sie wenig aussagekräftig. Man kann 9 Jahre lang einen Führerschein haben, aber ohne Fahrpraxis ist diese Sache nutzlos.*  
(Company B/21.07.2017/AR/Germany/120)

### **3.2 Power Asymmetry: Findings**

Intercultural contacts are not only characterized by cultural conventions but also by the power relations that exist between groups (Hinnenkamp 2009; Ruback & Singh 2016). Brown & Levinson (1987) argue that strategy choices in interaction are influenced by the interactants' social distance (D), relative power (P), and the ranking of the imposition of an act in a particular culture (R).

The theory has been criticized for its simplicity and claim to universality (Fraser 1990), but the study indicates that social distance, relative power and the weightage of cultural conventions have an impact on interaction. g. relative power is a consideration when seeking to minimize the undesirable payoffs of face-threatening acts, and face-threatening acts are culturally determined and ranked (cf. Brown & Levinson 1987).

To summarize, the study indicates that power is based on more than just one parameter – it includes organizational structure, professional role, seniority in terms of age/expertise and, to a marginal degree, perhaps even 'whiteness'. The outcomes lie in differing approaches to power and is apparent in the tension between guidance and self-agency.

#### **3.2.1 Power Factors in Interaction: Guidance vs. Self-Agency As**

Mahadevan (2012) highlights, the interpretative micro perspective assumes that individuals create sameness and difference between groups of people through their doings. Intelligibility is the basis for distinguishing between sameness and difference.

A core analytic issue systematically becomes that of the *intelligibility*, in situ, of various activities and their outcomes and characters for members. (It) results in the systematic uncovering of various cultural conventions that *enable* the production of sense, of practical actions and that inform the organization of social relations and the various practices of social life (Jayyusi 1984, p. 2-3, italics in the original).

Intelligibility is only possible in an intercultural context if cultural conventions are uncovered. The respect accorded to seniority in India created a lack of alignment in the field of tension between guidance and self-agency and inhibited the production of sense.

*In Indien läuft alles momentan über den Abteilungsleiter. Wie bindet man den indischen Gruppenleiter ein, damit er sich nicht übergangen fühlt? Eine Zeitlang hatten wir hier [in Deutschland] in der Gruppe keinen Gruppenleiter und es lief trotzdem. Die Tür des Abteilungsleiters ist immer offen und jeder von uns kann immer hingehen, wenn er Zeit hat. Fachliche Entscheidungen werden mit ihm diskutiert und adressiert. In Indien geht es schon viel hierarchischer zu. Da muss man den Dienstweg einhalten. (Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/121)*

*Bei der Sitzung habe ich eine technische Frage an einen indischen Kollegen gestellt. Er konnte mir die Antwort geben, aber als er damit anfang, hat der indische Leiter ‚just a moment‘ gesagt. Er wurde sofort still. Der Leiter hat etwas Allgemeines zu dem Thema gesagt, das uns nicht weitergebracht hat. Dann bin ich auf die technische Frage nochmals zurückgekommen. Der Ingenieur hat eine Sekunde gezögert, dann hat der Chef leicht genickt und der Ingenieur legte los. Bis er dieses Zeichen des Einverständnisses hatte, war er nicht bereit zu antworten. (Company B/14.03.2016/JH/Germany/122)*

In organizational structures, power relations – whether tacit or explicit – are inevitably linked to roles of leadership. When considering the nature of leadership, Rost (1993) argues that the content of leadership lies, among other determinants, in understanding of situations and “having a grasp of technical information needed in an organization” (p. 4). Guidance is called for from those with the edge in knowledge and experience to restore a certain equilibrium to the power asymmetry.

To achieve the desired equity, one of the numerous practices employed by those in non-dominant groups is the use of liaisons. This practice involves “identification of specific dominant group members who can be trusted for support, guidance and assistance” (Orbe 1998, p. 16) in the hope of redressing the balance.



This attempt on the part of the Indian CoP colleagues to seek guidance was an unfailingly recurring German theme during the analysis of the cooperation. Every single session and interview with the German participants in this study revolved to varying degrees around the Indian need for guidance which was attributed to a lack of self-agency ('Selbstständigkeit'). The figure below shows a German example of perceived gaps and a 'wish list' .

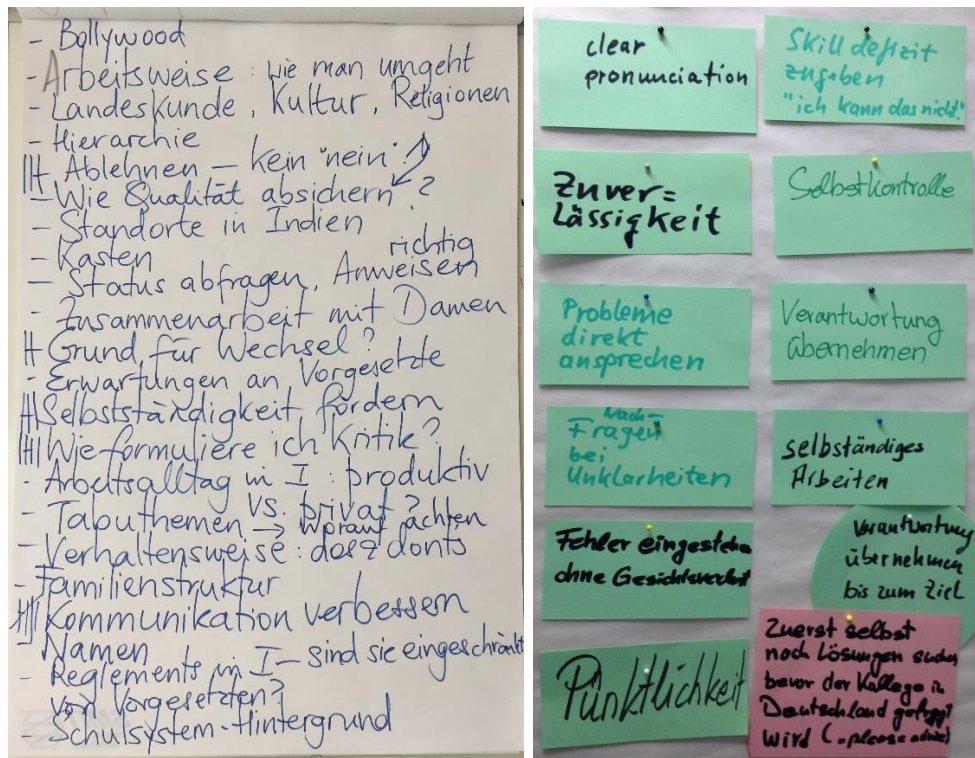


Figure 8. Germany: Topics to Discuss and 'Wish List' (Company B).

It was often conversely mirrored on the Indian CoP's side by the perceived lack of interest in providing 'guidance'.

*It's not easy with them at first. There is no guidance, we have to struggle along, they don't help even when we are thrown into cold water. It doesn't matter whether it's a professional or a personal thing – everyone is supposed to handle his own issues as best as he can and then they complain if it doesn't work out properly. What do they expect when we're new to so many things?* (Company B/28.03.2019/SY/India/123)

Schulz von Thun highlights that values can never be seen in isolation; rather, they need to be considered as a pair of matching opposites that are in a

complementary balance to each other within a field of tension<sup>168</sup> (Schulz von Thun 1989). His 'value and development square'<sup>169</sup> of opposing, paired values ('sisterly virtues') apply both on an individual and cultural level (Rez, Kraemer & Kobayashi-Weinsziehr 2006). In this case, the matched complementary opposites would be represented by the self-attributed German value of 'self-agency' and the corresponding Indian value of 'guidance' in a professional context.

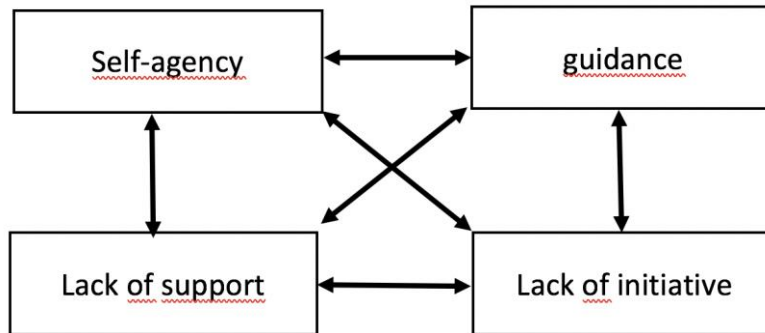


Figure 9. Matched complementary opposites based on Schulz von Thun (1989)

Part of the German bafflement arose from the fact that they often did not perceive themselves in a dominant role:

*Es ist für mich eine neue Erkenntnis, dass die indischen Kollegen eine Hierarchie zwischen uns sehen, die für uns nicht sichtbar ist. Wir sehen sie als Kollegen auf Augenhöhe. (Company A/9.03.2018/JL/Germany/124)*

The other lay in a value system in which confidence and self-agency were normative determinants of professional behavior.

*In Germany people like to show their managers that they can handle things on their own. And it is seen as a sign of trust and confidence in the ability of your staff if managers leave you alone to get on with your job. (Company B/05.04.2019/EL/Germany/125)*

*Sie [die indischen Kollegen] sind – ich will es drastisch sagen – unterwürfig, und ich warte täglich darauf, dass eine Emanzipation stattfindet. (Company A/09.03.2018/SS2/Germany/126)*

This was often accompanied by references to the enlightenment or the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

<sup>168</sup> "... jeder Wert, jede Tugend, jedes Leitprinzip <...> kann nur dann zu einer konstruktiven Wirkung gelangen, wenn er sich in *ausgehaltener Spannung* zu einem positiven Gegenwert, einer ‚Schwestertugend‘, befindet“ (Schulz von Thun 1989/2005, p. 38).

<sup>169</sup> Drawing on Hartmann (1926) and Helwig (1936).

*Die Bereitschaft im Dialog zu arbeiten – wie bekomme ich das hin? Das selbstständige Denken hat bei uns eine lange Tradition – ich denke dabei an Kant. Oder an die Aufklärung. (Company D/10.04.2017/TB/Germany/127)*

In fact, Kant's idea of freedom in his "Critique of Pure Reason" is defined as "independence from being constrained by another's choice" (Kant/Gregor 2003, p. 30). He goes as far as positing that it "is the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity" (ibid). His concern in political philosophy is with innate equality, "that is, independence from being bound by others to more than one can in turn bind them; hence a human being's quality of being *his own master (sui iuris)*" (ibid, italics in the original). This eighteenth-century declaration of belief in innate equality and individual choice based on autonomous thinking is translated into practical terms by the participants:

*Wir sind eher am Abbauen von Ebenen - mit flachen Hierarchien arbeiten. Dort [in Indien] wollen sie mehr und mehr Titel auf den Visitenkarten. Die Chefs werden angehimmelt. Ich verstehe einfach nicht warum. (Company B/08.03.2017/BB/Germany/128)*

*Man versucht in Indien Scrum einzustellen, aber es gestaltet sich schwer, weil Scrum grundsätzlich demokratisch ist und passt nicht ganz zu der indischen Führungskultur. (Company B/23.03.2017/AF/Germany/129)*

To many of the German participants, the reflected power asymmetry was subjectively undesirable.

*Da ist eine gefühlte Hierarchie, man wird mit 'Sir' angesprochen und das ist mir sehr unangenehm. (Company B/22.11.2016/ML/Germany/ senior manager/130)*

*Das muss ich Ihnen erzählen. Ich habe meinem indischen Kollegen mehrmals gesagt, er soll mich nicht „sir“ nennen. Und jedes Mal antwortet er „yes sir“ oder „okay sir“. [laughter] (Company B/20.02.2018/FB/Germany/senior manager/131)*

*Ich bin öfters zu M<sup>170</sup> am Tisch hingegangen, um sie wegen etwas zu sprechen. Sie stand sofort auf und hat sich auch nach Aufforderung von mir nicht hingesetzt. Sie mühte sich im Stehen mit der Tastatur ab. Das war besonders auffällig. Es gab übrigens nur einen Stuhl – ihren. Das hat sie nicht nur einmal gemacht - nee, sondern jedes Mal – bis zur Ausreise. (Company B/28.03.2017/RvD/Germany/132)*

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<sup>170</sup> Indian female colleague on a six-month stay for training in Germany in an interaction with a female team leader (German).

Scholars have suggested that the higher power distance implicit in the value of 'guidance' leads to hierarchically-structured organizations in which lower levels prefer to follow the instructions of superiors (Burns 1998).

*Das Mitdenken fehlt. Es wird nur das gemacht, was vordergründig gesagt wird oder was drinsteht. Es gibt ja kein Schema X passend für alle Aufgaben. Als Auftraggeber kann ich nicht alle Eventualitäten voraussehen und die passenden Anweisungen dafür im Voraus wissen. (Company D/10.04.2017/TB/Germany/133)*

Paternalism – a “hierarchical relationship in which a leader guides professional and personal lives of subordinates in a manner resembling a parent, and in exchange expects loyalty and deference” (Gelfand, Erez, Aycan 2007, p. 493) – is a prevalent managerial style in Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American cultures (Ali 1993; Kim 1994; Osland et al. 2006; Pellegrini, Scandura & Jayaraman 2010). The paternalistic management style in India (Anisya & Annamma, 1994; Sahay & Walsham, 1997) focuses on guidance rather than self-agency as a tool for enabling employees in the workplace. Independent critical thinking and reasoning are less overtly expressed than deference to positional or status authority (cf. Kanungo 1990).<sup>171</sup>

Sinha (2009) prefers the term 'nurturant leadership' that is based on a relationship of 'sneh' (affection) for subordinates who reciprocate by cultivating 'shraddha' (deference). Even in participative leadership models the leader continues to be looked to for inspiration and mentorship (ibid).

*They [the Germans] are much more independent, even the kids. We feed the kids for a long time, till they are five or six. Maybe that's what we see at work too. Sometimes I think they don't even need the boss [smiles]. (Company D/01.04.2019/SJ/India/134)*

The power differential is not the only conclusive cause for a lack of self-agency on the Indian CoP side. A closer look indicates that while dharma, power distance and paternalism were parts of the equation, the Indian requests for 'guidance' were often inspired by practical motives arising from the relative unfamiliarity of each new project.

*We [Indians] are still quite new to this game. Without a certain amount of handholding at first it is going to be hard to make a success of this project. (Company B/29.03.2018/RS/ India/135)*

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<sup>171</sup> Kanungo (1990) goes one step further to contend that Indian employees show a “behavioural disposition” indicating “a personal ethic of helplessness”. Such an oversimplified assertion is not justifiable in the context of this study.

*We still need training in India. We are expanding rapidly, and more and more young people are joining the company. They cannot be expected to do the job properly without input from the experts. (Company B/06.04.2018/BA/India/136)*

This was apparent to the more reflective German participants who adopted a more holistic, less monocausal view of the subject of self-agency. Remote collaboration, unfamiliarity, age factors and lack of adequate specifications from the German end all acted as stumbling blocks on the road to an autonomous workflow.

*Es lief ein halbes Jahr und ich habe es übernommen. Wir hatten noch kein klares Lastenheft und auch andere Vorstellungen, als die die in Indien ankamen. Das erste Jahr habe ich nur virtuell mit ihnen kommuniziert. Ich konnte das Können der Leute nicht einordnen, auch nicht genau was sie tun. Alles war nicht priorisiert, sondern wurde nur sukzessiv abgearbeitet. Ich habe von meiner Seite erwartet, sie würden selbstständig arbeiten. Wenn ich gewußt hätte, dass alle so jung sind, hätte ich sie geleitet. Wie soll ich ihnen sagen, sie sollen es eigenständig gestalten und von sich aus melden, wenn so viele Stolpersteine vorhanden sind? (Company B/29.11.2016/TK/Germany/137)*

**3.2.1 Power Factors in Communication.** Power impinges upon the communication deployed within networks of interdependencies and social relationships (cf. Pfeffer & Salancik 2003). Discourse includes reflections of cultural identities, organizational hierarchies, and political structures. The realization that “some meanings survive while others are rejected, and that some have the power to define a culture by deciding who and what means something” (Cooks 2010, p. 112) makes communication a power-driven issue.

Intercultural communication is both linguistically and sociologically motivated with category membership becoming visible in discourse (Hinnenkamp 1991). It is inextricably intertwined in thinking, speech and conduct. Therefore, the role of the enunciator and reward systems need to be taken into consideration when analyzing socially constituted discourse as social power relationships are embedded in intercultural communication (ibid). The specific manifestations will be discussed in greater detail later, particularly in Chapter 5, where information flows are predicated on the perception of roles.

Without an understanding of the varying cultural conventions concerning power, intelligibility suffers.

“To understand individual and organizational behavior, it must be located in a social and institutional context, and this institutional context both regularizes behavior and provides opportunity for agency and change” (Thornton and Ocasio 2008, p. 46).

The question of how to regularize behavior is based on "genre knowledge", which refers to an individual's repertoire of situationally appropriate responses to recurrent situations, from immediate encounters to distanced communication (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995). Its manifestations have been examined in terms of language (Fairclough 1991, Wodak 1989), sociology (Bourdieu 1991) and sociolinguistics (Young & Fitzgerald 2006).

With the dominant discourse located at the German/customer/parent company end and the Indian CoP's role-based acceptance of the situation, a self-sustaining communication loop integrating the power element was created. The lack of personal contact predicated in remote collaboration and the lack of sustained relationships only permitted understanding at an individual level:

*Es gibt 2 Sorten von Indern – die, die bald offen auf einen zukommen und andere, die sich bis zum Schluss scheuen, den Kontakt aufzunehmen.*

(Company B/13.03.2017/JH/Germany/138)

*Wenn der Kollege sich nicht auf derselben Ebene sieht, traut er sich nicht, seine Kenntnisse darzustellen. Er muss freundlich und kollegial dazu aufgefordert werden.* (Company A/02.07.2016/DS/Germany/139)

Studies indicate that in most Indian organizations there are strong norms that define who is expected to communicate with whom. Junior employees follow these norms and do not simply approach senior employees (Zaidman & Brock 2009). Not only this inarticulacy, but various other forms of communicative practices such as non-response are related to the dynamics of power and will form the substance of chapter 5.

As can be seen in Lasswell's early model of communication (1948), **who** said it is on par with what was said, in what channel it was said, to whom it was said, and with what effect it was said. The idea that the efficacy of utterances is inseparable from the institutions and social relations which give meaning to the utterance is also to be found in Bourdieu:

“What speaks is not the utterance, the language, but the whole social person” (Bourdieu 1977, p. 653)

The seniority of the enunciator transforms the essential nature of the communicative act. It was sometimes cited in traditional Indian terms as an ancient precedent to underline this position.

*Just remember the Indian saying: only when water has run through the ‘shanku’ [conch shell] does it become ‘theertham’ [holy water]<sup>172</sup>. So it is also with what people say. If I say something it is just something I have said, but someone in authority says the same thing, it has real significance. This is true everywhere in the world, right? (Company D/12.01.2019/VKR/India/140)*

*[interjects] Another example are [sic] the pooja fruits. Before the ‘pooja’ [prayer ritual], they are simply fruits from the market. After the blessings of the ‘pooja’, they are holy. It’s the process which makes it sacred – first putting the fruits on the ‘mandap’ [altar], then the ‘mantras’ [sacred verses] that are said by the ‘pujari’ [priest]. (Company D/12.01.2019/TH/India/141)*

### 3.3 Remote Collaboration

Along with power asymmetry, the next contextual element to be examined as a gap factor lies in the mode of remote collaboration. As early as 2009, 10 technologically-mediated communication technologies including email, the Internet, collaboration software, and Web teleconferencing were considered ‘mandatory’ by 50% or more of respondents in the workplace (D’Urso & Pierce 2009). Today, the numbers have risen and digitized communication has become ubiquitous.

The sociology of science offered the first insights into the study of scientific “tribes” and “things social” among them (Latour & Woolgar 2013), an approach considered when discussing the engineering culture in Chapter 2<sup>173</sup>. At the same time, from the social mediation of technology standpoint, technology is in itself a cultural actor which is deserving of interpretations (ibid) which need to be shared to establish coherence within a technical community of practice (Orr 1997).

When studying “technologies *for* communication”, Hutchby (2001) explores the “complex interplay between the *normative structures* of conversational interaction and the *communicative affordances* offered by different technologies” (ibid, p. 13, italics in the original). He argues that while interaction can be shaped by technological media, we simultaneously shape the cultural and interactional properties of these technologies.

A remote team may be defined as a group of geographically and temporally dispersed individuals who are assembled via technology to accomplish an organizational task (Jarvenpaa et al. 1999; Montoya-Weiss et al 2001). Ahuja (2010)

<sup>172</sup> The reference is to the conch shell, which is used as a sacred artefact in Hindu rituals. It symbolizes purity and auspicious beginnings. Not only is it blown to represent the primordial sound ‘Om’, it is also used as a receptacle to sprinkle water or milk over an idol while performing a prayer ritual.

<sup>173</sup> As engineering is based on both science and technology, a conflation of the term ‘science’ with the term ‘technology’ occurs here.

adds further attributes defining remote project teams such as knowledge work, inter-dependability, mutual accountability, and free entry and exit for team members.

Remote collaboration need not indicate a complete absence of face-to-face interaction in every strand of a cooperation network (Bolten 2008)<sup>174</sup>. Dispersion can be spatial and/or temporal, and of varying degrees, from physical location in the same building (low dispersion) or scattered around the world (high dispersion, both spatially and temporally) (O'Leary & Cummings 2007, p.434).

Practitioners<sup>175</sup> classify remote teams into eight categories, including the following:

- Networked teams that are cross-functional in nature and can include members outside the organization.
- Parallel teams within an organization that take on a parallel responsibility until a certain objective is reached.
- Project or product development teams in which specialists worldwide perform a clearly outlined task involving the development of a new product, information system or organizational process, with specific and measurable deliverables.
- Work, production or functional teams when members with clearly-defined roles work independently and come together to provide the end solution.
- Service teams for 24/7 customer support.
- Action teams, which are ad-hoc teams formed for a very short duration of time.
- Offshore teams to outsource portions of technical or software development work, often to a low-cost global location. The offshore team coordinates and collaborates with onshore team, i.e., the lead team, to deliver results. The term offshore team is the most general, as it may intersect with any of the above.

The types of team often have overlapping or blurred borders and the nature of global remote interaction varies depending on the type of team, its processes and objectives. The participants in this study belonged largely to project/product

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<sup>174</sup> "Wenn der Gegenstandsbereich der nachfolgenden Überlegungen auf „virtualisierte multikulturelle Arbeitsumgebungen“ bezogen wird, so ist mit „virtualisiert“ das gesamte Spektrum von Arbeitsbeziehungen gemeint, die nicht überwiegend face-to-face organisiert sind. Die Segmente dieses Spektrums unterscheiden sich eher graduell hinsichtlich der Quantität und der Modalität physischer Präsenz, wobei der Extremfall eines „virtuellen Teams“, das ohne jeglichen Präsenzkontakt arbeitet, faktisch kaum anzutreffen ist" (Bolten 2008, p. 70).

<sup>175</sup> Source: <https://www.managementstudyguide.com/types-of-virtual-teams.htm>



development or were members of functional or offshore teams, including some hybrid variations.

In today's global business environment, the arguments in favor of remote<sup>176</sup> collaboration assisted by technologically-mediated communication are difficult to dispute. By overcoming temporal and geographical limitations, it proffers cost benefits, flexibility, worldwide access, and extends the pool of employee competence (Konradt & Köppel 2008). It saves throughput time, is interdisciplinary, and transparent.<sup>177</sup>

Assessments on the success of remote vs. collocated teams are not free of ambiguity. Whiting and Reardon (1998) surveyed employees from ten regional offices of a Fortune 500 firm twice, once during the transition to remote collaboration and again later. After the initial insecurity during transition, no significant differences were found in the level of commitment between employees in virtual and traditional offices (Robey, Khoo & Powers 2000).

However, the remote collaboration studied did not entail the twin elements of interculturality and unfamiliarity, two elements that hold crucial importance to the current model. The hyperpersonal perspective of social information processing theory puts forward circumstances under which communicators may achieve outcomes that exceed those of their face-to-face counterparts (Walther et al. 2015). It is also argued that facility with remote collaboration is generation-dependent and that Generation Z<sup>178</sup> members – the first generation to be born into a digital world – are significantly more tech-centred and more agile as communicators.<sup>179</sup>

It would be premature to expect a wealth of research into the communicative practices of Gen Z, although numerous studies dealing with the earlier generations (the target groups addressed here) indicate that despite a familiarity with and a proclivity for technology, remote collaboration – both interculturally and otherwise – is prone to different missteps than traditional collaboration, at least in the initial stages (Bolten 2008; Bronner & Jedrzejczyk 2008; Conti 2011; Hinds & Mortensen 2005; Köppel 2007; Montoya-Weiss et al 2001; Stumpf 2005).

The participants in this study did not posit that the difficulties posed by remoteness were insurmountable, but without exception all locations agreed that personal interaction during the on-site phases was beneficial in the work setting.

*In den 1990-er Jahren hatten wir nur telefonische Kontakte, was durch die damalige Technik noch erschwert war. Alles war ein Problem – das Englisch,*

<sup>176</sup> Also termed “virtual”, “distributed”, or “geographically dispersed”.

<sup>177</sup> “Wenn der Kollege in Indien sitzt” (Oliver Schmale 05.03.2018).  
[HTTP://WWW.FAZ.NET/AKTUELL/](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/)

<sup>178</sup> The post-2000 generation (US Census Bureau).

<sup>179</sup> <https://us.nttdata.com/en/-/media/assets/white-paper/apps-dbc-mind-the-gap-white-paper.pdf>

*die Verbindung, der Kontakt mit völlig unbekanntem Menschen, die man noch nie gesehen hat. Seit einigen Jahren haben wir 4-5 indische Kollegen, die immer wieder vorbeischauen und die Zusammenarbeit hat sich total gebessert.*  
(Company B/28.03.2017/TD/Germany/142)

In some cases, responses indicated that the smoothly-working nature of the cooperation during the collocated period deteriorated after a return to remote communication.

*So lange sie [die indischen Kollegen] hier waren lief es einwandfrei. Wir haben uns regelmäßig ausgetauscht und es gab kaum Missverständnisse. Aber die Kommunikation hat sich verschlechtert, seitdem sie wieder zurück sind. Es ist nicht ganz so undurchsichtig wie vor dem Onsite Training, aber trotzdem.*  
(Company B/04.04.2019/JV/Germany/143)

It is therefore crucial to examine the role of remote collaboration in communication and to consider its implications for the communication gaps perceived by the participants.

**3.3.1 Remote Communities of Practice.** It has been suggested in Chapter 2 that engineering teams may also be considered communities of practice (CoP). A CoP may be defined as a group “of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder 2002, p. 4).

In a team, two or more individuals share a concern by performing organizationally-relevant tasks based on one or more common goals. As they exhibit task interdependencies, they are required to interact socially and share knowledge and skills to achieve their goals (Harris & Harris 1996). Additionally, they maintain and manage boundaries and are embedded in an organizational context that sets boundaries, constrains the team, and influences exchanges with other units in the broader entity (Kozlowski & Bell 2003).

This is not to argue that a CoP and a team are absolutely identical. A CoP may also revolve around a looser network based on participation rather than a pre-determined one based on official status (Wenger 1998, 2008). However, there is no reason to perceive these definitions as mutually exclusive. A CoP can be both deliberately established with a defined purpose and appointed members as well as spontaneously emerging and created by interested members (cf. Amin & Roberts 2008). In fact, some scholars believe that organizations can play a supportive role in providing structures to create CoPs and foster communicative interaction around them (Schwen & Hara 2003; Thompson 2005).

A remote team, a "virtual community of practice" (VCoP) (Dube, Bourhis & Jacob 2005) or a "mobile community of practice" (MCoP) (Kietzmann et al. 2013) display the same fundamental characteristics, with the additional factor of geographical distance between team members bridged through technological media. The final layer to a remote team is when the spatial distance between team members is predicated on the diversity of the cultures involved.

As Dube et al. (2006) highlight, three levels of cultural influence may be considered in the context of a CoP: the historical interactional space (Hitzler 2002) based on geographical location (South India and South Germany), the organizational culture of multinational technology companies, and the professional 'engineering' culture of engineering/IT. Not all of these forms of diversity are necessarily salient in all intercultural remote teams.

Wenger (1998 a) posits that a community of practice defines itself along three dimensions (ibid, p. 2):

- What it is about: its joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members.
- How it functions: the relationships of mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity.
- What capability it has produced: the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artefacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

In a classic CoP, the above dimensions are a joint enterprise which lead to bonding through a constant state of negotiation through participation. Participation refers to "a process of taking part and also to the relations with others that reflect this process" (Wenger 1998 b, p. 55). Participation goes hand in hand with cooperative relationships, a mutual engagement built on a shared repertoire of norms, work practices and familiar routines (Kietzmann et al. 2013).

In a virtual CoP – partly as it is not a CoP of its own volition – technology-mediated interaction appears to impede the sense of belonging and trust. Trust is a factor which increases the likelihood of comprehension, open exchange and sharing (e.g., Hildreth, Kimble, & Wright 2000; Pan & Leidner 2003). It is a loop in which comprehension, open exchange and sharing facilitate trust-building – factors that are more difficult to recreate in virtual settings.

The VUCA (Abidi & Joshi 2015) – volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – of today's globalized world finds its echo in the collaboration of intercultural remote teams (Bolten & Berhault 2017). Bolten and Berhault (2017) suggest that the partiality, temporary nature, weak ties and less clearly delineated rules of behavior in

remote collaboration speak for the “V” of volatility, the uncertainty regarding the joint framework of action for the “U”, the complexity of multi-channel communication for the “C” and the ambiguity of actions arising from lack of familiarity for the “A”.

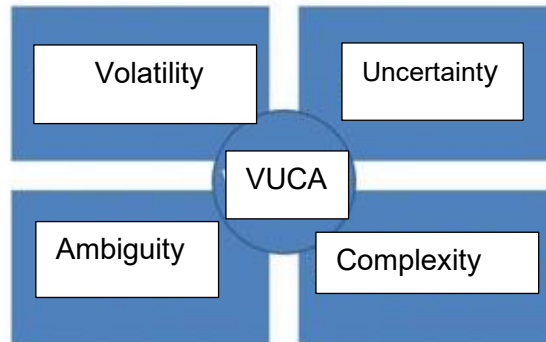


Figure 10. VUCA Model (Abidi & Joshi 2015).

The element of interculturality lays a wash over the remoteness, reinforcing each of these VUCA factors and thus further diluting the normalcy and plausibility of familiar routines (ibid).

### 3.3.2 VOPA: Trust.

As a counteractive strategy to VUCA contexts, a VOPA strategy for trust building is suggested, as a German acronym for networking, openness, participation and agility (Buhse 2014; Petry 2016).

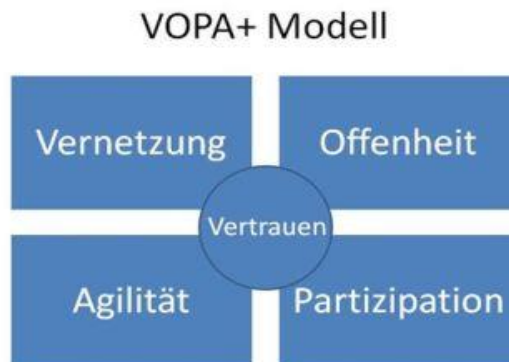


Figure 11. VOPA Model (Petry 2014, based on Buhse 2014).

Luhmann (1979, p. 71) posits that trust has a social function in reducing the complexity of social life, thus covering almost every aspect of a VUCA situation<sup>180</sup>. It therefore holds particular interest to view this elusive beast both from a general VUCA/VOPA perspective and its extended applicability to remote collaboration.

<sup>180</sup> Mistrust – the de facto opposite of the phenomenon postulated by Luhmann – also constitutes a means of reducing complexity (Busch 2008), even if it is not the ideal state in an ongoing collaboration.

Trust has been researched from many different approaches: as a question of utility (e.g., Coleman 1990), as a matter of routines (e.g., Zucker 1986) or as a processual, dynamic construct (e.g., Möllering 2013; Nooteboom 1996) (Tøth 2015, p. 27-28).

Rousseau et al. (1998) postulate that there are two essential elements to the trust paradigm: risk and interdependence. Schweer (2003, 2008) agrees in principle but focuses more on reciprocity than interdependence. The uncertainty<sup>181</sup> associated with risk is reduced cognitively by an expected performative certainty (Habermas 2003) not only of persons, but also of systems, structures, controlling mechanisms, propositions, and knowledge (cf. Schweer 2003). Reciprocity is based on expectations: "All social interaction is an endless process of acting upon expectations, which are part cognitive, part emotional, and part moral" (Barber 1983, p. 9). A 'trust object' arises when the 'trust subject' anticipates the reactive future (Schweer 2003: *own translation*) based on these expectations.

Goffman's example puts this succinctly in everyday terms: "It is apparent that if performers are concerned with maintaining a line they will select as team-mates those who can be trusted to perform properly" (Goffman 1978, p. 95).

It is difficult to anticipate the reactive future of expectations in a remote environment with unknown individuals. Trust therefore becomes "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al. 1998, p. 395).

*Die Kommunikation ist wirklich ein Problem. Ich frage mich, ist es jetzt angekommen? Wann weiß man, dass es richtig verstanden wurde?* (Company B/08.03.2017/SG/Germany/144)

McAllister (1995) distinguishes between affective and cognitive dimensions of trust, even if the dividing line between rational thinking and feeling is an artificial one. Affect-based trust refers to the "emotional bonds between individuals" that are grounded upon expressions of "genuine care and concern for the welfare" of the other party (McAllister 1995, p. 26). It emphasizes empathy, affiliation, and rapport based on shared regard for the other person.

Affective trust acts as a cushion for handling the ambiguity and volatility of a virtual, intercultural environment. Unlike enforceable trust – which is calculative and incentive-driven and can be created by contractual and legislative means – affect-

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<sup>181</sup> Simmel (1968) perceives trust as the middling position between knowing and not knowing. If everything is known, trust is not required; if nothing is known it would not be sensible to trust ("ein mittlerer Zustand zwischen Wissen und Nichtwissen"... "der völlig Wissende braucht nicht zu vertrauen, der völlig Nichtwissende kann vernünftigerweise nicht einmal vertrauen" (Simmel 1968: 263).

based trust is an intrinsic trust that instinctively promotes networks of human beings and creates a sense of community (Hofstede G.J. 2009, p. 88).

Creating a sense of community through trust – both affect- and cognition-based – is essential to managing remote teams. Continuity and familiarity minimize endogenous uncertainty and the risks of affording trust. The challenges posed by VUCA remoteness are threefold: 1) managing indirect, sporadic relations of reciprocity, 2) acquiring familiarity with the others' cultural repositories of knowledge, and 3) creating a shared repertoire of plausibility, routines and visions to ensure the evolution of in-depth structures (Bolten 2008).

### 3.4 Remote Communication

Shared repertoires do not emerge in isolation but are rather created in interaction with communication as a carrier. Etymologically speaking, communication derives from 'communicare', meaning to share, join, unite or participate in. Ultimately, communication relates to how interaction is managed, in the hope of producing the most effective individual, relational, group, or institutional outcomes. Consequently, every form of communication – whether dialogically and interactionally organized – is worth examining, along with its technological affordances that provide the required infrastructure for its creation (Beißwenger et al. 2017).

Remote communication may be defined as the process of exchanging information and communication at a distance, mediated by new information technologies. Androutsopoulos (2013, 2016) maintains that digital communication can be viewed from two perspectives: 1) as a "text" or archive of semiotic artefacts or 2) as a "space", an interactive space for communicative action, whether through language or other semiotic means. Both perspectives can be complementary in terms of intercultural learning (Androutsopoulos 2016).

Technology-mediated communication (TMC)<sup>182</sup> is a reflexive process, as it both influences and is influenced by the media that it employs. This feature is the precise focus of social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram or gaming platforms. In fact, they are even in a position to facilitate bonding and enrich intercultural understanding for multilingual young<sup>183</sup> people (cf. Androutsopoulos 2014).

However, they are not comparable with organizational TMC in terms of either handling or motivation. Social media sites are voluntary and relationship-based with intentional built-in interactivity. They are horizontal bonds created by and among people with shared interests (Cairncross 2001). A primary feature of social media applications – the interpersonal and interorganizational network structures developed

<sup>182</sup> Sometimes termed CMC for computer-mediated communication (cf. Walther 2015).

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Generation Z.

via friending and following behavior – is explicitly directed at creating opportunities for interpersonal engagement, interactivity, and dialogue (Lovejoy & Saxton 2012).

Organizational TMC is qualitatively different in the sense that it is mandated and limits choice to participate. It is primarily task-based, even with the presence of chat-like platforms for off-the-record communication to augment other channels such as email and remote conferencing. Significantly, unlike most social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram, which thrive on visual input, organizational communication in many cases actually restricts the use of technology-assisted visual communication due to European data protection regulations and privacy concerns.<sup>184</sup>

Any form of communication can potentially lead to misunderstandings<sup>185</sup>. Face-to-face interaction involves enormous feats of adaptation to cope with potential misunderstandings. There is a constant calibration between politeness and explicitness, an ongoing process of evaluating the interlocutors' beliefs and inferential effort (cf. Levinson 1994) and clarifying the ambiguities of language (Vendler 1994).

It can be argued that TMC inhibits this supple, adaptive process even in neuropsychological terms. TMC could impede the mind's fundamental ability to share attention with other human beings. Tomasello (2000, p. 406) posits that this ability emerges in non-linguistic form in childhood, near the end of the first year of life. Joint attentional skills develop at around 9 to 12 months of age, including following gaze direction, gestures, facial expression or directing attention using gestural signals. The simplest form of technologically-mediated communication based on the written word narrows the range of intersubjective signals, which makes for attentional engagement. It has become almost a truism that methods which include visuals in addition to voice – such as Zoom or WebEx – stimulate attentional engagement.

The backdrop to analyzing remote intercultural collaboration will be discussed under four sub-headings: 1) the role of proximate interaction, 2) media richness, 3) the unfamiliarity of cultural otherness, and 4) knowledge sharing.

### **3.5 Proximate Interaction**

The importance of shared space for proximate interaction has been identified by Stedman (2002, p. 562), who states that “a place is a centre of meaning, or field of care <...> based on human experience, social relationships, emotions and thoughts”. As human interaction takes place in time and space, inter-group processes are inevitably

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<sup>184</sup> With a very few exceptions, video conferencing in the companies studied was permitted when it is structured, supervised and limited to rooms specially designated for the purpose. In nearly all the companies studied, the camera feature on individual monitors had to be taped over or otherwise deactivated in some sensitive fields. With the advent of Covid 19, some changes are likely to be in process.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. the classic quote “Nothing is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood” (Freeman Teague Jr.).

linked to these dimensions. In practical terms, collocated work spaces are the setting for co-presence.

For generations, collocated work environments were so much the norm that “passive face time” (Elsbach, Cable & Sherman 2010) was taken for granted<sup>186</sup>. Collocation may be defined as a location where co-workers can get to each other’s workspaces with a short walk<sup>187</sup> (Olson & Olson 2000). The advantages of collocated cooperation are innumerable. They include rapid feedback, multiple channels to convey subtlety and nuances, shared local context for understanding, easy socializing and social bonding (ibid).

Ideally, remote collaboration should be in a position to replicate most – if not all – of these characteristics. Clark and Brennan (1991) distinguish between the various requirements to obtain common ground. Some of these are actually better served through asynchronous TMC. They posit that visibility, audibility, contemporality and simultaneity are the characteristics of collocated environments, but TMC is better suited to sequentiality (preventing disorder), reviewability (e.g., of what was discussed), and revisability (rethinking a message before it is sent). The body of research into remote work remains a nascent – albeit growing – one<sup>188</sup> and it presents both inconclusive and conflicting findings. The debate over the effects of distance on collaboration is therefore far from over.

Conventional wisdom suggests that team members’ objective distance (e.g., measured in miles) translates into subjective distance (i.e., a team’s perception of distance between its members). It takes more intentional participation effort from members and from the virtual CoP’s leader to keep the community alive (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002). High geographic dispersion complicates participation in face-to-face meetings, and different time zones often render synchronous communication impossible. Besides, high geographic dispersion is also likely to increase the cultural diversity of a virtual CoP (Dubé, Bourhis & Jacob 2006).

Numerous studies have argued that physical distance has a negative impact on liking, cooperative trust and other desirable outcomes (Allen 1977; Shapiro et al. 2002). TMC can reduce overall communication frequency within a social network (Sarbaugh-Thompson and Feldman 1998), thus hampering network survival and growth (Shapiro et al. 2002).

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<sup>186</sup> Elsbach et al. (2010) suggest that “passive face time’ leads to trait inferences about others, e.g., whether an employee is dependable or committed”.

<sup>187</sup> They use the 30 meters described by Allen (1997) and Kraut et al. (1990) to specify what is meant by ‘short’.

<sup>188</sup> However, the field of proximity studies is not of recent origin, dating back to the 1950s with scholars as such as Caplow and Forman (1950), Festinger (1951), and Newcomb (1954).



At the same time, there is research positing the contrary notion that the physical property of geographical distance does not necessarily influence the subjective perception of the same. It is not the sole indicator of psychological distance: if this were the case, physical proximity would always engender affective ties, which is manifestly not the case. It is erroneous to assume that proximate contact will of itself produce better relations between groups (Pettigrew 1998). Relationality and social proximity can transcend mere physical proximity (Amin & Cohendet 2004) and remote relationships are capable of being as social, sticky and tacit as proximate ones (Nonaka & Konno 1998).

It is too limited to visualize physical distance as a dichotomous alternative to collocated teams. Reactions to workplace stimuli are more influenced by their perceptions of these stimuli than merely by their physical properties (Siebdrat, Hoegl & Ernst 2009). The experience-based responses of the participants regarding their perceptions did not place exclusive emphasis on physical proximity; rather, they adopted a differentiated position that *periods* of face-to-face collocation were of crucial importance for desirable outcomes in collaboration. Contradicting the ‘death of distance’ celebrated by Cairncross<sup>189</sup> (1997), face-to-face interaction was viewed as contributing to collaboration.

*Just that kick-off workshop where we all met was enough at the beginning – there was a proper face to put to the names and get a feel of who we’ll be working with. We realized it needs to be refreshed every now and then...but...these face-to-face impressions don’t last forever you know.*  
(Company B/09/05/2017/CV/India/145)

*It’s really helped now that we’ve met them personally. We see them as people and are not so scared about voicing our opinion. They’re really nice people, but we can’t know that if we only mail or have videocons.* (Company A/03/04/2018/EJ/India/146)

*Es war sehr hilfreich, die Inder in Bangalore persönlich kennenzulernen<sup>190</sup>, auch wenn man sie zuvor über skype kennengelernt hat. Es hat dem Projekt richtig Auftrieb gegeben zu wissen ...wer ist wer und wer kann was.* (Company B/16.05.2017/SJ/Germany/147)

*Sobald die indischen Kollegen hier sind, läuft es auf einmal viel besser. Man braucht ein Gesicht, damit man effektiv kommunizieren kann.* (Company B/26.01.2016/KM/Germany/148)

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<sup>189</sup> However, despite the implications of the title, Cairncross (2001) also admits to “the enduring importance of proximity in commercial and social life” (p. 5).

<sup>190</sup> The echo of the English remark just above is worth noticing.

*Wenn man mit ihnen zusammen gegessen hat, gibt es gute Erfahrungen. [laughter] (Company B/16.05.2017/EH/Germany/149)*

Their experience suggests that there is a spatial character to social action and structure (cf. Kono et al. 1998). Without questioning the fundamental need for TMC, there was agreement that a higher density or regularity of proximate interaction was essential for sustaining and furthering a collaborative environment (cf. Pettigrew 1998).

*Ich bin ständig am Telefon und Skpe mit Indien – jeden Tag, manchmal mehrmals am Tag. Aber ich fliege ständig auch nach Indien, weil die persönliche Verbindung über Skype sehr schwierig ist. Es funktioniert viel besser, wenn man sich persönlich kennengelernt hat, zusammen gelacht hat. (Company B/22.05.2017/AB/Germany/150)*

*Wir haben gute Erfahrungen in USA gemacht mit einer permanenten Videoverbindung mit den indischen Kollegen. Es gibt dort einen Bildschirm, der ständig an ist und wo man die indischen Kollegen immer sehen kann – eine virtuelle Verlängerung des Großraumbüros. Es ist eine ganz normale Videokonferenz, nur rund um den Arbeitstag und mit einem großen Bildschirm, wo alles zu sehen ist. (Company A/04.10.2016/LR/Germany/151)*

Two of the best-known theories that point in the same general direction are briefly described below.

**3.5.1 Berry's Model of Acculturation.** Sharing collocated space ties in with the notion of acculturation. One classical definition is as follows:

Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups. (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits 1936, p. 149)

Berry's (1984) model of acculturation maintains that acculturation processes through contact are contingent upon two factors: cultural maintenance and contact-participation. The former implies the extent to which an individual strives to maintain his/her own cultural identity, while the latter refers to the extent to which individuals value and seek out contact/involvement with the other group. The degree to which these two variables are embraced or rejected determines inter-group dynamics.

Berry's model holds more relevance in immigrant contexts, but the notion of internal impetus to share and accommodate other viewpoints is equally applicable in organizational interaction. Unlike social media spaces – where interaction is (nearly) always predicated on voluntary self-agency – this model also considers the motivation driving first-hand contact.

### 3.5.2 Contact Hypothesis

Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis or intergroup contact theory is more optimistic when suggesting that subjective distance can be combated by proximate interaction. Under appropriate conditions, inter-group contact changes group attitudes, reduces subjective distance and fosters more harmonious inter-group relations. This "exposure effect" leads to contact effects such as greater liking and empathy and – of significance in our VUCA environment – it reduces uncertainty and enhances trust (Pettigrew & Tropp 2011)<sup>191</sup>.

Pettigrew (1998) suggests extending the contact theory by addressing process in his longitudinal model. Four interrelated processes operate sequentially over time and through contact to mediate attitude change: learning about the out-group, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and in-group reappraisal. The behavioral process also benefits from repeated contact, preferably in varied, multiplex settings (Jackman & Crane 1986). Repetition makes inter-group encounters comfortable and, in a benevolent environment, leads to liking (Pettigrew 1998, p. 71).

### 3.6 Media Richness

The variety and density of the communicative process is evident in Bolten's (1999) four-fold classification of both oral and written communication ('Kommunikationsstile') – verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal and extra-verbal. Verbal components include lexical, syntactical, rhetorical and stylistic means of creating text, and sequence of propositions. The non-verbal category includes facial expression, gestures, posture and gaze behavior; para-verbal is made up of volume, pitch and tone of voice, speech rhythms, laughter, throat-clearing, pauses and accent; and extra-verbal contains time, place, communicative relationship, dress, contexts, tactile and olfactory aspects (Bolten 1999, p. 114).

Both proximate and TMC can involve intercultural challenges for communicators, but the essential question of whether technology works as a simulacrum of physically proximate interaction remains. In terms of affordances there is reason to suppose that TMC does not possess the entire range of channels needed to transmit communication in its fullest sense. In terms of constraints, technology may frame rather than determine social action (Hutchby 2001).

Media richness theory as put forward by Daft and Lengel (1986, p. 196) defines it as "the potential information-carrying capacity of data. If the communication of an item of data, such as a wink, provides substantial new understanding, it would be

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<sup>191</sup> Elsbach (2010) goes as far as positing that in face-to-face interaction, i.e., "just being around" one another, co-workers were evaluated more positively than the remote counterparts.

considered rich. If the datum provides little understanding, it would be low in richness". A medium's capacity for "immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, personalization, and language variety" (ibid, p. 560) all influence its degree of information richness.

The media richness construct is defined theoretically by four sub-dimensions: (1) the number of cue systems supported by a medium, (2) the immediacy of feedback with unidirectional, asynchronously bidirectional or simultaneous bidirectional interaction, (3) the potential for natural language, and (4) message personalization. Obviously, these requirements are best met in face-to-face communication, as direct contact generally involves rich media (ibid 1987).

Richness holds situational relevance. For example, richer media leads to improved performance for equivocal tasks. In fact, the more equivocal a situation, the more media richness required (ibid). This needed to be learned through experience:

*Ich habe seit über 10 Jahren Kontakt und habe immer ganz gut mit ihnen gearbeitet. Bei den Routineaufgaben läuft es inzwischen hervorragend. Bei neuen Projekten oder komplexen Aufgaben weniger. Da habe ich manchmal das Gefühl, man muss ihnen die Würmer aus der Nase ziehen. (Company B/31.01.2017/MM/Germany/152)*

Media richness theory is historically preceded by Korzenny's (1978) electronic propinquity theory, which concerns the psychological closeness experienced by remote communicators. Korzenny (1978) argues that electronic communicators could also experience a sense of closeness if certain factors are given. These include – among others – the capacity of a channel to convey multiple-cue systems, mutual directionality (like immediacy of feedback), greater communication skills and relative simplicity of a task. Considering that this theory predates modern-day TMC, it appears interestingly prescient.

As previously mentioned, the companies studied did not fully exploit communication technology for various reasons including privacy regulations and an unreliable communications infrastructure at some locations. It was practically limited in everyday terms to email, phone, and company-internal chat platforms. Non-interactive resources such as referential databases – repositories of technical information – were also deployed. Therefore, not only was face-to-face interaction largely absent, but even its equivalent in TMC – video-assisted communication – was only sporadically utilized.

Yee et al.'s (2007) findings support the hypothesis that social interactions in online virtual environments are governed by the same social norms as social interactions in the physical world. On this basis, some of the affordances and

constraints of TMC will be discussed against theories related to the media richness perspective.

**3.6.1 Social Presence Theory.** A lack of face-to-face contact among participants can reduce group identity and make relational ties more fragile (Shapiro et al., 2002), an idea harking back to Social Presence Theory. In their seminal work, Short et al. (1976, p.65) originally devised the concept that social presence is the degree of salience – i.e., the quality of being there – between communicators using a communication medium, and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships. Gunawardena (1995) defines it more tangibly as “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (Gunawardena 1995, p. 151).

Their work sees social presence as a construct primarily based of two main concepts: ‘intimacy’ (Argyle & Dean 1965) and ‘immediacy’ (Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). Argyle and Dean (1965) posited that intimacy in a communication medium is influenced by a number of factors, such as physical distance, facial expression, eye contact, smiling, and personal topics of conversation<sup>192</sup>. Immediacy is defined by Wiener and Mehrabian (1968) as communication behaviors that enhance closeness in interaction. Intimacy and immediacy emphasize the role of non-verbal and extra-verbal behaviors, and verbal immediacy includes the use of name, humor and encouraging input and discussion.

Garrison et al. (2000, p. 94) draw on the intimacy and immediacy concept when defining social presence “as the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people (i.e., their full personality), through the medium of communication being used”. While Gunawardena’s definition relates to perception, Garrison’s focuses on projection. All the definitions consider the interpersonal emotional connection between communicators. Lowenthal (2010) suggests that all of these definitions of social presence fall along a continuum, ranging merely from the perception of being “real” at one end to positive affective connections between the actors at the other.

Short et al. (1976) hypothesize that communications media vary in their degree of social presence, whereby these variations are important in determining the way in which individuals interact. They posit that the capability of the medium to transit verbal and non-verbal cues is determined by the user’s perceptions towards the medium. Video-assisted media convey a higher degree of social presence and are viewed as

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<sup>192</sup> Cf. Malinowski (1935): “It is very profitable in linguistics to widen the concept of context so that it embraces not only spoken words but facial expression, gesture, bodily activities, the whole group of people present during an exchange of utterances and the part of the environment in which these people are engaged” (Malinowski 1935:22 in Senft 2014).

being more sociable and personal. Social presence is a subjective quality of the medium, although it is also dependent on the medium's objective qualities. When it is combined with "interactivity" or the actual quality of the communication sequence (Rafaeli & Sudweeks 1997) and is also noticed by the participants, there is a higher degree of social presence.

### 3.6.2 Social Information Processing Theory

The positions discussed above signal general agreement that social presence along the entire range of the continuum is enhanced by socioemotional communication through non-verbal and extra-verbally encoded messages. They are aligned to social influence theories which consider processes such as attitude change (Tesser & Shaffer 1990), persuasion (Cacioppo & Petty 1984), and compliance (Cialdini & Goldstein 2004). These theories would lead to the argument that interaction that most closely mimics collocated situations enables interlocutors to engage in natural and seamless communication.

However, there are other schools of thought. Among them are social influence theory in TMC (Fulk, Schmitz, & Steinfield, 1990; Fulk, Steinfield, Schmitz, & Power, 1987) and channel expansion theory (Carlson & Zmud, 1994, 1999). Both depart from the assumption that fixed properties can be ascribed to various media and they also highlight the factor of perceptions and interactive, networked processes.

Walther (2011) sums them up as follows:

Whereas social influence theory focuses on how dynamic interaction in a social network of communicators predicts and explains how users come to perceive CMC's richness, the primary focus of channel expansion theory is on internal, experiential factors. The theory's original, central argument is that as individuals gain more experience with a particular communication medium, the medium becomes richer for them (Carlson & Zmud, 1994). That is, theoretically, it becomes more capable for the conduct of equivocal and interpersonally oriented communication tasks <.....> In social influence theory, Fulk et al. (1987) argue, the nature of media and their potentials are socially constructed, and the richness and utility of a medium are affected by interaction with other individuals in one's social network (Walther 2011, p. 457).

Walther's (1992) social information processing perspective continues in this vein to dispute that socioemotional expression relies on the exhibition and detection of non-verbally encoded messages, and that text-based messaging without non-verbal cues must therefore lack socioemotional expression. Walther & Parks (2002) posit that with time, communicators learn to manage remote relationships by adapting non-verbal social information to achieve the desired levels of immediacy. By textualizing non-

verbal content, remote interpersonal relationships may demonstrate the same relational dimensions and qualities as proximate ones.<sup>193</sup> The use of emoticons to express missing non-verbal cues and enhance socioemotional experience is one such strategy (Gunawardena & Zittle 1997; Miller et al. 2016).

However, there are certain assumptions underlying these theories as well. One assumption is that the communicators involved are equally motivated to develop relational ties with each other, an assumption that cannot be taken for granted in an organizational context. In fact, there were even certain pockets of irritation:

*Warum stellen sie sich so umständlich an? Ich bekenne mich zum Problem, nehme es an und suche nach einer passenden Lösung.* (Company B/10.04.2018/MW/Germany/153)

Second, the social influence theory of CMC/TMC predicts that one's strong ties have more influence on one's perception of media richness compared with one's weak ties. It contends that people's perceptions are affected by the opinions and email-oriented behaviors of other individuals who share strong sociometric ties to one another (Fulk, Schmitz, & Steinfield 1990). In a sense, this puts the cart before the horse: social ties are not formed through TMC but are influenced by them. Gunawardena & Zittle's findings (1997) are in agreement, claiming that a higher sense of social presence encourages the use of emoticons for socioemotional emphasis, indicating that social presence precedes their use rather than the other way around.

Although Walther (2011) argues for a learning curve in interpersonal relationships through TMC, he also contends that it is a slower process:

Because verbal communication with no nonverbal cues conveys a fraction of the information of multimodal communication, communication functions should require a longer time to take place. CMC users need time to compensate for the slower rate in order to accumulate sufficient information with which to construct cognitive models of partners and to emit and receive messages with which to negotiate relational status and definition (Walther 2011, p. 458).

In short, richness and density of communication remain crucial to the success of distributed teams (Hinds & Mortensen 2005). Distributed teams whose members do not communicate frequently and share information evenly with one another are at risk of rampant miscommunications (Cramton 2001).

In the context studied, the motivation to communicate with the sufficient breadth and depth appeared to be initially lacking, particularly with the Germany-based

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<sup>193</sup> Short et al. (1976) observed that because of the reduced-cue situation, participants modified their behavior, for example by using verbal phrases like "I agree" for head-nodding.

participants. The efficiency framework (Nowak, Watt & Walther 2009) predicts that expending less effort is preferred to more effort, not only on tasks but also on communication. The expenditure of effort better predicts outcome success than do user preferences, with greater perceived group effectiveness for synchronous text and face-to-face interactions (Nowak, Watt & Walther 2009). Enjoyment or frustration responses override an individual's objective assessment of effectiveness (Walther 2011).

The reluctance to extend the range and frequency of communication channels was often based on pragmatic reasoning, such as time constraints or linguistic hurdles.

*Mein Verständnis ist, dass es ihnen schwerfällt, unstrukturierte Aufgaben zu übernehmen. Die Strukturierung ist aber Teil der Aufgabe, Vorgeben funktioniert nicht. Es klappt am Besten, wenn man die Pakete gut strukturiert, fein gegliedert und detailliert rübergibt – bloß nicht offen reingeben. Das kann ich in der Zeit aber selber machen. (Company A/31.05.2017/DH/Germany/154)*

*Der Kommunikationsaufwand ist riesig. Ich verbringe mehr Zeit mit Standups und Telefonaten als mit der eigentlichen Aufgabe. (Company B/04.04.2017/MB/Germany/155)*

*Ich spreche ganz gut Englisch, aber mit meinen indischen Kollegen habe ich so meine Probleme. Sie nuscheln so...und sprechen oft zu leise. (Company B/26.01.2016/MD/Germany/156)*

There was a distinct and expressed preference for written communication over telephone or Skype, again from the Germany-based participants<sup>194</sup>. The disinclination for verbal communication also stemmed from precisely the non-verbal and para-verbal factors which are believed to enhance communication: The varying degrees of language proficiency, unfamiliarity with accents and hesitation to interact with personally-unknown colleagues on both sides led to a reluctance to engage in telephone conversations.

*Ich habe grosse Schwierigkeiten mit der Kommunikation übers Telefon, besonders wenn er schneller spricht. Es liegt auch am Akzent. (Company B/ 25.04.2017/CB/Germany/157)*

*Ich habe nach Anderthalbjahren immer noch Schwierigkeiten mit dem Akzent. Nach dreimal hintereinander nachfragen, kapituliere ich und bitte um eine Mail. Inzwischen gibt es fast nur noch Kommunikation über Mail. (Company B/ 17.05.2019/TH/Germany/158)*

<sup>194</sup> The India-based participants did not express a particular preference for either medium. This is possibly to be attributed – at least in part – to the Indian belief in the virtue of adaptability.



*Sie reden 400 Worte pro Minute auch noch im indischen Englisch.*

(Company B/ 22.6.2017/JB/Germany/159)

Telephone or Skype calls were generally limited to brief exchanges in which core messages were exchanged, either preceded or supplemented by emails to ensure unambiguity and archivability.

*Es gibt viel mehr Raum für Missverständnisse bei mündlichen Abmachungen. Da kommt manchmal die Antwort ‚yes, at the end of the day‘ aber am nächsten Tag schaue ich ins Postfach und es gibt nichts. Der Vorgang ist besser nachvollziehbar, wenn er schriftlich im Mailverkehr dokumentiert ist. (Company B/ 21.04.2017/JC/Germany/160)*

*Wenn ich am Display sehe, dass der Anruf aus Indien kommt, gehe ich oft gar nicht dran, weil es mir zu viel wird. Der Kollege schickt mir dann in der Regel eine Mail, die ich in aller Ruhe lesen und beantworten kann. (Company A/ 27.02.2018/SJ/Germany/161)*

Video-assisted communication was available but limited due to data protection laws, a lack of access to the technology required or simply due to habit.

*Wir arbeiten in verglasten Bueros und Video ist am Arbeitsplatz nicht zulässig. Da könnte jemand im Hintergrund durch das Bild laufen. Der Betriebsrat achtet darauf, dass keine Persönlichkeitsrechte verletzt werden. (Company B/ 17.05.2019/TH/Germany/162)*

*Die Möglichkeit gibt es schon, aber man muss dann einen extra Raum buchen. (Company B/ 17.05.2019/AB/Germany/163)*

*Daran habe ich gar nicht gedacht, dass Video von Vorteil sein könnte. (Company B/ 17.05.2019/LH/Germany/164)*

Additionally, an uncertainty about the right interpretation of the message was complicated by the ‘cultural’ issue, the factor dealt with in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

*There is a lack of emotional understanding in emails. I have no feeling for the tone. Are they really angry or is it a language question? Or a cultural one maybe? (Company B/ 19.09.2019/ST/India/165)*

*Wie soll man raushören, dass jemand nicht zufrieden ist? Wie soll man Anerkennung und Respekt überbringen, wenn man sich nicht sieht? Wir sind mit ihrer Kultur nicht vertraut. (Company B/ 22.05.2017/MH/Germany/166)*

### 3.7 Asynchronous Communication

The lack of synchronous or real-time communication is an additional factor to be considered in remote collaboration. Although possible – for example, through chats – asynchronous or delayed communication through emails was the norm in this study. Time zone differences of 3.5 hours in summer and 4.5 hours in winter contributed to this in no small measure. Mails sent in the late afternoon from Germany are only likely to be processed the following morning in India. Even when communicators are simultaneously logged in despite time zone differences, it is in practice rare that they are both exclusively focused on just that interchange. In the course of the study, it became apparent that this only happened when communicators scheduled a specific time to discuss a topic in depth. A loose coupling of work between distant team members was much more the norm, with sites modularizing their work to minimize day-to-day interdependence<sup>195</sup>.

Asynchronous communication is an impoverished form of TMC. Without the recursive loops of synchronous communication, conversational routines are disrupted (Gregory 2010). Even a constant and uninterrupted exchange of real-time TMC provides a relatively smaller accumulation of interpersonal information compared with face-to-face communication over the same time interval (Walther 2011).

The likelihood of detecting social presence (a “real person”) is lower due to lack of immediate response, both physiological and verbal (cf. Peters and Manz 2007). Along with the lack of visibility, the lack of instantaneous feedback raises the question of whether the remote partner is present and available, present but unavailable, or absent but available, in a situation that may affect the performance of specific communication tasks (Sarbaugh-Thompson & Feldman 1998). It can also lead to speculation that effort-withholding behaviors (such as loafing, shirking, free-riding) are being displayed by the remote team members (ibid).

Berger and Luckmann’s (1966/2011) concept of a “conversational apparatus” argues that a common sense of reality is constructed as an ongoing accomplishment. In asynchronous communication, it is easier to display behaviors such as information withholding or non-response (Chapter 5). This leads to a reduced cycle of communication as non-response can in turn lead to a hesitation to ask questions, especially to a group<sup>196</sup> (Vonderwell 2003). Studies show that with time, the

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<sup>195</sup> Some researchers posit that teams with increased modularization and reduced interdependence experience fewer problems and better performance (Olsen & Olsen 2000; Hinds & McGrath 2006).

<sup>196</sup> One respondent points out that in face-to-face communication “they won’t just sit there and ignore you. That’s a big difference” (Vonderwell 2003, p.83).

promptness and frequency of responses tend to diminish (ibid) and a co-construction of communicative meaning is not achieved.

Tolerance of misunderstandings is higher in face-to-face than in man-machine interaction (Bazzarella & Damiano 1999). Synchronous communication enables it to a lesser degree, while in asynchronous communication the lack of instantaneous feedback makes it difficult to initiate repair mechanisms such as trouble-source turns and misunderstanding revealing turns (Busch 2015). Finally, asynchronous communication hampers casual conversation, which plays an important role in creating social presence (Sarbaugh-Thompson & Feldman 1998) and a sense of cohesion within groups.

### **3.8 Cultural Unfamiliarity**

The issue of cultural CoP practices is one of the significant elements in extra-verbal communication and the common thread linking Chapters 4 and 5.

Culture may be included in Bolten's (1999) four levels of communication as an extra-verbal element. It represents one important facet of the umbrella term 'context'. Context includes socialization contexts and stores of cultural knowledge which, along with individual characteristics, shape communicative styles (Bolten 1999).

From the perspective of the participants, the cultural element was often cited as an obstacle to efficient cooperation.

*Manchmal frage ich mich, ob es sich überhaupt lohnt. Dieser ganze Aufwand, Geld und Zeit. Alles immer wieder erklären müssen, Englischkurse, Seminare veranstalten. (Company B/ 13.04.2018/OP/Germany/167)*

Shapiro et al. (2002) theorize that the three characteristics of transnational teams – cultural value diversity, reliance on electronic communications, and the lack of on-site monitoring – reduce the salience of team identity. They may be seen as individual factors, but they are also interlinked, as the reliance on lean TMC impedes both on-site monitoring and the building up of common stores of cultural knowledge (cf. Bolten 1999).

Siebdrat, Hoegl & Ernst (2009) postulate that subjective distance as a psychological state is more predictive of social and task-related processes than spatio-temporal distance. Their study in the software industry puts team members' national diversity at center stage for factors affecting the subjective perception of distance in a team's construction of reality (Siebdrat et al. 2009). King & Torkzadeh (2008) agree that cultural differences between client and vendor have effects on various dimensions of the IS offshore outsourcing relationship, including trust, conflict, communication,

coordination, and cooperation. Put simply, culture appears to trump configurational distance.

Olson and Olson (2000, p.169) argue that “possibly the single biggest factor that global teams need to address is culture differences”. They even contend that differences remain substantially intact in TMC:

There is no compelling evidence that cultural differences are receding in our tightly knit global community. Indeed, it is possible some of the differentiation allowed by modern information technology may work to preserve such differences. (ibid, p.171)

One argument supporting this contention is that TMC actually makes direct personal interaction redundant. Collaboration is possible with the team members remaining in their own cultural enclaves. The protagonists have stronger ties to their proximate team and a stronger affiliation to its norms. Some in-group behavioral norms are followed due to habituation, but some are consciously chosen to comply with the norms of the local organization which wields power over rewards and sanctions:

*We know we have a problem with over-commitment, but we have to go with the flow and not stand out negatively by saying ‘no’ when everyone else is saying ‘yes’.* (Company A/ 03.04.2018/RG/India/168)

*The problem we [Germans] often have is that the Indian boss demands something quite different. But he is not willing to tell us that. My Indian colleague just follows his local boss’s orders and we are left wondering what happened. Didn’t he understand what we want?* (Company B/ 06.04.2018/BA/India/169)

Language both transmits culture and is a reflection of it. Sharing a language is not to be conflated with sharing cultural concepts and we can ‘hear’ culture only by ‘listening to’ language in a certain way (Silverstein 2004, p. 621). Although English is increasingly the lingua franca in global communication, the likelihood of a global communication style<sup>197</sup> (Bolten 1999) does not seem imminent. Even in the field of marketing, media communication considers cultural stores of knowledge and interpretation at a deep-structure level (Bolten 1999).

Effective communication between people requires that the communicative exchange take place with respect to some level of common ground (Clark 1996). Common ground refers to “the sum of all the information that people assume they share” (Clark 2009, p. 116). Kecskes (2014) distinguishes between three components of common ground: information that the participants share, understanding the

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<sup>197</sup> "kommunikativer Weltstil" (Bolten 1999)

situational context, and relationships between participants. It is certainly possible to create common ground in remote, transnational teams, although it is much easier when interlocutors have similar histories, experiences and world knowledge (ibid).

Common ground in CoPs can be acquired through familiarity. A common store of technical work-related knowledge is relatively easy to establish, but “long-term speech communities” are required for conventionalization of speech and cultural norms (ibid, p. 158).

In intercultural communication, even the most advanced media does not assist with selection, salience or interpretation. It offers no additional benefits in managing ambiguous situations or cultural framing from differing perspectives. It can even make accurate contextual interpretation and intentional evaluation a problematic proposition.

Contextual cues, cultural cues and symbolic content are filtered out technologically and culturally, and the receiver’s ability to fill in the blanks<sup>198</sup> is limited by the lack of access to cultural stores of knowledge. A lack of coherence or inconsistencies between subsequent turns in the exchange are noticed, but the re-interpretation of the preceding exchange remains problematic (Bazzarella & Damiano 1999). Remedial communicative behaviors such as trouble-source turns and misunderstanding revealing turns are more difficult to initiate.

The following question asked of this practitioner is an example of the inability to interpret cultural cues:

*Können Sie mir sagen, warum manche Bewerber einfach auf unserer Seite ein "Hi" hinterlassen und sonst nichts? Kein ganzer Satz, keine Info an welchem Programm Interesse besteht? Ich finde das sehr unangemessen und es fällt mir schwer, die ‚Nachricht‘ ernst zu nehmen. (Company A/ 30.05.2018/MD/Germany/email/170)*

When asked by the practitioner how she reacts:

*Ich ignoriere sie einfach. 170b*

The interlocutors did not share the same cultural background and experience, leading to a breakdown in communication. The contact from India sending a “hi” was attempting to establish contact and elicit a response (‘push/pull’ communication, see Chapter 5).

Finally, there is the issue of cultural preferences and evaluation in remote communication posited by researchers. Hall (1976/1981) proposed that high-context cultures place more value on visual and vocal cues than low-context cultures, a factor that is relevant in TMC. Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song (2001) found lower

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<sup>198</sup> Pelz terms it “apperzeptive Ergaenzung” (Pelz 2005, p.4).

satisfaction levels among Asian participants using asynchronous text-based systems, which they attributed to the unavailability of prompt feedback and social cues.

### **3.9 Knowledge Transfer and Information Sharing**

As mentioned earlier, knowledge sharing is vital to the success of offshoring practices, including business, functional, and client-specific knowledge (Dibbern & Heinzl 2009). Both remoteness and cultural unfamiliarity pose obstacles to the effective transfer and sharing of knowledge.

The Covid -19 pandemic has contributed to an exponential increase of online learning with all of its manifest advantages. Transformational new technologies with screen- sharing, video accompaniment, bulletin boards, and synchronous chats have all become an enormous advantage in this field. Nonetheless, this technology benefits knowledge transfer more than it does knowledge sharing, which is an interactive behavioral process predicated on social interaction.

Based on Leidner and Jarvenpaa (1995), there are three approaches to learning:

- Objectivist learning based on absorbing knowledge from the expert.
- Constructivist learning by constructing knowledge with the support of the instructor.
- Social learning by participating in a network of social relations with the encouragement of the instructor.

Knowledge transfer can be efficiently achieved through objectivist learning; for instance, through web-based sources and digital repositories. Constructivist learning may be assisted through online webinars or talks, which seek to reproduce the benefits of proximate learning. Social learning – which helps knowledge transfer to evolve into knowledge sharing – is the approach that is most strongly affected by remote technologies, especially in asynchronous communication. Being multidirectional, it is the form of learning that bridges gaps to the greatest extent possible.

Social learning corresponds to Wenger's (1998) theory of learning as social participation. It reflects "a process of taking part and also to the relations with others that reflect this process" (Wenger 1998, p. 55). Participation involves all kinds of relations, "conflictual as well as harmonious, intimate as well as political, competitive as well as cooperative" (ibid, p. 56). All of this is necessary to build a broad-based sense of community in a CoP. Wegner's (1986) 'transactive learning' is the process of sharing information about the capabilities and boundaries of knowledge that exist among members of a group. It is an investment in the 'groupness' of the collective as members identify their expertise, recount their successes and failures, acknowledge each other's abilities (De Sanctis et al. 2003). It is echoed by Suthers' (2006) concept

of 'intersubjective learning' that is not only accomplished through the interactions of the participants, but also consists of those interactions.

The social construction of knowledge paradigm holds that learning is enhanced through the process of communication of ideas, which involves interaction and reflection (Vygotsky, 1962). It creates a collaborative learning environment with the opportunity to discuss, argue, negotiate, and reflect upon existing beliefs and knowledge (Agostinho, Lefoe & Hedberg 1997). Such an interaction is particularly necessary when the interactants do not come from culturally cognate backgrounds, not only in a geographic but also in any other CoP-related sense. A CoP needs not only to be aligned through shared organizational and technical knowledge, but also along the sociopsychological phenomena of collective social representations (Durkheim 1912; Moscovici 1963). Bridging all of these gaps to create common ground requires access not only to pre-existing explicit knowledge, but also to tacit knowledge.

**3.9.1 Tacit Knowledge.** One of the main dimensions of complex knowledge is its level of codification (Zander and Kogut 1995). Codification refers to the degree of completeness when documenting or expressing knowledge in the knowledge transfer process. A culturally-cognate CoP can handle a low level of codification better, as transmitters and recipients share a higher degree of common knowledge. "The more common ground we share with a person, the less effort and time we need to convey and interpret information" (Kecskes 2010, p. 151).

A low level of codification closely corresponds to the concept of tacit knowledge, i.e., knowledge that is difficult to articulate or can only be acquired through experience (Gregory 2010). Polanyi (1958, 1966) had already made this crucial distinction between explicit knowledge – which permits expression through symbolic forms of representation – and tacit knowledge, which defies such expression. Nicholson and Sahay (2004) use the term 'embedded knowledge' to describe knowledge that "resides in organizing principles, routines and standard operating procedures" and is non-migratory in nature. It is embedded at three different levels – cognitive, organizational and societal – which poses additional challenges for knowledge transfer (Nicholson & Sahay 2004, p. 330).

Polanyi considered tacit knowledge to be inexpressible, but later research has revised this view. The term tacit knowledge has gained currency with Nonaka & Takeuchi et al.'s (1995, 2000) work on knowledge creation.

Wenger (1998b) elucidates in some detail how the term 'practice' in a CoP includes both the tacit and the explicit:

It includes the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes all the implicit relations, conventions, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, recognizable intuitions, specific perceptions, well-tuned sensitivities, embodied understanding, underlying assumptions, and shared world views. (Wenger 1998 b, p. 47)

Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) and Nonaka & Von Grogh (2009) perceive tacit and explicit knowledge as not separate but mutually complementary. It is a key determinant of the geography of innovative activity (Gertler 2003). Communities of practice rarely follow 'corporate doctrine', or implement 'canonical knowledge'; rather, they establish idiosyncratic knowledge that reflects local experience and meets local requirements (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995).

Tacit knowledge eludes transmission for several reasons. Firstly, all knowledge – but particularly tacit knowledge – is more difficult to locate as it is often situated in remote corners of the organization (von Krogh, Ichijo & Nonaka 2000).

*Wie soll man die Distanz überwinden? Wir wissen nicht, was am anderen Ende passiert. Es ist sozusagen ein „schwarzes Loch“.* (Company B/ 17.01.2017/FJ/Germany/Email/171)

*Es scheint in manchen Bereichen besser zu klappen als bei uns. Genau was die anders machen kann ich nicht sagen. Sie kennen den Spruch "wenn die Firma B nur wüsste, was Firma B weiß..."<sup>199</sup>* (Company B/ 07.02.2019/DF/Germany/172)

Secondly, tacit knowledge is both generated and transferred by members as they work together (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). As Howells (2000) highlights, tacit knowledge in organizations is produced *during* social interaction in a shared social, organizational and cultural context. Thirdly, it has a context-specific nature which is best conveyed in a shared common social context. "Tacit knowledge is deeply rooted in action, procedures, routines, commitment, ideals, values and emotions" (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno 2000, p. 7). Finally, it is "highly personal and difficult to formalize" as it includes "the active and subjective nature represented by such terms as 'commitment' and 'belief' that is deeply rooted in individuals' value systems" (ibid).

Remote communication intensifies the elusive nature of tacit knowledge on all four fronts. The issue of locating sources of tacit knowledge in organizations could be

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<sup>199</sup> An echo of the famous quotation "I wish we knew what we know at HP" attributed to Lew Platt of Hewlett-Packard (O'Dell C., Jackson Grayson Jr. C. 1998. If only we knew what we know. The Free Press).



procedurally managed with – for example – the deployment of boundary-spanning liaison staff, also variously termed ‘straddlers’ (Levina & Vaast 2008), ‘offshore middlemen’ or ‘brokers’, for intermediation between locations.

*Wir haben zum Teil gute Erfahrungen mit Länder-Koordinatoren gemacht. Seitdem wir einen pro Standort eingesetzt haben, wird die Zusammenarbeit einfacher. Aber sie sind auch manchmal ein Nadelöhr für Informationen.*  
(Company B/ 07.02.2019/HW/Germany/173)

Although most organizations are routinely faced with the situation of assimilating new employees into an organizational culture (Hess 1993), it is a largely tacit process that is furthered by face-to-face and immediate interaction.

The difficulty of conveying knowledge through TMC has already been discussed on the preceding pages, but it is particularly salient in tacit knowledge. Sharing context and subjectivity, particularly of the cultural variety suggested in Nonaka’s value systems, requires a deep and subtle information exchange (Gregory 2010).

Holden (2002) classifies cultural knowledge in management in three domains – general cultural knowledge, culture-specific knowledge, and cross-cultural know-how – but indicates that the dividing line between tacit and explicit knowledge is not absolute. While general cultural knowledge can be associated with explicit knowledge and cross-cultural know-how with tacit knowledge, culture-specific knowledge can be both tacit and explicit according to the convention (Holden 2002).

The transmission of group norms in a remote context is a case of culture-specific knowledge transfer. As discussed in chapter 2, social identity – i.e., an individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to a certain group (Tajfel 1982) – and social self-categorization (Turner et al., 1987) lead to the cognitive representation of social categories as depersonalized prototypes (e.g., ‘engineer’) (Hogg and Reid 2006). These prototypes are fuzzy sets of attributes (e.g., attitudes and behaviors) that define one group and distinguish it from other groups (ibid). Shared group prototypes then evolve into group norms (Turner 1991; Hogg & Reid 2006).

Communication plays a key role in acquiring information about norms, identity and prototypicality (Hogg and Reid 2006). Hogg and Reid (2006) argue that “when group membership is salient, a significant portion of what is communicated within an interactive group or among members of larger social categories is directly or indirectly about or contextualized by group norms” (Hogg and Reid 2006, p.14).

Tacit knowledge can be “disembedded” (Nicholson & Sahay 2004) to facilitate knowledge transfer. As proposed in Nonaka, Toyama & Konno’s SECI model (2000), behavioral group norms can be explicitly transferred by codifying knowledge into explicit knowledge in the concrete form of images, and written documents.



Figure 12. Sign at an Indian railway station platform.

However, their influence at the final internalization stage of the SECI model where explicit knowledge is internalized by individuals to the extent that they are transferred into routines, is less conclusive. For example, social learning theory (Bandura 1977) suggests that normative behavior is learned through social interaction, by observation of prevailing prototypical behavior and their outcomes (e.g., social sanctions)<sup>200</sup>.

Remote collaboration does not facilitate sufficient intersubjectivity to discover the prototypes of the geographically-dispersed groups. Therefore, questions of understanding the others' prototype, how well one matches these prototypes and how prototypical others think one is (c.f. Haslam et al. 1995) remain largely unanswered.

Knowledge transfer implies more than a superficial behavioral compliance with externally-prescribed norms. The oft-cited "Ingenieursdenke" underlying the collaboration in this context appears to call for the internal cognitive change posited by referent informational influence theory (Turner, Wetherell & Hogg 1989). It calls for managing bonds among group members, creating a shared world view (ibid), and a shared cultural understanding<sup>201</sup> to facilitate internal cognitive change<sup>202</sup>.

This important mechanism for successful knowledge transfer requires the presence of what Nonaka and Konno (1998) term "*Ba*".

**3.9.2 Ba.** Nonaka and Konno (1998) put forward the ancient Japanese concept of *Ba* for knowledge creation, which is visualised as a place where information is interpreted to become knowledge.

The Japanese word *ba* means not just a physical space, but a specific time and space. *Ba* is a time-space nexus, or as Heidegger expressed it, a locationality that simultaneously includes space and time. It is a concept that unifies physical

<sup>200</sup> This refers to behaviour that is controlled by environmental influences rather than by innate or internal forces.

<sup>201</sup> A "negotiated" culture (Nicholson et al. 2004).

<sup>202</sup> "Stories embedded in narrative and discourse manage bonds among group members (Bochner, Ellis, & Tillman-Healy, 2000), construct representations of social categories (Edwards, 1997), and such representations of group (and situational) norms influence what people actually talk about (Cote´ & Clement, 1994)" (Hogg and Reid 2006, p. 14).

space such as an office space, virtual space such as email, and mental space such as shared ideals (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno 2000, p. 14).

It is related to Baker et al.'s (2002) notion of a “conversational space” in which – in a Gadamerian sense – “the world between people” is revealed or developed through conversational interaction.

A key concept to understanding *ba* is also interaction, not only among individuals but also between individuals and their environment in a complex evolutionary process. According to Nonaka, Toyama & Konno (2000), there are four types of *ba*:

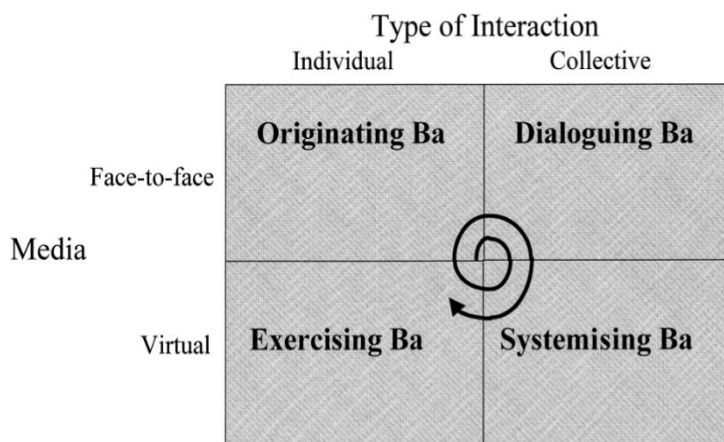


Figure 13. Four Types of *ba* (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno 2000, p. 16).

Of the four types of *ba* and the two dimensions of interaction, the focus in this sub-section is on the types that are less easily conveyed through remote media as they are more tacit in nature - originating and dialoguing *ba*. Originating *ba* is defined by individual and face-to-face interactions.

It is a place where individuals share experiences, feelings, emotions and mental models <...> Originating *ba* is an existential place in the sense that it is the world where an individual transcends the boundary between self and others, by sympathising or empathising with others (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno 2000, p. 16).

Dialoguing *ba* is defined by collective and face-to-face interactions.

It is the place where individuals' mental models and skills are shared, converted into common terms, and articulated as concepts. Hence, dialoguing *ba* mainly offers a context for externalisation. Individuals' tacit knowledge is shared and articulated through dialogues amongst participants. The articulated knowledge

is also brought back into each individual, and further articulation occurs through self-reflection (ibid, p.17).

To summarize, objectivist learning is obviously possible through TMC, and even facilitated by computerized networks, written documentation, and databases. It is less suited for the tacit, cultural aspects of learning, which include “the history of practice, the significance of what drives the community, the relationships that shape it, and the identities of members” (Wenger 2010, p. 3)

Culturally-dispersed teams need to create a genuine CoP by sharing explicit knowledge, building up a shared history and generating a common understanding. It requires thickness and regularity of remote communication and a willingness to accommodate a degree of ambiguity in terms of how much knowledge has actually been understood and internalized. Technologically-mediated knowledge transfer which permits the transmission of tacit knowledge requires effort, vigilance and a leap of faith.

#### **4 Chapter 4: Gap Factors: India**

Although communicative action is individual action, it is designed to promote common understanding in a group and to promote cooperation, as opposed to "strategic action" designed simply to achieve one's personal goals (Habermas 1984)<sup>203</sup>.

Scholars in the nascent stages of modern communication research suggested a unidirectional, linear model with a transmitter and receiver, such as that of Shannon and Weaver (1949).

However, in the subsequent years, their concepts were developed by others such as Schramm (1954) and Berlo (1960) into an interactional model. Schramm's (1954) model is multidimensional and includes feedback, communication context and the participants' frames of reference ('fields of experience'), which tie into the sociocultural backgrounds of the interlocutors.

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<sup>203</sup> This is reflected in Goffman's belief in the moral commitment involved in interaction.

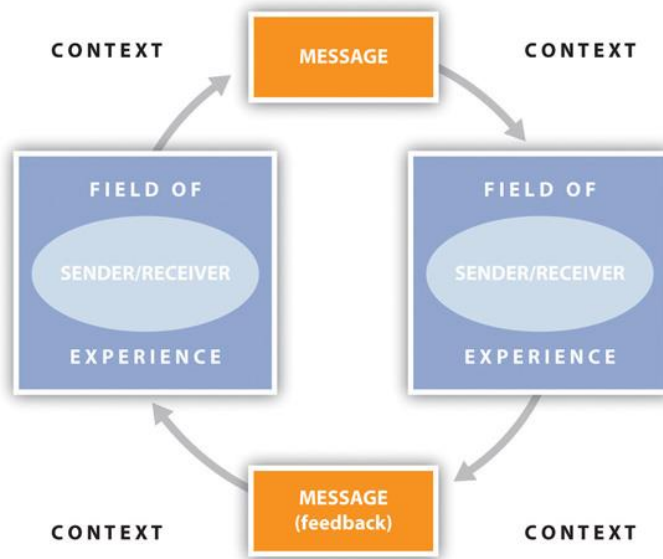


Figure 14. Schramm's interactional model of communication (1954)

As Schramm (1954) phrased it:

"In fact, it is misleading to think of the communication process as starting somewhere and ending somewhere. It is really endless. We are little switchboard centers handling and rerouting the great endless current of information"<sup>204</sup>. (Schramm 1954 in McQuail & Windahl 2013, p. 20)

Barnlund's (1970) transactional model depicts communication as a simultaneous transaction between interlocutors with overlapping fields of experience generated during the transaction.

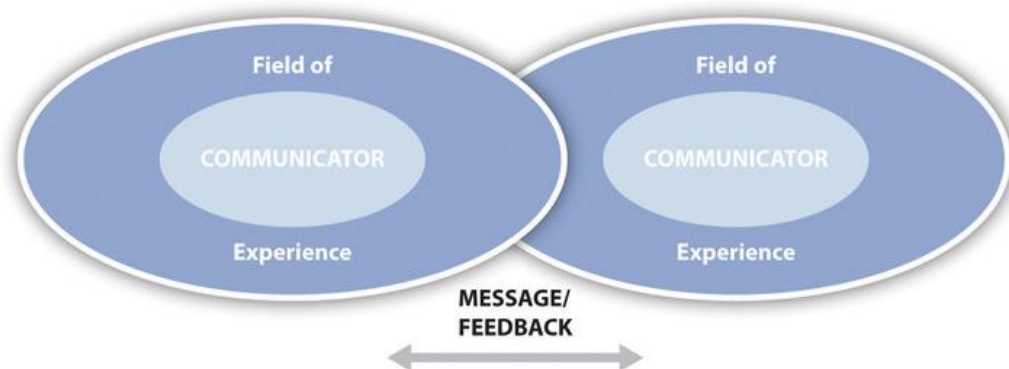


Figure 15. Barnlund's transactional model of communication (1970).

Central to the process of communication is meaning construction, which has not only cybernetic aspects but also phenomenological, sociopsychological, sociocultural,

<sup>204</sup> This definition reveals interesting parallels to the non-substantialist theory of Self in Advaita Vedanta Hinduism, where the Self is seen as being both circular and limitless (Whitfield 1993).

semiotic and rhetorical aspects (cf. Littlejohn, Voss & Oetzel 2016). Every one of these aspects comes into play during intersubjective meaning-making.

Communication is an ongoing reciprocal cycle in a process of self-organization (Taylor 1995) during which it continually makes the adjustments needed to sustain itself (Wiener 1954).

Known repertoires are the antecedents in this reciprocal process, as they are seen as the starting point on which all further action is predicated. Handed-down interpretations and practices are initially unquestioningly deployed until a congruence of meaning construction is not apparent<sup>205</sup>. This leads to an action being modified to the smallest degree necessary to sustain the interaction (Hitzler 1993, p. 227-228<sup>206</sup>).

In the process of reciprocal interpretation, interactants negotiate meaning, more often so when reference systems do not appear to be in alignment. A dyadic encounter can be seen as:

a two-way street that takes place inductively and deductively. In the course of communication, these two processes run parallel. Inductive meaning construction refers to the speaker perspective and implies that preverbal thought is prompted in producer-interpreter "A" by internalising utterance/s produced by producer-interpreter "B". Preverbal thought in producer-interpreter "A" triggers the selection and merging of lexical units to express that particular thought. .... This utterance triggers the deductive meaning construction in the mind of producer-interpreter "B", who internalises the utterance by matching it to his/her existing conventionalised models, patterns, blends and knowledge in his/her mind, and constructs the meaning of the utterance accordingly. Then the cycle continues with the preverbal thought generated by the constructed meaning..... and so on and so forth. (Kecskes 2013, p. 23-24)

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<sup>205</sup> „Das heißt, wir verwenden oft relativ unbedacht und auch unbedenklich überkommene Deutungen, Erklärungen und Praktiken“ (Hitzler 1993:227).

<sup>206</sup> „Diese Deutungsschemata, diese Typisierungen werden situationsspezifisch lediglich modifiziert - und zwar normalerweise so wenig wie wie möglich. Alltägliche Problembewältigung heißt also prinzipiell: Reduktion von Neuem, Unbekanntem auf Bekanntes, Typisches“ (ibid: 227 -228).

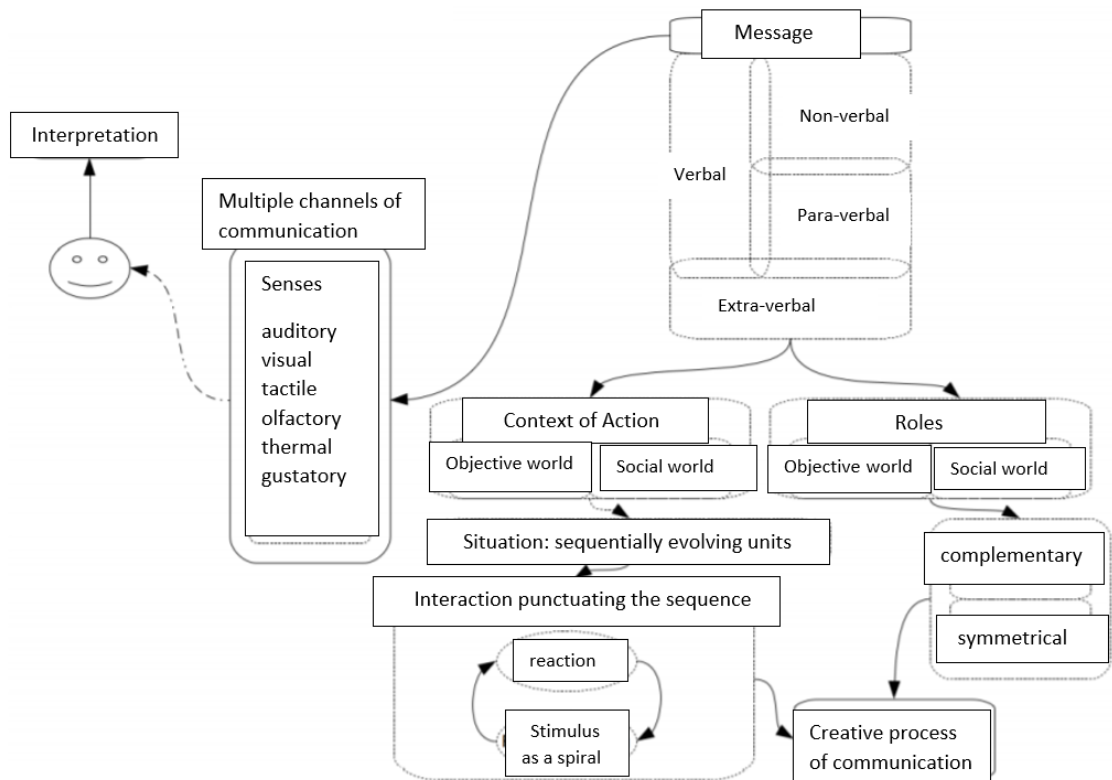


Figure 16. Realizational levels of Communication (Conti 2011, p. 59; own translation).

Organizational communication is additionally focused on the meso level of group communication. Membership category analysis, for instance, is directed towards “interlocutors’ orientations to the talk of others’ scrutinizing how such categories are made relevant in the turn-by-turn setup of an interaction” (Van De Mierop 2017, p. 191). Formal, brand-oriented, and role-based communication patterns are more consciously exercised in organizational communication. In view of all these aspects, both this and the following chapter will attempt to shed light on the communication gaps perceived by the participants.

One structural element that impeded the meaning-making process has been mentioned in Chapter 2: the reported volatility of the group composition.

*Die Sache läuft recht gut mit unserem erfahrenen indischen Koordinator drüben [in Bangalore]. Seitdem wir mehrere Andockstellen in Indien haben, merken wir, dass die Kommunikation sehr 'indisch' ist. [indicates inverted commas with fingers] Das macht die Sache wieder schwieriger. (Company B/30.01.2019/HvG/Germany/174)*

*Since the restructuring it has become more difficult. Just when everything was going smoothly, management decided to chop and change and I don't know what. So, it's all topsy-turvy and we have to realign with everyone. (Company B/10.06.2017/BS/India/175)*

Besides this structural element, communicative patterns that obscured shared meaning were discerned in the participants responses. Based on frequencies, the responses were codified using thematic analysis<sup>207</sup> to create an analytic core of categories (Glaser and Strauss 2011). The findings appear to indicate complementary differences in the categories of the two groups.

When considering the participants' input, one must remain cognizant of the fact that members of a group manage their own prototypicality verbally by "talking up" or "talking down" their prototypicality directly or by reference to other members' prototypicality (cf. Hogg & Reid 2006). The construction of group prototype and social identity with the focus on affect in this chapter appears to be such an instance of 'talking up' affect in relation to the perceived German prototype.

It suggests a high degree of generalization, i.e., an act of reasoning that involves drawing broad conclusions from particular instances, in other words making an inference about the unobserved based on the observed (Polit & Beck 2010, p. 1451). The justification for and the attainability of generalizability elicits a number of conflicting viewpoints in qualitative research<sup>208</sup>. Participants who are unburdened by academic considerations have fewer reservations about generalization, and a closer look at the responses reveals an initial generalization, which is then qualified by contextual detail.

The generalized theme of affect that forms the content of this chapter is an example of individually observed actions leading to general inferences (cf. Spencer-Oatey & Kádár 2016) which – with numerous qualifications – are construed as gaps by the participants.

Emotions are universal, but emotional states are only observed by others if they are revealed – either voluntarily or not – through emotional expression (cf. Picard 1995), which is also termed emotional signaling. These signals are perceived, appraised, and acted upon. Evaluative judgment is part of the appraisal process (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár 2016) and determines which signals become salient, through either their presence or their absence (i.e., as 'gaps').

The Indian perspective – which forms the substance of this chapter – reveals a higher frequency of communication gap issues that concern the perceived absence of emotional expression, even in face-to-face contexts:

*What we have seen [is] we repeat what we have said because there is no reaction from the German side, even face to face. I thought he didn't*

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<sup>207</sup> "A method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke 2006, p. 6).

<sup>208</sup> Schwandt (1997) calls it a paradox of qualitative research, with its focus on the particular and its simultaneous interest in the general and abstract.



*understand me because his expression was so neutral, but then he said “Yes I have understood you Maneesh” (Company A/03.04.2018/MK/India/176)*

Conversely, Indian emotional signaling is mentioned by the Germans, albeit with a distinction: The affective signaling of the Indian side is present, sensed, or intuited, but not cognitively processed.

*Mir fallen verschiedene Sachen auf. Erstens diese überwältigende Freundlichkeit und die Bereitschaft alles zu tun. Aber ist das auch gewollt? Vielleicht funktioniert die Kommunikation deswegen nicht so hundertprozentig. Es kommt immer anders als man denkt. Ich habe das Gefühl, wir fliegen [corresponding hand gesture] kommunikativ aneinander vorbei. (Company A/01.07.2016/SS4/Germany/177)*

This is evaluated as an impediment to conveying communicative content, leading into the German perspective in Chapter 5, which concerns the gaps impeding communicative efficiency. Thus, the two perspectives are closely interrelated as sides of the same coin, or as matched complementary opposites (Schulz von Thun 1989). As affect<sup>209</sup> appears central to this chapter's observations, the question of what it constitutes will be initially addressed in the following pages. As a starting point at the macro level, there is a preliminary worth mentioning: As a whole, the gap issues posited by the Indian side were proportionately far smaller in number than those on the German side<sup>210</sup>.

The gaps were largely mentioned either in the form of explanatory self-categorization, or as a defensive reaction to a German observation:

*Emotions play a big part in everyday life. So, we are more socially aware, more sensitive to others' emotions, to their reactions. So, our communication is anticipatory, thinking about the reactions of the listener. (Company A/15.12.2016/AAS/India/178)*

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<sup>209</sup> 'Affect' is used broadly as a synonym for 'emotion'; the latter will be used more frequently as it is the term invoked most frequently by the participants. It will be defined more closely further on in the chapter.

<sup>210</sup> Although not central to this issue, it might be intriguing to consider why gaps in general have been less frequently mentioned by the Indian side. Some speculation may be permitted here. One possible explanation is that differing interlocutor status, i.e., the power asymmetry mentioned in the previous chapter of role (service provider vs. customer/client and age/expertise differentials), limits scope for criticism. Another might be that there is less awareness of any meaningful gaps in the interaction. A third one could be an unwillingness to generate negative emotion, an issue which frames many of the observations in this chapter.



Figure 17. India: Self-categorization: values, motivation, strengths & weaknesses (Company C).



Figure 18. India: Our view of working with Germans (Company B).

The Indian observations often appear in the form of storytelling<sup>211</sup>, as the examples on the following pages reveal:

*It is interesting to see how well they [the Germans] have themselves under control. I once saw an accident. The man whose car got bashed up was standing there on the side of the road talking calmly to the other man who ran into him. In India there would have been more 'halla'<sup>212</sup>, sometimes even shouting and all that. It was really an interesting experience for me. Maybe we can learn a bit of this from them, but not too much, no? [smiles] (Company B/19.9.2019/US/India/179)*

More significantly in a collaborative context, the gaps pointed to fewer displays of *positive* affect, i.e., socioemotional communicative markers pointing to the OCB factors such as agreeableness (McCrae & Costa 1987), courtesy (Podsakoff et al. 2000) or even boosterism (Kwantes 2008), all of which may be subsumed in the broad category of positive affectivity (Watson, Clarke, Tellegen 1988)<sup>213</sup>.

*Germans don't smile at all. I often wonder what is troubling them but I can't just ask. They may not like it. I always want to know whatever troubles my colleagues, they don't or at least that is the impression I get. (Company B/28.03.2019/RG/India/180)*

Interestingly, these observations were often mirrored by their German counterparts:

*Wir kommen kühler rüber. Man ist zwar freundlich aber nicht überschwänglich. Wir gehen nicht auf die Leute zu und fragen aktiv, kann ich helfen? Der indische Abteilungsleiter (in Indien) hat sich den ganzen Tag freigenommen und hat sich mit seiner Frau um mich gekümmert. (Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/181)*

The "affect-as-information" hypothesis (Clore et al. 2001) examines the link between affect and judgement. It suggests that the information conveyed by affect is

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<sup>211</sup> Not only are the gap factors on the Indian side in themselves more affectively directed, the use of storytelling as a device for expressing them is also worth noticing. Affect is both the content and carrier of the message. The Indian participants utilize it as a means to bridge *logos* and *pathos* and to enhance the emotional reception of what is observed (Sundin et al. 2018). It has also been suggested that those parts of knowledge and memory that are close to experience are stored in episodic (Strube & Janetzko 1990) and narrative forms (Bruner 1986) (Flick 1994, p.191. In *Social representations and the social construction of everyday knowledge: theoretical and methodological queries* <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F053901894033002003>).

<sup>212</sup> A Hindi term denoting a ruckus or an uproar.

<sup>213</sup> Though 'agreeableness' has been developed in a dispositional context, notably as part of the "Big Five" dimensions of personality, it also ties in with the concept of OCB as voluntary, discretionary *attitudinal* behavior which adds value to the effective functioning of the group.

crucial to judgement. Affective cues of mood and emotion influence judgments directly by serving as experiential and bodily information regarding how one feels about the object of judgment (Clore & Huntsinger 2007). “In social situations, for example, the crucial factor in our evaluation of other people is often the feelings that they elicit in us” (ibid).

Inevitably, the perceived gaps in positive affect led to value judgements:

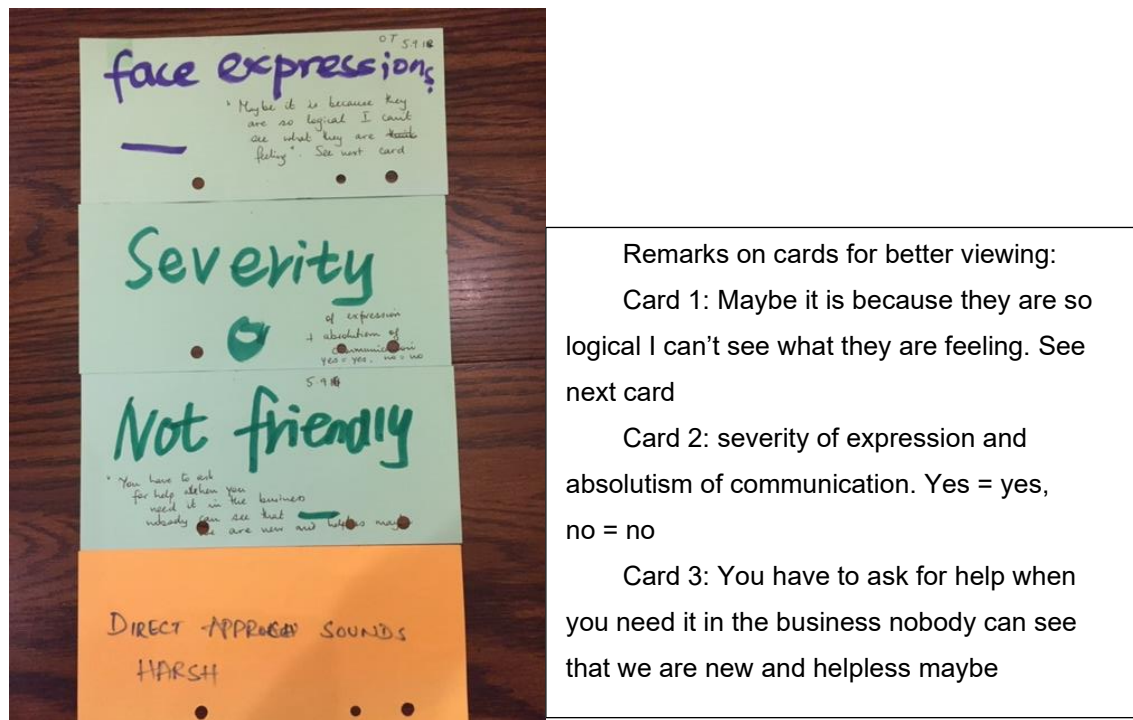


Figure 19. India: Our German colleagues' 'minus points'<sup>214</sup> (Company B).

On the other hand, as can be seen in Figure 18, while affective gaps were discerned, they were not always viewed unfavorably.

The needs analysis on the German side also consistently indicated an awareness that affective elements were pertinent to business interaction. The gaps – as is evident from all of the needs analyses – lay in an inability to gauge the emotionality of Indian responses and act either pre-emptively or appropriately.

*How do I get the discussion on the same emotional level? I feel we are sometimes on different planes. (Company A/20.07.2018/LM/Germany/182)*

<sup>214</sup> However, the “severity” card appears to be marked 0 (neither + nor -).

<p><b>Fallstricke in d. Kommunikation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ich bin direkt (→ wo sind die Schmerzgrenzen?)</li> <li>- Ja, ja, alles tut, aber wir wissen, dass es fertig wird.</li> <li>- Mentale Unterschiede: Wie tickt man in Indien?</li> <li>- Was ist "Respekt"? stärken - wie?</li> <li>- Erstes Kennenlernen in I</li> <li>- Probleme mit der Kommunikation</li> <li>- Kultur Kennenlernen</li> <li>- Small talk - üblich, erwünscht</li> <li>- Nein besser verstehen</li> <li>- Worauf achten, dass man versteht wie Lage ist.</li> <li>- Fettnäpfchen in d. Kommunikation</li> <li>- Mann/Frau → Small Talk Unterschiede?</li> <li>- Umgang mit Problemen, Kritik, Eskalation</li> <li>- Selbstständigkeit: wie motivieren</li> <li>- Signale erkennen, dass Fragen erwünscht sind</li> <li>- Kritik, ohne sie persönlich anzugreifen</li> <li>- Führungsmentalität → Vergleich</li> <li>- Offenheit in d. Kommunikation - wie erzeugen?</li> </ul>	<p>Some selected items:</p> <p>Fallstricke in d. Kommunikation</p> <p>Ich bin direkt – wo sind die Schmerzgrenzen?</p> <p>Small talk – üblich, erwünscht</p> <p>Worauf achten, dass man versteht wie die Lage ist</p> <p>Umgang mit Problemen, Kritik, Eskalation</p> <p>Signale erkennen, dass Fragen erwünscht sind</p> <p>Kritik, ohne sie persönlich anzugreifen</p>
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Figure 20. Germany: Topics to Discuss (Company B).

Scherer (1994) maintains that emotions are an interface that mediate between environmental input and behavioral output. As gap factors are the central premise of the study, this chapter is directed more at the perceived gaps in expected behavioral input than at the emotional output and action readiness (Frijda 2007) released by such stimuli.

Consequently, drawing upon the field of emotion research, the gaps in socioemotional communicative action put forward by the Indian participants will be examined in this chapter. This includes the organizational underpinnings of emotion research such as OCB, emotional signaling in its various manifestations, and the affective potential of communication. The latter aspect will be returned to in the following chapter, where the German side view it as an obstacle to communicative transparency.

#### 4.1 Caveats

Let us once again recall the ongoing caveats in this context. As is apparent, e.g., from figures 17 and 18, both self-categorization and other-categorization are expressed in terms of broad cultural descriptions<sup>215</sup>. This can be attributed in part to the format of the exercise that calls for both simplification and valuation encapsulated in a

<sup>215</sup> This corresponds to the taxonomy propagated by Hofstede, Hall and numerous others in the intercultural field.

few key words. In tandem with the brain's propensity to reduce complexity<sup>216</sup> through categorization, the tendency to stereotype and generalize appear much more marked in the initial findings. There is a tendency to narrate, reflect and interpret from the perspective of one's own reality, with an automatic reliance on default frames, categories and narratives<sup>217</sup> that allow individuals to order and depict their circumstances (Weick 1995).

However, as becomes apparent later in this chapter, the sweeping generalizations are reconsidered and qualified in the course of the discussion. Contexts are taken into account<sup>218</sup> and broad descriptions/valuations are enriched by nuance. Some nuances become apparent even within the keyword categorizations. For instance, the "direct communication" card in figure 18 is simultaneously listed under what is appreciated and what is 'strange/difficult'.

However, gaps are neither immutable nor insurmountable. "Strangeness" is in essence a transient term. It reflects a snapshot in time that can be expected to pass with experiential familiarity<sup>219</sup>. As Giora (2003) asserts when discussing the retrieval of information, salience is related only to "its accessibility in memory due to such factors as frequency of use and experiential familiarity" (p.33). "The brain is an instrument that learns cumulatively on Bayesian principles—it understands on the back of accumulated experience and knows what to expect" (Whimster 2018).

Emotion is not an environment-behavior interface with rigid links and hard-wired responses (Scherer 1994). Frijda & Mesquita (1994) highlight that "emotions are part of the very process of interacting with the environment". They are to be viewed as:

"dynamically changing, structured elements in ongoing interchanges, which both influence and are influenced by the other elements in these interchanges, such as the external events and the attitudes and actions of the other individuals involved" (Frida & Mesquita 1994, p. 51).

It is a cultural and psychobiological adaptation mechanism that allows each individual to react flexibly and dynamically to environmental contingencies (Scherer 2009). The mind may be seen as a "wet computer", a sponge-like mass of neurons in

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<sup>216</sup> Categorization of objects into distinct classes is central to decisions that affect survival (Grinband et al. 2006).

<sup>217</sup> "Conceptual template" (Weick 1995, p. 109).

<sup>218</sup> The ability to factor in context appears to be another in-built human mechanism. Grinband et al. (2006) point to the brain's ability to adapt the internal criterion demarcating 'danger' when encountering a tiger three feet away by considering the context of whether it is in the jungle or in the zoo.

<sup>219</sup> The exposure effect posits that familiarity both creates and enhances positive affect. Repeated benign exposure to a particular stimulus object creates an emerging preference for that object (Zajonc 2001).

which information processing properties change as different chemicals are supplied depleted, reflecting the chemical modulation of emotions (Lord & Kanfer 2002, p. 14).

As an emergent process, the human emotional interface thus permits a great deal of flexibility in adjusting to differences. Scherer (1994) argues that while emotions prepare and energize appropriate action tendencies, responses are not immediately released, providing a latency period in which additional information can be processed and alternative responses considered. Humans are capable of continuous evaluation and thoughtful choices and taking the motives and the emotions of the other into account (ibid).

*Slowly I am beginning to understand. At first, I thought my colleagues in Germany didn't like me or something like that. In India we make a big fuss about newcomers from abroad. There [in Germany] you come to office and everyone is just getting on with their work as usual. It's not that they don't like you or something. They are like that at first. (Company A/03.04.2018/SA/India/183)*

As mentioned, this cumulative process of adaptive familiarization is impeded by remote collaboration and does not always lead to complete understanding. Even if emotion expression can be recognized (cf. Orr 2018<sup>220</sup>), in some cases, it is perceived as inconsistent with genuine feeling<sup>221</sup>. For instance, from a German viewpoint, overt Indian displays of benevolence were sometimes suspected to be 'emotional labor', a term coined by Hochschild<sup>222</sup> (1983) to describe positive emotional expression as a work requirement in service industries.

*Bei den Tickets merkt man, dass sie eine andere Arbeitsweise haben als wir – sehr zurückhaltend, freundlich, wo wir es gar nicht wären. Können sie ihre Gefühle besser verbergen? (Company B/10.07.2017/KO/Germany/184)*

In numerous cases, awareness even ran counter to deep-structure CoP beliefs (Bolten 2007):

*Ich verstehe schon, dass sie anders ticken. Aber wir sind rationale Menschen und dass sie auf die emotionale Ebene gehen, verstehe ich nicht. (Company B/25.04.2017/MB/Germany/185)*

<sup>220</sup> Orr D. (25.10.2018) Lecture (Paris): Tell us how you recognize. Understanding how recognition processes operate and how to improve/open them (Forschungsinstitut fuer Bildung und Sozialoekonomie).

<sup>221</sup> Experimental psychology appears to indicate that people are in a position to present facial expressions that are inconsistent with their real feelings (Rafaeli and Sutton 1989). Sales behavior is often cited as an example.

<sup>222</sup> Cited in K. Senge, R. Schützeichel (Hrsg.), Hauptwerke der Emotionssoziologie, DOI 10.1007/978-3-531-93439-6\_25, © Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2013

## 4.2 Emotion Research

Emotion is fundamental to the human condition<sup>223</sup>. It is a neurobiological activity that is sensed and expressed even in children without a cerebral cortex (Merker 2007). It is therefore unsurprising that it has been the subject of research since antiquity<sup>224</sup>. Starting with James (1884), who is often considered the pioneer of modern emotion science, the key principles of emotion science have changed periodically depending on both the advance of neuroscientific research and the changing philosophical perspectives.

When using the term emotion, it is important to distinguish it from trait, affective disposition, mood, or preferences (Scherer 2009). Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2013) place stable traits and changing states at two extremes of a continuum, with stable, 'pure' traits such as intelligence and positive heritable characteristics at one end and continuously-changing states such as moods or fleeting emotions at the other (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans 2013, p. 157). An affective disposition may be defined as a product of his/her biological past (Mühlhoff 2019). Emotions are generally of short duration and are associated with a specific stimulus, whereas by contrast, mood is more enduring, more diffuse, and less related to specific stimuli (Frijda 1994). Emotions also have a stronger linkage with specific behaviors compared with moods. Affect is a more general term and it can refer to either mood or emotions" (Lord & Kaufer 2002, p. 6)<sup>225</sup>. At the same time, moods and emotions are not mutually discrete. Emotions – either as a singular, short-lived experience or cumulatively – can create a longer-lasting mood experience (Cropanzano et al. 2003<sup>226</sup>).

Feidakis et al.'s students provide an accessible definition of emotion: "Emotion is what we feel, derives from inside us, as a reaction to an action, with positive or negative valence, and it can be expressed through our face, our voice, our body, our gestures" (Feidakis et al. 2014).

Emotions can be usefully divided into two broad types or kinds<sup>227</sup> according to Izard (2009): basic emotion episodes and dynamic emotion-cognition interactions or

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<sup>223</sup> "Everyone knows what emotion is, until they are asked to define it" (LeDoux 1996: *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*". Simon and Schuster).

<sup>224</sup> This includes Plato, Aristotle and – even more famously – the four humors of Hippocratic medicine in Western thought. Some examples in Eastern thought are Buddhist teachings, Vedic philosophers such as Śaṅkara, and the three 'gunas' of Sāṃkhya-Yoga in India. Curiously, emotions often have negative connotations in both traditions, albeit for different reasons (cf. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2016).

<sup>225</sup> For the purposes of this study, the terms affect and emotion will be used interchangeably.

<sup>226</sup> As Cropanzano et al. (2003) phrase it, moods can linger on as emotions "divorced from their antecedents" (p. 843).

<sup>227</sup> There are innumerable scholarly categorizations of emotions. Basic emotions' theory established by Darwin (1872) linked basic emotions to the instincts of survival. Damasio (1994) distinguishes between primary and secondary emotions, while Parrott (2001) offers a



emotion schemas. Basic emotions are those considered fundamental to life tasks, such as human evolution, normative development, human mentality, and effective adaptation.

An emotion schema is emotion interacting dynamically with perceptual and cognitive processes to influence mind and behavior (Izard 2009). Again, the distinction between basic emotion episodes and emotion-cognition interactions is a fluid one, and the classifications beloved by academic tradition are not absolutely distinct.

Emotions are communicated via two distinct but interrelated processes of expression and perception (cf. Van Kleef 2016). The expression comprises an externalization of internal emotion processes, resulting in – for example – the production of a facial expression (cf. Lynch et al. 2006). Perception refers to observers inferring what emotion(s) the expresser is experiencing, based on the physical signal that the observer perceives (Fang, Sauter & Van Kleef 2018). Emotion is encoded by the perceiver using knowledge of the social situation, voices, body posture, scenes, or other emotional faces, often supported by emotion words in language (Barrett, Mesquita & Smith 2010, p. 11). Such information – even in physical environments – is processed by the brain to make predictions based on prior experience<sup>228</sup> (Bar 2007).

Emotion perception requires handling the complexity of inferring multiple emotions from facial expressions, or interpreting dynamic emotional expressions that include a preceding expression as well as an end expression (Fang, Sauter & Van Kleef 2018). Although perceivers often agree about the primary emotion that is conveyed by a particular expression, the perception of nonprimary emotions from emotional expressions is poorly understood (*ibid*).

It is widely agreed that emotions are adaptive responses to the demands of the environment (Ekman, Davidson & Friesen 1990; Elfenbein 2007; Scherer 1994). It is a functional psychological system that includes a stimulus, leads to emotional registration and from there on to the emotional experience (Elfenbein 2007). In another view, it is composed of four components: appraisal, expression, body regulation and feeling (Holodyski & Friedlmeier 2005).

Scherer (2005) proposes a design feature system suggesting that emotions are (i) focused on specific events, (ii) involve the appraisal of intrinsic features of objects or events as well as of their motive consistency and conduciveness to specific motives,

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third, tertiary, layer. Hascher (2010) speaks of gradual emotion dimensions ranging across arousal, valence, intensity, duration, frequency and time. Each of them has its own claim to validity, but an in-depth analysis here would distract from the main tenor of this argument.

<sup>228</sup> In the context of fuzzy-trace theory, Wilhelms et al. (2018) postulate that the encoded gist of whether something is generally good or bad is likely to be informed by the valence of previous emotional experiences. Conversely, the encoded gist of information often influences the emotional reactions to that information (e.g., influencing whether people interpret a nudge from a stranger as a threat or benign).

(iii) affect most or all bodily subsystems that may become synchronized to some extent, (iv) are subject to rapid change owing to the unfolding of events and reappraisals, and (v) have a strong impact on behavior owing to the generation of action readiness and control precedence.

According to appraisal theory<sup>229</sup>, it is the interpretation of events and situations – rather than events themselves – that causes emotions (Roseman & Smith 2001, p. 6). Appraisal (and reappraisal) explain how different emotions may emerge from the same event in different individuals as it is the way in which individuals construe (and later reconsider) an emotion-eliciting situation, which has a motive-serving relevance for those concerned. Which emotion is elicited depends on the significance attached to the situation in terms of the individual's own motive satisfaction or goal concerns (Holodynski & Friedlmeier 2005; Lord & Kaufer 2002).

A salient stimulus event is a novel experience that requires attention deployment and information processing (Scherer 2009). Scherer (2009) suggests that there are four major appraisal objectives needed to react adaptively when faced with such a situation:

(i) Relevance: How relevant is this event for me? Does it directly affect me or my social reference group? Is it intrinsically pleasant for me or not?

(ii) Implication: What are the implications or consequences of this event and how do they affect my well-being and my immediate or long-term goals? How different is it from my expectations?

(iii) Coping potential: how well can I cope with or adjust to these consequences?

(iv) Normative significance: What is the significance of this event for my self-concept and for social norms and values?

### 4.3 Emotion as a Sociocultural Process

Emotion as communication evolved as an adaptive response to social living. It is central to social relationships (Mesquita 2010). As Rizzolatti and Craighero (2004) highlight: “if we want to survive, we must understand the actions of others. Furthermore, without action understanding, social organization is impossible” (Rizzolatti & Craighero 2004, p. 169).

Emoting – which is a relational action showing emotion (Mesquita 2010) – is fundamentally linked with social capacities, providing a non-verbal means to communicate emotions through facial expressions, body posture, and voice tone. This heritage is evident even in prelingual infants who both communicate and respond to affective messages (ibid).

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<sup>229</sup> Appraisal theory is considered to have been first proposed by Arnold (1960) and developed by Lazarus (1966), among others.

There are various approaches to the issue of “mind-reading”, which ties in with emotion reading. One is the “simulation theory” approach, according to which “other people’s mental states are represented by adopting their perspective: by tracking or matching their states with resonant states of one’s own” (Gallese & Goldman 1998, p. 493). It echoes the concept of empathy<sup>230</sup>.

Gallese and Goldman’s (1998) research indicates that “mirror neurons” in a monkey’s premotor cortex respond when performing or observing the same action done by another. Extended to humans, it argues for a built-in evolutionary reciprocity, an empathy which assists in “mind-reading”, i.e. “the activity of representing specific mental states of others” (ibid, p. 495). Another is “theory theory”, according to which “mental states are represented as inferred posits of a naive theory” (ibid, p. 493), a folk psychology mechanism which starts out with a basic, common-sense theory that is then revised through a process of observation and data gathering<sup>231</sup>.

The emotion schemas mentioned earlier belong more to the second category. They are causal or mediating processes that comprise emotion and cognition, they interact dynamically during the appraisal and reappraisal stages to affect perception, thought, and action.

Being fundamental to human interaction, emotions provide an underlying structure for many social processes (cf. Lord & Kanfer 2002). They are defined by the sociocultural situations in which they occur (Frijda 1996). This argument underlies the social-functional approach to emotions, which posits that emotions coordinate interactions related to formation and maintenance of social relationships (Keltner & Kring 1998).

The role played by cultural influence on appraisal in emotion schemas has been addressed by various scholars. Lynch (1991) posits that: “emotions are essentially appraisals, that is, they are judgements of situations based on cultural beliefs and values. <...> As cultural appraisals, emotions are learned or acquired in society rather than given naturally” (Lynch 1990, p. 9).

Friedlmeier (2013) concurs that cultural models organize how specific states are experienced<sup>232</sup>. Kitayama and Markus (1994) highlight that cultural factors contribute divergently and dynamically yet systematically to the shaping of human emotions. Mesquita and Ellsworth (2001) maintain that despite numerous cross-cultural

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<sup>230</sup> Research in the neurobiology of empathy has changed the perception of empathy from a soft skill to a neurobiologically based competency (Riess 2010).

<sup>231</sup> As mirror neurons research is still an ongoing process, it appears as yet uncertain how far its application is mutually exclusive or concordant with both approaches.

<sup>232</sup> „Kulturelle Modelle organisieren Gelegenheiten, spezifische Zustände zu erfahren. ein Verständnis von kulturellen Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschieden im emotionalen Geschehen ist eine entwicklungspsychologische Perspektive wichtig“ (Friedlmeier 2013, p. 219).

similarities in appraisal-emotion relationships<sup>233</sup>, the relationship between emotions and appraisals is subject to cultural influence.

How might cultural influence play out in emotion schemas? At an individual level, an emotion is experienced as a result of the meaning assigned to it by the individual (Kneepkens & Zwan 1994). According to Frijda's (1988) law of situational meaning, "emotions arise in response to the meaning structures of given situations; different emotions arise in response to different meaning structures" (p. 349)<sup>234</sup>.

Emotion schemas – particularly their cognitive aspects – are influenced by individual differences, learning, and also by social and cultural contexts (Izard 2009).

By having and expressing an emotion, we take a stance in the social world, express our concerns, and reveal our strategies, goals, and intentions to act (Frijda 1986, 2007; Griffiths and Scarantino 2009). Inferring this information about the other's thoughts, feelings and intentions is crucial in successful social interactions, and has – for example – been related to leadership skills and satisfaction with social relationships (Lopes et al. 2003). Therefore, the true challenge is to make the right inferences – or even any inferences at all – when faced with unfamiliarity in a sociocultural situation.

At a group level, humans as social animals learned and categorize emotion through social interaction within a certain social context or culture (Mesquita 2018). The social orientation hypothesis proposes, for instance, that cultures differ in their social orientation. Cultures that endorse and afford independent social orientation tend to emphasize self-direction, autonomy, and self-expression, while cultures that endorse and afford interdependent social orientation tend to emphasize harmony, relatedness, and connection (Varnum et al. 2010)<sup>235</sup>. This orientation would be reflected in the expression and appraisal of emotions.

The individual's affective disposition is co-shaped by sedimented affective patterns from the past (Muehlhoff 2019), including the cultural past, even if not in a deterministic sense<sup>236</sup>. Emotions are aligned with cultural values, ideals, goals and concerns and regulation happens at the levels of individual tendencies, relational co-regulation and structural affordances (De Leersnyder, Boigner & Mesquita 2013). In other words, given social actions as understood increase the likelihood of some forms of emoting and render others less likely (Mesquita 2010). The situational experience of emotions is thus linked to previous experiences, expectations, knowledge as well as

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<sup>233</sup> "Universal contingency". However, this might apply more to basic emotions.

<sup>234</sup> This is to be seen in a non-pathological context. For instance, endogenous depression caused by neurotransmitter dysfunction is an example of emotion unrelated to appraisal (Roseman & Smith 2001)

<sup>235</sup> The authors link the two categories to the cultures of West and East Asia, respectively.

<sup>236</sup> Muehlhoff (2019) points out that the past is not to be seen in a deterministic sense, but rather as a latency, a potential in the process of reciprocal modulation.

what is happening in the moment. What takes place is a “diachronic co-presence of the past and synchronic modulation in the present”<sup>237</sup> (Muehlhoff 2019).

Unfamiliarity can in itself lead to affective states that influence interaction. In the theoretical foundation of the affect infusion model (AIM), Forgas (1995) defined the term ‘affect infusion’ as “the process whereby affectively loaded information exerts an influence on and becomes incorporated into the judgmental process, entering into the judge's deliberations and eventually coloring the judgmental outcome” (Forgas 1995, p. 39). He maintains that the effects of mood are intensified when faced with complex, unanticipated situations that demand substantial cognitive processing. Processing of unfamiliar cultural factors is substantial as it requires selection, learning and interpretation of novel or complex input in relation to pre-existing knowledge structures (Chou, Lee & Ho 2007).

There is evidence to show that in collaborative learning, mental awareness (being aware of other’s knowledge and ideas) usually goes along with emotion awareness (Feidakis et al. 2014). The capacity to read emotions can be learned explicitly, but as a rule such learning is largely implicit, reflecting regularities in family, ethnic, organizational, or national cultures (Lord & Kanfer 2002).

Learned emotions acquired experientially as social learning (Fischer, Shaver & Carnochan 1990) tie in with the phenomenon of cultural regulation. The term refers to all of the processes that help “to attain culturally appropriate (or functional)-emotional experiences; appropriate are those experiences that, within a culture, are more often than not instrumental in the successful navigation of the social world” (De Leersnyder, Boigner & Mesquita 2013). In Fischer et al.’s (1990) classification of emotions<sup>238</sup>, cultural regulation would correspond to the category of “prototypical scripts” comprising numerous sets of appropriate behavioral responses used to express emotions in particular circumstances.

*If I was in an Indian group and my colleagues made a joke in a language I don't understand, I would immediately ask what they were all laughing about. In a German group I don't do this and no one bothers to explain either. You see, we react in a strange way with foreigners – we always have the feeling that the joke*

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<sup>237</sup> The mental events and behaviors emerging from moment-by-moment interaction with the environment do not proceed in invariant, context-free fashion from preformed dispositions or causes (Barrett et al. 2010, p.5).

<sup>238</sup> The other two categories of Fischer et al.’s classification (1990) are the superordinate category which involves a functional appraisal of events as either positive or negative for goal advancement, and a basic, species-specific level subsuming the five broad labels: love, joy, anger, sadness, and fear, which later develops into “a broad array of complex, often subtle” emotions such as compassion, nostalgia, humiliation (Fischer et al. 1990, p. 82).

*may be directed at us, but we feel bad to ask also, as it may not be proper to do that here. (Company B/05.12.2016/RS/India/186)*

The emotional challenge is to manage the duality of shaping/regulating a current, novel situation in the light of past cultural experience while being co-shaped by the situation (cf. Muehlhoff 2019). During the emotional dynamics of the interaction, the challenge becomes twofold: on the one hand, there is an inability to read the meaning of social and emotional cues (appraisal), or uncertainty at the very least:

*I just can't figure out what they are thinking or feeling. They simply look at you and listen silently. I then don't know how to react and start stammering. It's even worse on the phone when you can't even hear the response. (Company B/07.10.2019/PS/India/187)*

The next stage of the ongoing interaction is fraught with uncertainty concerning affective feedback<sup>239</sup>. What response behavior is most appropriate to navigate a particular situation (cf. Roseman & Smith 2001)?

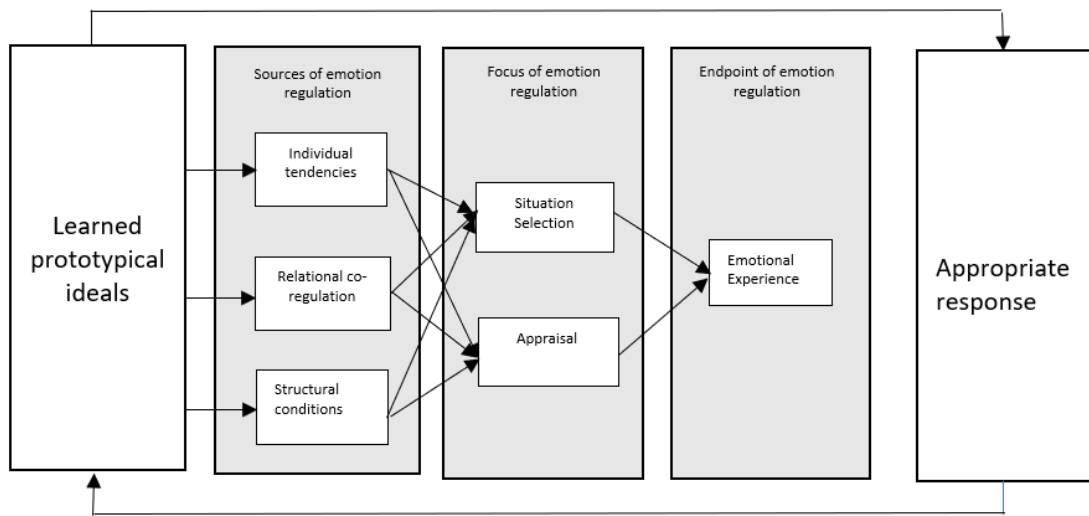
*Wie verhalte ich mich, wenn ich zu privaten Gemächern eingeladen werde und ich nicht hingehen will, weil es mir zu privat ist? Ich will niemanden beleidigen. (Company A/09.03.2018/JL/Germany/188)*

The cyclical challenge in unfamiliar intercultural interaction for the sender lies in how to appropriately convey an affective message, how to appraise unfamiliar socioemotional reactional cues, and how to respond. The same applies for the receiver

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<sup>239</sup> Affective feedback can be either parallel-empathetic (exhibit an emotion similar to that of the target), reactive-empathetic (focus on the target's affective state, in addition to his/her situation) or task-based (change task sequence-supplementary to empathetic strategies) (Sabourin et al. 2009).

in a reverse cycle.



*Figure 21.* Cycle of antecedent-focused emotion regulation in a cultural context (based on De Leersnyder, Boigner & Mesquita 2013)

#### 4.4 Emotions in organizations

The influence of emotions in organizations may not be discounted, whether in dyadic interaction, within groups, or within and between organizations. Job characteristics and other environmental factors are important stimuli that influence workers' affective states (Saavedra & Kwun 2000). This culturally-based structure for social interactions or organizational processes provides "a continuous, often implicit emotional structure" (Lord & Kanfer 2002, p. 13) that drives organizational interaction.

However, social interactions are just as salient in work environments. The workplace is an important location where people establish social ties (Regts & Molleman 2016) and individuals relate to their work as a series of interactions and relationships with other people (Dutton & Dukerich 2006).

##### 4.4.1 Cognition vs. affect

Picard (1995, p. 1) maintains that emotions have a stigma in science; they are believed to be inherently non-scientific. Scientific principles are derived from rational thought, logical arguments, testable hypotheses, and repeatable experiments. Emotions are often seen as the polar opposite of cognition and correspondingly undervalued, particularly in technological settings.

This perceived mutual exclusion is not supported by research (Langer 1967; Phelps 2006)<sup>240</sup>. Although early scholars such as Arnold (1960) started out on the assumption that appraisals are intuitive rather than deliberative assessments, later research indicates that complex, conscious, high-level cognitive processing can be a part of the process<sup>241</sup> (Smith & Kirby 2001). Despite some separate features and influences (Talmi & Frith 2007), emotion and cognition are dynamic coalitions of networks of brain areas (Pessoa 2008).

Studies in neurobiology point in a similar direction, particularly Bechara and Damasio's (2005) somatic marker hypothesis. In their neural model for economic decision-making, the neuroscientists argue that "knowledge and reasoning alone are usually not sufficient for making advantageous decisions, and that the role of emotion in decision-making has been underestimated" (p. 337).

Frijda (1986) contends that far from being irrational, emotions are a mechanism that serves our interests and plays a central role in goal fulfilment. His law of concern posits that "emotions arise in response to events that are important to the individual's goals, motives, or concerns" (Frijda 1988, p. 351). The "affect-as-information" hypothesis (Clore, Gasper & Garvin 2001) also indicates that knowing and feeling are tightly linked, with affective feedback guiding judgment, decision-making, and information processing.

#### 4.4.2 Affect in OCB:

Social identity theory advances the view that membership in a social group exerts an influence on individuals, leading to internalized roles, norms, and values that affect behavior (Haslam 2001). When people identify with social groups, they also appraise events in terms of their implications for those groups (Smith & Mackie 2015). The appropriate socialization of emotional regulation and emotional displays are part of these roles, norms and values, and arise within the professional self-categorization<sup>242</sup> discussed in Chapter 2.

Norms and appraisals regarding affect fall beyond the scope of formal job requirements, but often reveal themselves in the previously-discussed concept of

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<sup>240</sup> Though the ancient Indian Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika involves a strict division into cognition (*jñāna*) and mental phenomena that include a feeling aspect, such as love or attraction (*rāga*) and aversion (*dveṣa*), the 8<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Śaṅkara considered this division artificial. In his holistic notion of Advaita Vedānta, a mind will always have certain emotive qualities such as desire, aversion, hatred, pleasure or pain. So, as long there are cognitions, there will also be emotions. Both must be eliminated in order for the self to attain liberation (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy 2016).

<sup>241</sup> Elfenbein (2007, p. 9) prefers to label appraisal as 'emotional registration' in order to incorporate both automatic subconscious processing as well as more explicit cognitive interpretation.

<sup>242</sup> "The way things are done around here" (Deal & Kennedy 2000).



organizational citizenship behavior. Despite evidence on the interrelatedness of cognition and emotion, a look at our two communities of practice shows a propensity for self-categorizing along rational-emotional lines between 'contextual performance' and 'task performance'. In everyday parlance, they might be termed 'soft skills' and 'hard skills'.

Within the OCB framework, Organ and Ryan (1995) propose that:

'Task performance' is determined by task-related knowledge, skills and abilities, whereas 'contextual performance' is attitudinal and includes such contributions like volunteering for extra-job activities and helping others, regardless of personal inconvenience. Such behaviors are not directly related to task functions but contribute to organizational effectiveness through shaping the 'context' that supports the tasks (Organ & Ryan 1995, p. 776).

The above distinction does not consider that some OCB dimensions, such as 'conscientiousness' which includes the subdimensions of quality and meeting deadlines, are directly linked to task performance. However, OCB offers a convenient overview to discuss the relative importance of task and contextual performance in the groups studied. As the scholarly variations on the OCB theme<sup>243</sup> are too numerous to be completely listed, five broad categories of Kwantes et al.'s (2008, p. 236) OCB factors table will be selectively cited, both in this and the following chapter.

Table 2

*OCB factors table with gap factors of Indian CoPs highlighted (abbreviated from Kwantes et al. 2008, p. 236)*

Conscientiousness	following regulations and procedures, punctuality, highest quality
Initiative	Risking disapproval for good of the company, using own judgement, informing others to prevent unanticipated problems
Volunteerism	Helping others, volunteering without being asked, helping to organize departmental get-togethers
Boosterism	Defending the organization when outsiders criticize it, showing pride when representing the organization in public
Sportsmanship	Taking undeserved work breaks, complaining about trivial matters, making problems greater than they actually are

<sup>243</sup> Organ (1988), for instance, proposed altruism, courtesy, sportsmanship, conscientiousness, and civic virtue. Additionally, OCB can be broadly grouped into OCBI that benefits individuals and OCBO that benefits the organization as a whole (McNeely & Meglino 1994).

The first two OCB factors are more immediately related to task performance, while the other three are contextual to varying degrees.

German tech self-categorization indicates a positioning tending towards task performance:

*Wir haben 2 Ebenen – die Sachebene und die Emotionsebene, sie haben noch eine dritte, die Machtebene. In einer Diskussion sind wir in der Lage, die Emotionsebene auszuschalten und uns auf der Sachebene zu konzentrieren. Bei den Indern ist es nicht so – da überwiegt die Emotionsebene, und die Machtebene spielt mit. (Company A/16.03.2018/AK/Germany/189)*

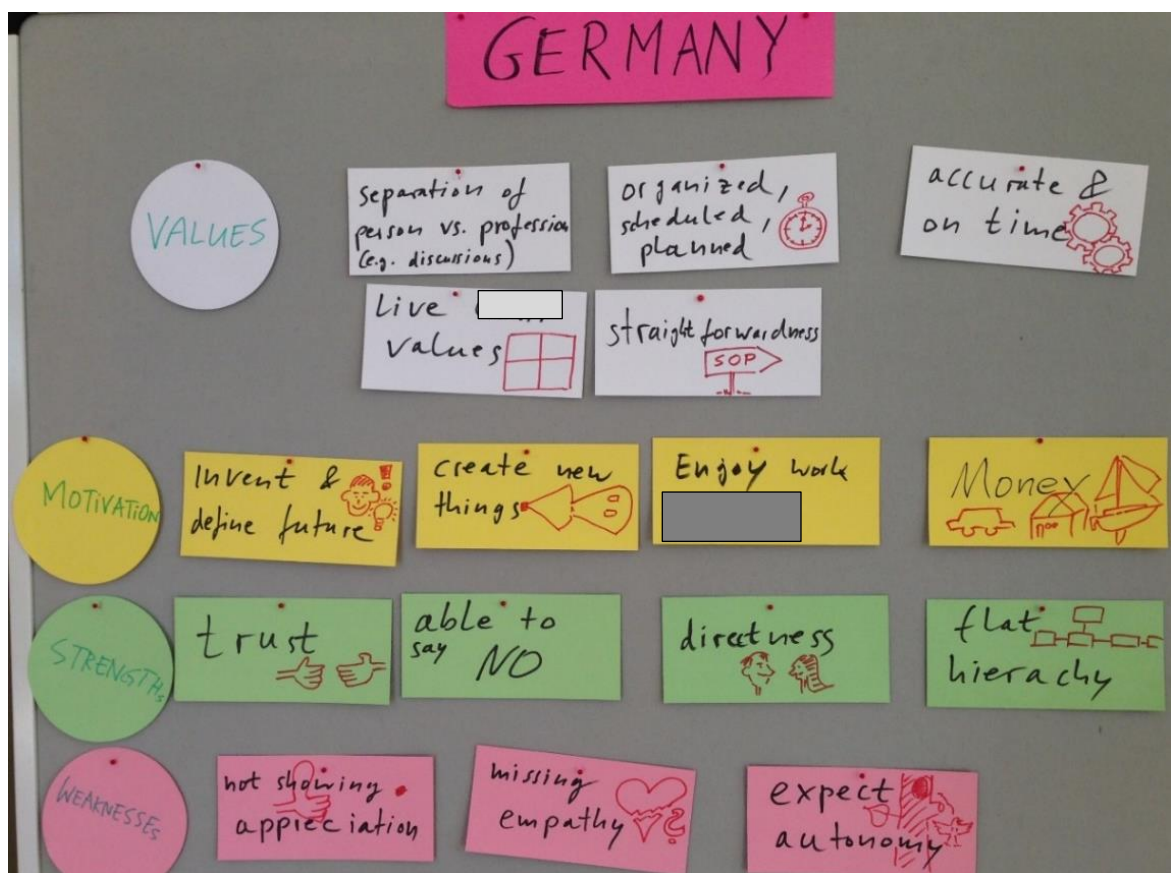


Figure 22. Germany: CoP self-categorization: Our values, motivation, strengths and weaknesses (Company C)<sup>244</sup>

On the other hand, the salience of affect in Indian professional contexts – in part covered by the dimension “volunteerism” – is repeatedly cited by the Indian participants:

<sup>244</sup> This pinboard was created by German team members for their Indian team counterparts.

*The emotionality of Indians is not understood. They think everything is only based on logic – is it a sensible thing to do<sup>245</sup>? But we are not always so rational, not at home and not at the office. (Company B/28.03.2019/PS/India/190)*

Despite this perceived dichotomy, it is worth recalling that there is no such thing as “pure reason” (Damasio 1994). Emotion plays a part in reasoning and emotions are vital for us to function as rational decision-making human beings (ibid). This holds particularly true for organizations, which are social units formed for the purpose of achieving collective goals.<sup>246</sup>

In the organizational context, Basch and Fisher (2000) have demonstrated that – with only a few exceptions – employees experience nearly the full range of emotions in their workplace, together with emotions that are more specific to the work environment.

#### **4.5 Levels of Emotions in Organizations**

Ashkanasy’s (2003) five-level model of emotions in organizations serves as an illustration of how emotions pervade the entire spectrum of organizational behavior. It will provide a structural basis for the discussion on the following pages.

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<sup>245</sup> In a curious paradox, this utterance rejects reason and logic-based action as not sensible when the dictionary definition of “sensible” is “able to make good judgments based on reason and experience rather than emotion” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries).  
[https://www.google.com/search?q=sensible+oxford+dictionary&rlz=1C1GTQC\\_enUS761US761&oq=sensible+dictionar&aqs=chrome.3.69i57j0l5.11662j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=sensible+oxford+dictionary&rlz=1C1GTQC_enUS761US761&oq=sensible+dictionar&aqs=chrome.3.69i57j0l5.11662j1j8&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

<sup>246</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/organization.html>



Figure 23. Levels of emotions in organizations (Ashkanasy 2003, p. 11).

In the following pages, some prevalent theories of workplace emotions will be examined and linked to the gaps cited by the Indian participants. Though Figure 23 suggests a compartmentalization, it must be kept in mind that the five levels intersect interdirectionally:

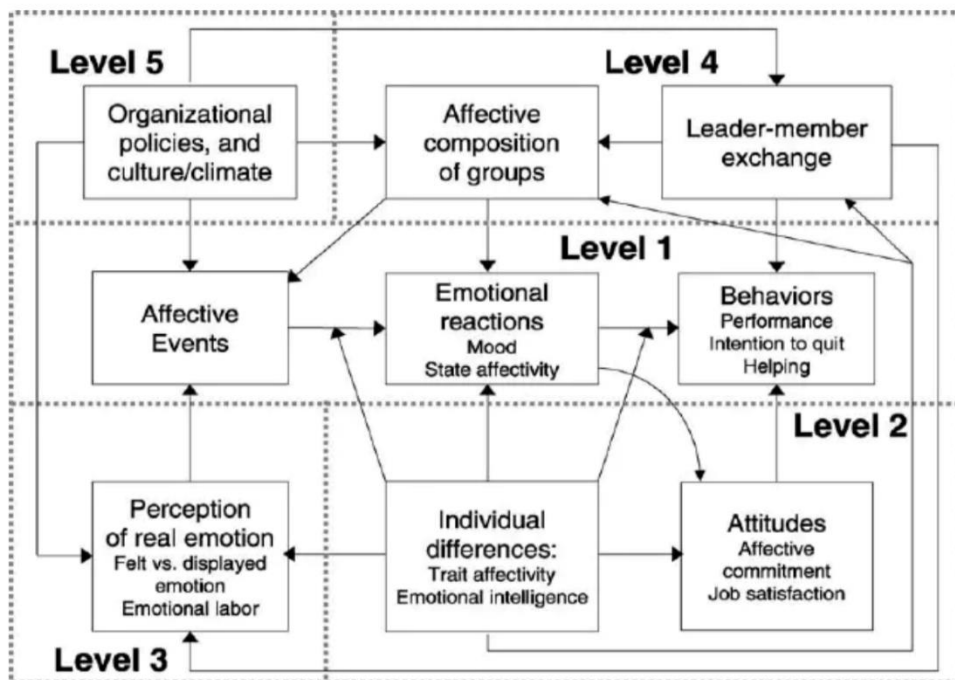


Figure 24. Multi-level model of emotions in organizations (Askanasy 2003, p. 40).

In the following pages, the five levels will be compressed into three groups: within-person, interpersonal interactions and organization-wide<sup>247</sup>. Based on the findings, the gaps at each of the three levels will be clustered around the Indian participants' meta-gap, namely the concept of positive affect.

Positive affect can be described as the experience of a set of emotions reflecting pleasurable engagement with the environment. Positive affect reflects neither a lack of negative affect nor the opposite of negative affect, but is a separate, independent dimension of emotion (Watson and Tellegen 1985).

Positive emotions have garnered less attention than negative emotions, for several reasons: they are less differentiated, they are not associated with specific problems needing solutions, and they are not associated with specific action tendencies thought to be necessary for survival (Fredrickson 1998; Lord & Kanfer 2002).

Fredrickson's (1998, 2001) position on the value of positive emotions for building physical, social, and intellectual skills can be generalized to organizational perspectives. Positive emotions are likely to promote a number of important organizational processes, such as skill building, creativity, effective social relations, organizational commitment, collective orientations, and prosocial behaviors. They can also serve as an antidote to the harmful physiological and cognitive effects of negative emotions (Fredrickson 1998; Lord & Kanfer 2002). Isen (2001) maintains that positive affect enhances problem-solving and decision-making, leading to flexible, creative, innovative cognitive processing.

Negative emotions interfere with information processing (McGaugh & Roozendaal 2002; Dinh et al. 2014) and effective social relations (Fredrickson 1998). In conjunction with prevailing belief systems they may lead to counterproductive organizational behaviors (COB) (Levine 2010).

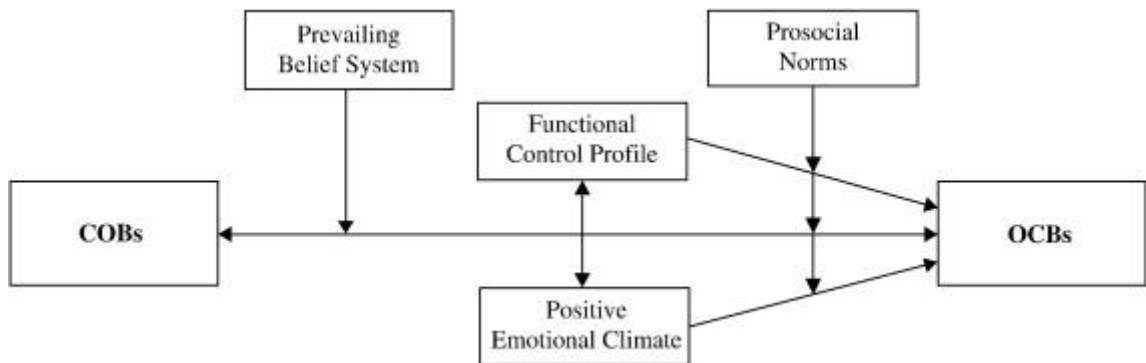


Figure 25. Counterproductive organizational behavior (Levine 2010).

<sup>247</sup> Askanasy himself suggests that levels 1 and 2 constitute the micro level, Levels 4 and 5 the group or organizational level, and level 3 the link between the two (Askanasy 2003, p.25).

**4.5.1 Within-Person.** One of the best-known theories at the within-person level is affective events theory (AET) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which was initially driven by the idea of job satisfaction. The theory refers to a model of emotions in organizations, premised on the idea that work events such as everyday hassles and uplifts determine emotional states, which in turn underlie the way in which we think and behave at work.

AET posits that events are the proximal causes of emotions and makes a clear distinction between features and events as explanatory constructs. When something happens to people at work, their reactions are often emotional in nature. The basic literature on emotions consensually accepts the idea that events drive changes in emotional states (Weiss & Beal 2005). Although events are instigators of changes in emotional states, there may be differences of opinion concerning how events are interpreted, the relative impact of positive and negative events, the filtering process of personality, etc. (ibid)<sup>248</sup>.

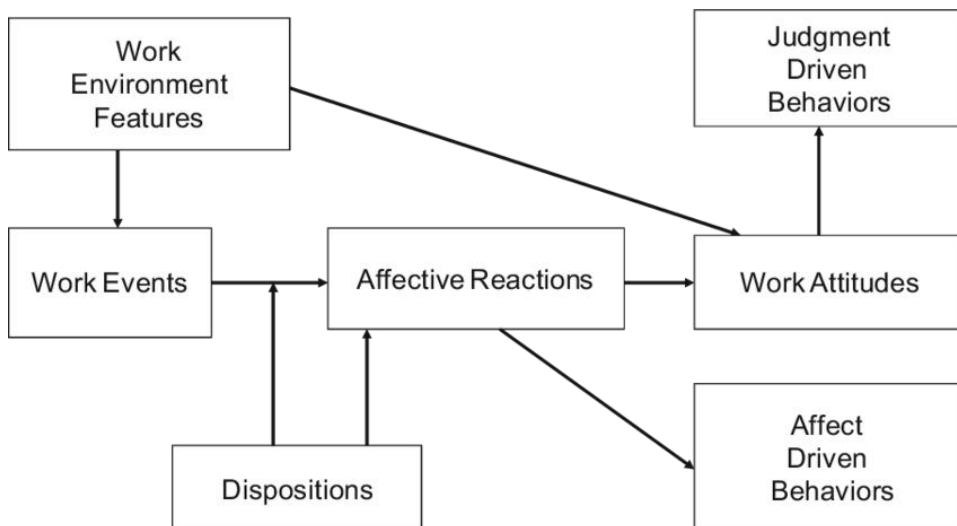


Figure 26. Macro-structure of affective events theory<sup>249</sup> (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996, p. 12)

AET also draws attention to the importance of accumulation of hassles and uplifts. Rather than the intensity of major events being the source, emotions are more determined by the frequency with which hassles or uplifts occur (Ashkanasy & Ashton-James 2007). The emotions sparked by events – either as a singular, short-lived experience or cumulatively – can thus create a mood experience of varying duration (cf. Cropanzano et al. 2003).

<sup>248</sup> Let us recall the footnote on page 12: AET is to be seen in a non-pathological context.

<sup>249</sup> Figure from: Gouthier, M & Ganz, W 2011, *Emotionalität in der Arbeitsproduktivität des Servicepersonals*, 10.1007/978-3-8349-6663-6\_15.

Mood is considered an important variable in organizational effectiveness (Brief & Weiss 2002) and it has a place not only at the within-person level but also at the between-persons, group and organizational levels.

Studies on mood indicate that that positive mood is associated generally with positive outcomes (Isen & Baron 1991), including OCB dimensions such as more helping behaviors at work (Williams & Shiaw 1999). It is generally accepted that positive affect helps maintain emotional health<sup>250</sup> (Ashkanasy 2003), while the issue of whether happier workers are more productive continues to be the subject of scholarly research<sup>251</sup> (cf. Lord and Kanfer 2002).

As is apparent from the following remarks, there is a belief that moods are causal in terms of outcomes in India.

*I think we tend to be mood-driven. When a guy is feeling on top of the world he comes into the office and produces some genius stuff. If he's feeling low – for whatever reason – he tends to slack. (Company A/24.08.2019/BD/India/191)*

*That is absolutely true. I hadn't even thought of that aspect. The quality of our work is very dependent on mood, so it's not consistent. We do our best if we're in the right mood, but on other days we are just doing whatever is necessary, checking our boxes. That's even true of me to some extent. Do you think it's because we can't compartmentalize? There are days on which I have family issues which worry me and then I can't keep my mind on my work. The Germans come into the office and they're completely focused on their work. It's admirable. (Company A/24.08.2019/RJ/India/192)*

*Grundsätzlich sind sie gelassener als wir. Nur nicht unnötig aufregen. Ich glaube, sie finden uns zu penibel und perfektionistisch. Aber wir sind die Qualitätsweltmeister, weil wir uns mit nichts zufriedengeben. (Company B/22.02.2018/CM/Germany/193)*

The participants from India indicate that there is a greater awareness of positive mood in Indian environments and a corresponding drive to provide a higher frequency of uplifts:

<sup>250</sup> Studies on the psychophysiology of emotion point in this direction. Heaphy and Dutton review research indicating that positive workplace interactions have beneficial effects on three physiological systems: the cardiovascular system, the immune system and the neuroendocrine system (Heaphy and Dutton 2008).

<sup>251</sup> There is also some evidence that negative people are more realistic in estimating contingencies of actions and are more accurate in judging the consequences of their actions – “sadder but wiser” (Alloy and Abramson 1979).

*There's no fun at work here. That's a big difference I find. No informal birthday parties or anything. Sometimes there's cake put out, but nobody even knows why.* (Company C/10.10.2016/DV/India/194)

*Sie feiern jede Woche, egal ob es was zu feiern gibt, scheint's. Wir machen es einmal im Jahr, so ein Teamevent mit Grillen oder so was.* (Company B/25.06.2019/PM/Germany/195)

As mentioned earlier, Forgas' (1995) affective infusion model proposes a correlation between mood, evaluation and judgmental outcomes. It suggests that negative moods lead to risk-avoidant behavior as the world is perceived as a more threatening place (cf. Chou, Lee & Ho 2007). The German interactants perceived their counterparts in India as having a more positive life view:

*Woher nehmen sie diesen unerschütterlichen Optimismus? Dieses Gefühl, dass alles gut wird? Oder vielleicht wird es nur so dargestellt.* (Company B/29.06.2018/JS/Germany/196)

*Es ist nur ein Film, aber manchmal denke ich bei der Arbeit an diesen lustigen Typen aus dem Marigold Hotel der sagt, „es wird am Ende alles gut. Und wenn nicht alles gut ist, dann ist es auch nicht das Ende“<sup>252</sup>.* (Company B/22.06.2017/JP/Germany/197)

Here, the self-perception of the Indian colleagues reveals a rare case of divergence

*Work in India is so hectic, we are always rushing around because something has to be done at the last minute or there's a crisis cropping up. They seem so relaxed, have so much more free time at weekends.* (Company D/10.06.2017/RT/India/198)

*I agree. I am much more relaxed here than in Bangalore. There it was the traffic, the pollution, the noise .... Uff [sound denoting exhaustion]<sup>253</sup>.* (Company D/10.06.2017/SK/India/199)

**4.5.2 Between persons and groups.** There can be no denying the increasing importance of team-based work as organizations move away from traditional hierarchies (cf. LePine, Erez & Johnson 2002). In teamwork, emotion is the relational phenomenon that permeates the connections between the within-person level, the interpersonal interaction level and the group level.

<sup>252</sup> The reference is to the film "Best Exotic Marigold Hotel" (2011).

<sup>253</sup> People with multiplex relationships (in which co-workers are also friends) received better performance reviews from supervisors but also more emotional exhaustion because of two roles. (Methot et al. 2015)



In DeGroot and Brownlee's (2006) composite OCB scale, the three main dimensions are interpersonal-related, organization-related and task-related. It can be argued that the interpersonal-related dimension comes to the forefront in autonomously managed team projects. Research indicates the importance of meeting both the need for task accomplishment and the need for team members' socioemotional well-being (Daft 2008).

While task-oriented behavior is often associated with higher productivity, people-oriented behavior is associated with higher employee satisfaction (ibid, p. 205). The positive outcomes of positive mood include OCB factors such as more helping behaviors at work (Williams & Shiaw 1999), less employee turnover (Shaw 1999) and improved performance (Cropanzano et al. 2003).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)<sup>254</sup> famously postulates that people need to be given affection and security to give it in return. Consequently, the within-person well-being of employees is a feedback loop as it contributes to the maintenance of positive affect in the whole team (cf. Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2000). In the collective socialization of work groups, positive emotion is a necessary precursor of group cohesiveness (Ashkanasy 2003)<sup>255</sup>.

*How can one survive so many hours a day in the office without a good mix of personal and professional life? I spend more time in the office than with my own family. So it's only natural that the colleagues become like a second family, my office is a second home. (Company B/28.03.2019/AP/India/200)*

Trait affectivity represents a personal disposition to be in a long-term positive or negative affective state (Fox and Spector 2000). High levels of positive affectivity are marked by frequent feelings of cheerfulness, enthusiasm, and energy (Watson & Naragon 2009). The "affective composition" of a group (Kelly and Barsade 2001) "begins initially with the emotional characteristics of team members<sup>256</sup>, and then develops through a process of emotional contagion, entrainment, modeling, and manipulation of affect" (Ashkanasy 2003, p. 32).

Emotional contagion refers to the synchronization of emotion with others, whether consciously or unconsciously. It describes the social influence based on the processes and consequences of shared emotions at work (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson 1994), i.e., the convergence of emotions through social networking (Deng & Hu 2018). Contagion is connected to both moods – "weaker, more diffuse affective

<sup>254</sup> Maslow A. "A Theory of Human Motivation" Psychological Review 50 (4) ,p. 370 – 96.

<sup>255</sup> Lam et al. (2016) posit that employees who engaged in OCB have higher levels of work meaningfulness at the end of the day, i.e., the feeling that their job is useful or significant.

<sup>256</sup> The individual-level affective characteristics that members bring to their groups include moods, emotions, sentiments, and emotional intelligence (Kelly & Barsade 2001).

reactions to general environmental stimuli” – and to emotions, which are “intense, relatively short-term affective reactions to a specific environmental stimulus” (Barsade 2002, p. 6-7).

As the AET corollary posits, positive affect is maintained by support from colleagues, friends, and family. Such support can even offset an accumulation of negative events. The findings indicate that interdependency<sup>257</sup> and relational cohesiveness are rated highly in an Indian work environment.

*Socializing in Germany is not free and easy, they don't even try to generate any feeling of comfort. We Indians are initially nervous of foreigners, we are new to this place and feel alone – either there is no willingness or no awareness to defuse this. (Company B/28.3.2019/SY/India/201)*

Workplace commitment is not merely transactional (Hrebiniak & Alutto 1972) or obligatory (Meyer & Allen 1991). It can be driven by interpersonal relationships and perceived benevolence, which can be defined as a concern for others beyond their own needs, backed by benign motives (Dietz, Gillespie & Chao 2010)<sup>258</sup>.

*The workplace is for us a proxy family. Because of our emotionalism we develop close friendly relationships. Work is not the focus of emotional bonding, relationships are. These relationships sometimes last a lifetime, long after the work is done. I often go to work when I am sick just to feel the emotional comfort and support of my colleagues. (Company A/24.08.2019/RJ/India/202)*

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<sup>257</sup> “An interdependent self stresses the connection to others and defines and defines the self in terms of relationships with others” (Morf & Koole 2012, p.141). Some scholars maintain that workers who adhere to collectivistic norms have been found to be related to within-group helping behavior (Finkelstein 2012)

<sup>258</sup> Dietz et al. consider it in the context of trust; “‘intention’ can be understood as a trustor’s positive orientation towards a trustee, which is benevolence” (Dietz et al. 2010, p. 10).

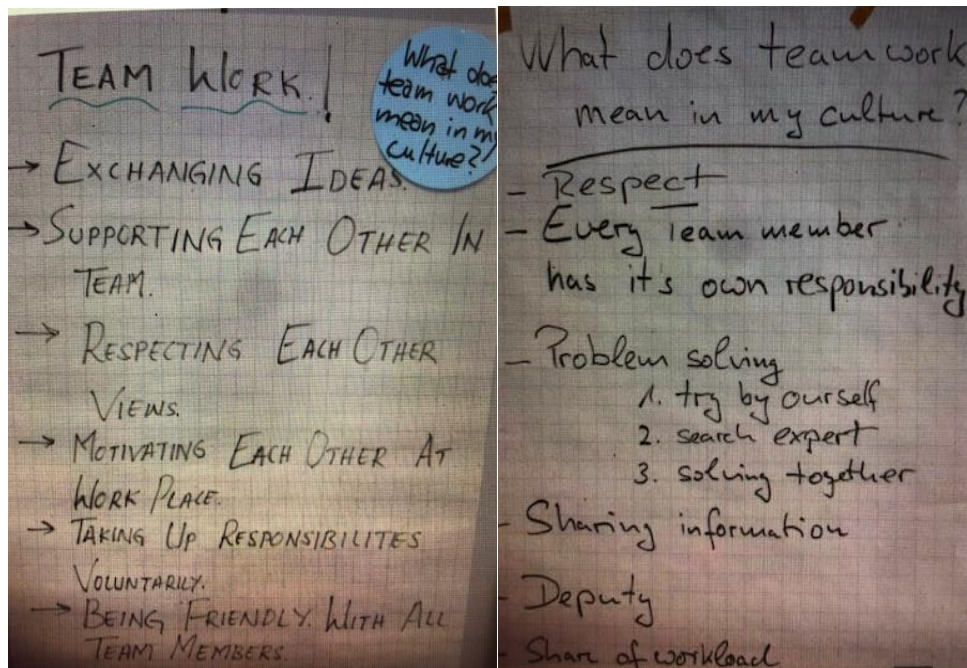


Figure 27. India & Germany: Teamwork in our culture (Company D)

**4.5.2.1 Signaling Interpersonal Positive Affect.** Signaling theory is used in a wide array of research contexts, ranging from job interviews to corporate social responsibility. According to Spence (2002), signaling theory is fundamentally concerned with reducing information asymmetry between two parties. Though the theory is more prevalent in an organizational literature, signaling in interpersonal interaction can be seen as a means to implicitly convey one's traits and preferences to observers (cf. Bennett & Chakravarti 2009), whether verbally or otherwise. Without affective signaling, there is no observational data to infer preferences.

Affective signaling is related to the concept of interpersonal "face-work" in a heuristic sense. The paradigm of "face" has undergone a series of adaptations and modifications over time, with Ting-Toomey (1988) and Brown and Levinson (1987) drawing on the work of Goffman (1955)<sup>259</sup>. Its variations are manifold, but the definition that "face represents an individual's claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction" (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey 2003, p. 600) provides a basis for the following pages.

Goffman (1967) distinguishes between "face" that incorporates evaluation and emotional response and "face-work" that is subsumed in ritual practices, including etiquette (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003). Face can be "defensive" (of own face) or "protective" (of others' face) (Goffman 1967). Brown and Levinson's (1987) later politeness theory is primarily concerned with linguistic strategies. It introduces the

<sup>259</sup> Goffman's original concept in turn owes a debt to Durkheim (1915, 1924).

cultural element and provides a dualistic model of positive and negative politeness behaviors, with an emphasis on face-threatening acts (FTA) that pose a concern to politeness. Goffman's "face-work" has a wider range, including social norms, conventions and expectations (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003).

All of these factors come into play in the concept of benevolence signaling, both when conveying positive affect to enhance face, and considering other-emotions to protect face.



Figure 28. India: Wish list for collaborative success (Company B).

The above image reveals how signaling affective benevolence is seemingly essential for collaboration. The gaps summarized on the first three cards show the importance of face-enhancing socioemotional messaging to convey interpersonal regard (cf. Walther et al. 2015). They are in alignment with Bourdieu's notion of social capital within the social (in this case, CoP) network, concerning recognition, appreciation and support (Bourdieu 1983, p. 183). The fourth<sup>260</sup> card largely relates to protecting face.

The wish list above was compiled by a remote team with a few points of on-site contact<sup>261</sup>. The gaps in the following pages will include elements reflecting both completely remote interaction as well as on-site interaction. Throughout, it is essential to bear in mind that every gap is to be seen in relative terms: it is not the case that

<sup>260</sup> Card 5 will be viewed from a German gap perspective in Chapter 5.

<sup>261</sup> Some team members from India had visited the German site, others had not.

these affective signals are completely missing, but rather that they are weaker than what is considered habitual in Indian CoPs.

**4.5.2.2 Embodied Emotional Expression.** Primary signals are conveyed through facial expression, and the smile is a key element of benevolent emotional expression on the human face (cf. Ekman, Davidson & Friesen 1990). Smiling has existed as a form of human behavior for ages in all human societies (Niedenthal et al. 2010). Psychological studies on smiling have existed at least since Duchenne's seminal work in 1862<sup>262</sup>. The interest in his findings gained momentum with Ekman and Friesen's (1978) facial acting coding system over a century later.

Many still consider the "Duchenne smile" – which is difficult to issue voluntarily – the only genuine expression of positive emotion (e.g., Ekman 1985). In extension, the Duchenne smile has a social signal value. Based on their findings that Duchenne smiles were displayed at higher rates in sharing situations, Mehu, Little & Dunbar (2007) propose that one of the proposed functions of smiling is to advertise cooperative, altruistic intentions. This signal would increase the likelihood of the social partner reciprocally investing resources in the relationship (ibid).

A further study indicates that smiling is also perceived as a marker for sociability and generosity (ibid). A variation on the theme are so-called enjoyment smiles (Johnston et al. 2010). In their experiment, participants evaluated individuals displaying enjoyment smiles more positively than those displaying non-enjoyment smiles and had higher rates of cooperation with those displaying enjoyment smiles:

*It's hard to get a sense of whether they are comfortable or not. I miss the emotional response, the nodding of heads or smiling, joking around or compliments – there's no fun in the workplace. I like to work seriously but that doesn't mean you have to have a serious face. Quality doesn't mean looking grim and gloomy. I hold SAP instruction trainings [in Germany] and the [German] participants look at me as if they have been carved from a block of wood or as if I had been carved from a block of wood [smiles]. (Company D/07.10.2019/VD/India/203)*

Besides physical cues such as smiling, the general lack of emotional expression and informal social interaction is seen as detrimental to the emotional climate of the workplace. Casual in-person contact facilitates self-disclosure, or the process of revealing personal information about oneself. Self-disclosure is believed to contribute to relationship building and maintenance (cf. Sprecher & Hendrick 2004)<sup>263</sup>. As with

<sup>262</sup> Darwin's "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals" (1872) is considered the forerunner to the canon of smiling research.

<sup>263</sup> Sprecher and Hendrick's scholarship concerns couples' relationships.

social media messaging, relationships are maintained, and possibly even established, through commonplace communicative interchange (cf. Walther 2011).

'Conversational spaces' which contribute to informal interaction contribute to learning and advance the well-being of those within organizations (Baker, Jensen & Kolb 2002). They serve to establish personal bonds through phatic communication, "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words" (Malinowski 1923, p. 478<sup>264</sup>).

*Small Talk ist uns nicht so wichtig<sup>265</sup>. Es gibt bei uns einen Satz dazu: „Er hat nichts gesagt, dann habe ich mir gedacht, sage ich auch nichts.“ (Company B/20.02.2019/H-JM/Germany/204)*

*Where's the fun at work? No feeling of happiness just being there, being with the others. (Company C/10.10.2016/DV/India/205)*

- es wird (das gilt auch für's Private) unheimlich viel **kommuniziert**. Das ist an sich was Positives, weil sich die Teams dadurch z. T. selbst steuern können und gemeinsam eine Lösung erarbeiten. Das gefällt mir viel besser als in Deutschland, wo man oft zur Teamarbeit richtig zwingen muss, weil dann sieht der Chef ja nicht mehr, wer die besten Ideen hatte. Hier scheint das eine nicht so grosse Rolle zu spielen. Aber die Handys liegen die ganze Zeit auf dem Tisch, das lenkt doch ab. Und auch sonst lassen sich die Leute sehr leicht ablenken von ihrer Arbeit und schauen dann lieber, was um sie herum passiert oder tauchen in ein Gespräch ein. Mir fehlt da die Konzentration auf die Arbeit. Aber da ticken unsere Kulturen vermutlich total unterschiedlich

(Company D/20.5.2017/SS/German expat manager/email)

At the same time, phatic communication was by no means absent in a German business environment. It appeared to be more selectively deployed, depending on target group and occasion:

*Wir trennen nicht so streng zwischen Privat und Beruf wie die indischen Kollegen glauben. In unserer [deutschen] Gruppe haben wir viele junge Väter, die sich oft über ihre Kinder austauschen. Aber die Gespräche sind meistens auf dem Weg in die Kantine oder zur S-Bahn Haltestelle. (Company B/14.05.2019/AS/Germany/206)*

For obvious reasons, such conditions are more difficult to replicate in remote environments, even with the help of video-assisted communication and chat platforms.

**4.5.2.3 Helping Behavior/Altruism.** For Organ (1988), "altruism" is a primary dimension that denotes employees' mutual help with organizationally relevant

<sup>264</sup> Malinowski (1923) made a distinction between language used as 'an instrument of reflection' for giving information and language used 'as a mode of action' for doing something social (phatic communication).

<sup>265</sup> One the most frequently asked questions by German participants was regarding topics for small talk.

tasks (e.g., voluntarily helping less skilled or new employees), while for Kwantes (2008) it is a sub-dimension under the term “volunteerism”. Costa et al.’s (1991) agreeableness dimension in personality psychology includes altruism as one of its facets, along with compliance, modesty and tender-mindedness<sup>266</sup>. While volunteerism might be highly valued in Germany on a personal scale, particularly in extra-curricular pursuits<sup>267</sup>, it certainly appears to be less salient than conscientiousness or initiative in professional CoP self-categorization.

The nuanced view of altruism projected by the Indian participants is particularly meaningful in this context. To illuminate, it might be worthwhile drawing on James’ (1981) concept of the “fringe”. James (1981) posits that consciousness has two parts: the nucleus that forms the substantive parts of thought and the fringe that is formed by the relational, transitive parts. The fringe is like a halo or penumbra spreading out around the distinct image of the nucleus. The fringe represents the context and web of relations that give meaning to the particularized contents in the nucleus (Marsden 2017).

The nucleus of altruism is by no means considered absent in Germany:

*I find them really helpful. When we go out with our baby daughter, they will all help with the stroller. Also at the ticket machines someone usually shows us which buttons to press for which stop and all of that. (Company B/19.09.2019/US/India/207)*

*I once asked my colleague about going to Paris for the long weekend when I was in Germany. He then googled a list of things to see and put together a list better than a travel agent [smiles] and I never even asked him for so much. (Company D/01.04.2019/SK/India/208)*

In dedicated knowledge transfer contexts, Indian participants appreciate the wholehearted support of their experienced German counterparts:

*But I have to say – all of the Germans here have been very helpful. We are in a learning transition phase and all of the doubts have been resolved. (Company A/03.04.2018/RA/India/209)*

Faced with a tangible or role-prescribed need for help, the German colleagues appear to be obliging to a high degree.

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<sup>266</sup> *Tender-mindedness* is defined as the extent to which an individual's judgments and attitudes are determined by emotion (Costa et al. 1991).

<sup>267</sup> Social volunteering has a long tradition in Germany; 15.98 million Germans were involved in some form of unpaid voluntary work in 2019 (<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/173632/umfrage/verbreitung-ehrenamtlicher-arbeit/>).

It is only in situations where nebulous, usually unsolicited altruism – particularly in relation to personal well-being<sup>268</sup> is expected – that the gap is observed.

It could be posited that the gap lies in the absence of James' (1981) relational 'fringe':

*I had a horrible experience in Germany. I got measles, I was all alone and nobody to take care of me. In the office no one [emphasis] bothered to find out how I was. In Bangalore it's totally different. If a German comes without his family and gets sick, we get like totally, totally worried. The colleagues will go to his house every single day to ask if he's okay, that he's eating properly, got his medicines. I never felt so alone in my life as in those 2 weeks I was sick in Germany. And when I came back, they simply said hello and went on working, no concern, no asking how are you feeling, nothing. (Company D/01.04.2019/SK/India/210)*

*Let me tell you this story my Indian friend told me. One day in the canteen a lady just fainted. Instead of rushing to help her everyone moved away and left her alone - just two colleagues came to help. The help came really quickly, but I mean in India we would all [emphasis] rush up immediately to let her know she isn't alone. I asked my German colleague about it later and he said it was better to make space for the experts, the first-aid team, do their work properly. But when I first heard the story, I thought all these Germans are thinking I don't care, it's not my business<sup>269</sup>. (Company B/06.04.2018/BA/India/211)*

The German counterparts corroborate the Indian interest in the well-being of visitors:

*Wir wurden um 4 Uhr morgens vom Flughafen abgeholt und am nächsten Tag stand ein Arbeitstisch für mich eingerichtet. Jedes Mal, wenn ich aufgestanden bin, auch ins Klo zu gehen – wurde ich gefragt, welche Hilfe ich benötige. (Company A/08.03.2018/JL/Germany/212)*

This readiness to proffer help is reflected in the degree of reciprocally expected helping behavior:

*Die Erwartung – Hilfestellung wird immer und immer wieder erwartet – es wird angenommen, dass wir eine unerschöpfliche Quelle an Infos sind (Company A/27.02.2018/SS/Germany/213)*

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<sup>268</sup> The helplessness of being ill and alone in Germany was a recurring motif for Indian colleagues.

<sup>269</sup> Such a re-assessment would have not been possible in exclusively remote collaboration.



Busch (2014) postulates that the readiness to ask for and to accept help may vary culturally as it could lead to loss of face<sup>270</sup>. However, the explanation proffered by the German colleague in the canteen scenario appears to be a pragmatic, rational decision to step back and let the experts do their work.

The complexity of the rationale behind 'to help or not to help' is reflected in the following interchange between the 3 German participants TF, BS and DB (Company B/05.02.2019/Germany/214):

*Vor einer Woche habe ich in der Stadt zufällig einen indischen Kollegen getroffen, den ich nur flüchtig kenne. Ich war überrascht, als er stehen blieb und mir breit und lang eine Geschichte erzählt hat, wie er sich einen Fernseher gekauft hat und dass er plötzlich kaputt gegangen ist. Dann hat er mich gebeten, das Geschäft bzw. den Verkäufer anzurufen, weil sie dort wohl kein Englisch sprechen. (TF)*

*Ich hätte abgelehnt, weil es nichts gebracht hätte. (BS)*

*Was meinen Sie mit ‚nichts gebracht‘? (practitioner to BS)*

*Ich hatte nicht genug Hintergrundwissen, um eine Diagnose zu stellen. Gab es an dem Tag einen Stromausfall in der Straße? Die technischen Details haben gefehlt – gab es Vorzeichen, dass etwas nicht stimmt? Hat das Gerät davor einwandfrei funktioniert? Wenn er ein Freund gewesen wäre, hätte ich den Fernseher mir angeschaut, eine Diagnose gestellt, und wäre mit ihm ins Geschäft gefahren. Aber den kenne ich kaum. Ich hatte nicht die Zeit, ihm eine durchdachte Lösung anzubieten. Ein Anruf macht wenig Sinn. Deswegen hätte ich ihm gesagt, er soll jemanden fragen, der mit ihm zum Mediamarkt geht. (BS)*

*Ich glaube, ich hätte es gemacht. Vor allem wenn ich denke, wie ich in Indien betreut wurde. Ich habe gefragt, ob man mir ein gutes Seidengeschäft empfehlen kann, weil ich meiner Mutter einen Schal kaufen will. Da haben sie mich am Abend dorthin begleitet. Auch eine Kollegin kam mit, weil sie meinte, Frauen können so was viel besser (DB)<sup>271</sup>.*

*Was haben Sie gemacht? (practitioner to TF)*

*Gut, ich habe es gemacht. Es war doch nur ein kurzer Anruf und die Sache war erledigt. (TF)*

There appear to be numerous factors at work in the supposed altruism gap. BS addresses two of them: the first is the 'quality' dimension of OCB apparent in Germany with its corresponding aspiration that assistance should take the form of real expertise.

<sup>270</sup> „Auch die Bereitschaft, Hilfe zu suchen und in Anspruch zu nehmen, scheint kulturell unterschiedlich ausgeprägt zu sein“ (Busch 2014, p.223).

<sup>271</sup> An example of the reciprocity principle in action.

The second is possibly related to the separation of work and private life suggested on the self-categorization pinboards (figures 17 and 27).

The issue of offering unsolicited help arose even in completely remote contexts in which personal well-being plays a secondary role.

*We are used to being constantly asked are you done? Do you need anything? What are you doing next?* (Company B/09.05.2017/CV/India/215)

It also ties in with the issue of 'pull' communication which will be addressed in the next chapter.

**4.5.2.4 Hospitality.** Hospitality is one further display of benevolence considered important to social relations. It also feeds into the OCB dimension of altruism as it is intended to show interpersonally engaged positive emotions and foster a sense of well-being. However, it goes beyond the established OCB dimensions for contextual performance as it spills over from the workplace into personal life. As all of the remote teams studied were afforded certain points of f2f interaction, nearly all of the Indian participants and some of the German participants were in a position to contribute to the topic of hospitality. Again, the gap perceived was not the absence of hospitality in German CoPs: it was an expectations gap concerning elements over and above the conventional notion of what is owed a guest.

This gap is what may be termed the absence of the affective nimbus or halo (i.e., James' concept of the 'fringe') surrounding the fundamental act of receiving a guest (i.e., James' 'nucleus'):

*The treatment of guests is very casual over there [in Germany]. You are not badly treated, but there is no feeling of 'atithi devo bhava'. For us the guest is divine, he should be given all of the care and appreciation – it is part of our culture. I'm sure the Germans must have told you how we look after them in India – nothing but the best, make them feel special.* (Company B/28.03.2019/NO/India/216)

The gap also concerns the affective nimbus which surrounds commensality, the practice of sharing food:

*It is not bad or good what I'm going to say. [turning to group of German colleagues] Please don't take it wrongly<sup>272</sup>. But I've noticed a strange thing in Germany. When a colleague brings a cake or pie to the office for his birthday, he just puts it there, maybe sends around an email and people just help*

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<sup>272</sup> This remark reveals concern about the expected affective response from the German listeners (fellow team members).

*themselves. In India we take the cake around and offer a piece to everyone with a small personal remark about where this specialty is from and with some urging to try it. We are trying to show hospitality, our care for others, our warmth and affection. It is more about the emotions than the cake. It is a help yourself mentality here. (Company B/05.12.2016/AS/India/217)*

*Yes, and by the way in India the birthday person usually is presented with a cake by his colleagues, not the other way round. (Company B/05.12.2016/SS/India/218)*

- ich habe das Gefühl, dass man auf der anderen Seite mit wirklichen Kleinigkeiten zur **Motivation** des Teams beitragen kann. Das persönliche Gespräch zählt unheimlich viel (wobei meine one on ones dann von der Führungsebene dazwischen wieder kritisch kommentiert wurde, anscheinend habe ich mich im Territorium meines Teamleiters bewegt). Auch habe ich zu einem Teamtermin Schokobons von Kinder Schokolade

mitgebracht, und da bedanken sie sich jetzt immer noch jeden 2. Tag, was das für eine tolle Idee war. Würde in Deutschland keiner mit einer Silbe erwähnen... Überraschung also in die positive Richtung:))

(Company D/ 24.04.2017/SS2/Germany/Email)

In reverse, the willingness to go the extra mile for a guest is endorsed by their German counterparts:

*Wir wurden zur Hochzeit von einem Kollegen eingeladen. Sie fand in Kerala statt. Die Fahrt dorthin hat viel länger gedauert als erwartet und wir hatten mehrere Stunden Verspätung. Der Kollege hat gewartet bis wir ankamen, um mit der Zeremonie zu beginnen. Schon beeindruckend. So was ist bei uns schier unvorstellbar. (Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/219)*

*Aber ich muss sagen, so wichtig habe ich in meinem Leben noch nie gefühlt [wie in Indien]. (Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/220)*

The benevolence signals mentioned above – altruism and hospitality – are face-giving mechanisms that emphasize the importance of the beneficiary to the giver. Such benevolence signals are closely intertwined with the concept of reciprocity. The concept has been already touched upon in Chapter 2, and will be reviewed as a gap per se in the following paragraphs.

**4.5.2.5 Reciprocity.** Gouldner (1960) was the first to propose a universal generalized norm<sup>273</sup> of reciprocity - a pattern of mutually-contingent exchange of gratifications. It is allied to social exchange theory (SET), which maintains that social exchange involves a series of interactions that generate obligations<sup>274</sup> (Emerson 1976), with reciprocity as the best-known exchange rule. The individual's belief in the

<sup>273</sup> A norm implies a standard how one should behave (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005).

<sup>274</sup> SET also outlines exchange rules apart from the principle of reciprocity, such as negotiated rules (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005).

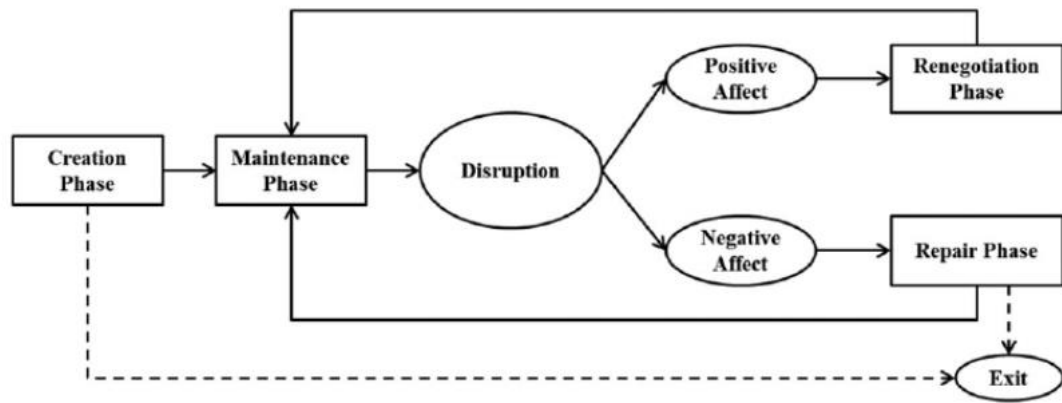
obligation of reciprocity constitutes the psychological contract (Levinson et al. 1962, Schein 1965, Rousseau 1989).

The psychological contract is an interactive construct made up of employees' beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between them and their organizational systems (cf. Morrison and Robinson 1997). Rousseau (1995) distinguishes between two categories: the transactional, which is defined by a tangible, often specified, exchange, and the relational, which involves unspecified obligations and the exchange of socioemotional resources. Obligations dictate reciprocal response, whereby individuals should return help received in the form of social exchange (Gergen 1969). Both the norm of reciprocity and SET agree that such reciprocal interchange is an interplay that strengthens relational ties and increases the social stability of groups.

Conway and Briner (2002) highlight the dynamic nature of the psychological contract, a feature linked to reciprocity. It is assumed that the psychological contract can change over time in an adaptive process to preserve the balance of fulfilment of mutual obligations (Coyle-Shapiro & Parzefall 2008). It is an iterative ongoing process in which perceptions of the degree of mutuality are adjusted and lead to varying patterns of fulfilment. The significance of a psychological contract also varies depending on the relationship stage, and it is particularly critical in the first months after organizational entry (Delobbe, Cooper-Thomas & De Hoe 2016).

The construct of OCB has its roots in social exchange (Deckop, Cirka & Andersson 2003). It is often about relationships between employees and organization, and more attention needs to be paid to OCB exchanges among co-workers, a level at which the "norm of reciprocity" may be most strong, given the absence of a formal authority hierarchy (Gouldner 1960).

Although the fundamentals of psychological contracts apply to both employee-organization and team obligations, reciprocal process dynamics are more immediately evident in smaller settings such as a team. The dynamism increases with heightened interpersonal interaction and decreases if there is minimal interaction or if it stops after the encounter stage (cf. Rousseau, Hansen & Tomprou 2018). The process requires a constant series of adjustments over the course of an exchange arrangement to maintain positive affect.



Note. Dashed lines reflect known relationships between: Creation Phase and Exit (e.g., Wanous, 1980), Repair Phase and Exit (e.g., Zhao et al., 2007).

Figure 29. Overview: Psychological contract phases and their interrelations (Rousseau et al. 2018, p. 2).

Gould distinguished two types of reciprocity: heteromorphic and homomorphic reciprocity. The former captures an exchange where the resources exchanged are different but equal in perceived value, while the latter captures exchanges where the content or the circumstances under which things exchanged are identical.

Helping behavior in a work environment is often heteromorphic, particularly in the perceived novice-expert/vendor-customer interaction of this study. The Indian novice/vendor is keen to demonstrate willingness to help:

*Was mich begeistert, sie sind unheimlich freundlich, immer hilfsbereit, egal wie langweilig die Aufgabe ist. (Company B/28.03.2017/RvD/Germany/221)*

Reciprocal exchange requires that the expert provides support and guidance (Chapter 3). This is aligned with the model of nurturant leadership, which sees leadership behavior from a personalized viewpoint rather than as a contractual relationship or one of practical utility (Sinha 1980). As mentioned, Sinha (1980) postulates that Indian employees value a “nurturant task” leader who “cares for his (or her) subordinates, shows affection, takes personal interest in their well-being, and, above all, is committed to their growth” (p. 55). In return, subordinates are eager to exert themselves to maintain this personalized relationship (ibid).

*Parents want to be actively involved every aspect of our lives and give us their input and guidance. And we are brought up not to question this but rather to accept it as love and caring. Same for managers and leaders. Indifference would be much harder to live with from an Indian perspective. (Company B/13.04.2018/FS/India/222)*

Hospitality is driven by the homomorphic reciprocal principle, as the fundamental resource exchanged is very similar - the well-being and protection of the guest (cf. Aramberri 2001<sup>275</sup>). This reciprocal exchange appears to constitute an oft-noted affective gap for the Indian participants:

*We always try to ensure that the external person, whoever is new to the group – is accommodated – speak his language, make him part of the community. Germans are helpful if you ask but they tend to go back to their own comfort circle. Persons from an alien environment needs [sic] to be fitted in, his interests accommodated. He needs to feel included – that is what we are taught from childhood (Company B/05.12.2016/SS/India/223)*

*Germans in India are treated much better than we are in Germany. Here we solve all their problems, provide every facility without them needing to do anything. (Company B/28.03.2019/SY/India/224)*

**4.5.3 Feedback.** Scholarship on feedback emerges largely from educational settings, but is also applicable to this study due to the customer-outsourcer role and the knowledge transfer context. Feedback is a consequence of performance and it can be defined as “information provided by an agent <.....> regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding” (Hattie & Timperley 2007, p. 81).

Feedback has two fundamental purposes: instructional and motivational (ibid). Its instructional purpose is to reduce the gap between performance and expected goal attainment through corrective feedback. Its motivational purpose is to enhance commitment and increased effort through praise or rewards. Consequently, feedback entails both criticism or praise, either implicitly or otherwise. While it is an effective tool for learning and achievement, it needs to be delivered effectively to elicit the appropriate affective response.

The following paragraphs will review the two purposes in terms of affective response. Both sides of the feedback coin are the issue here: the absence of face-enhancing recognition on the motivational side and the relative absence of face-protecting mechanisms on the corrective side<sup>276</sup>.

**4.5.3.1 Rewards, praise and recognition.** Extrinsic motivation is often based on tangible rewards. They are typically offered by the superior or the organization as a sign of recognition for performance. Rewards are often of financial

<sup>275</sup> Aramberri's findings relate to research into the tourism industry, where he describes a quasi-heteromorphic reciprocity based on commercial exchange: care and protection proffered by the host in return for consideration and abiding by the rules for the guest.

<sup>276</sup> Emotional intelligence involves – in part – a person's abilities to identify and to perceive emotion (in self and others), and it includes skills to understand and manage emotions successfully (Ashkanasy 2003, p. 25).

value such as a bonus or a salary raise, but they can be in the form of verbal praise, public recognition or awards. As financial rewards belong to the jurisdiction of the local Indian organizations in this study, the reward gaps detected in interaction belong in the category of praise and recognition.

Vroom's expectancy theory (1964) postulates that behavior results from conscious choices among alternatives whose purpose it is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. The theory – which is particularly relevant in organizational contexts – suggests that motivation is enhanced through the belief that there is a positive correlation between effort and performance. As favorable performance will result in a desired reward, it is worthwhile making the commensurate effort.

Self-worth theory proposes that individuals strive to give their lives meaning by pursuing the approval of others (Covington 2009). It can be traced all of the way back to James (1890) and his definition of self-esteem as a product of 'perceived competence in domains of importance'. Atkinson's (1957) need achievement theory maintains that "the motive to achieve and the motive to avoid failure influence behavior in a situation where performance is evaluated against some standard of excellence" (p. 371).

Approval can be indicated in the form of rewards or praise<sup>277</sup>. Some scholars have postulated that praise for task performance may be ineffective as it contains little learning-related information (Kluger and DeNisi 1998). Kohn (1993, 2001) suggests that rewards undermine risk-taking, can foster a hostile climate in groups, and that any positive impact is only of short duration, although his assertions concern childhood education rather than organizational feedback.

Most management theories take a different position. There is widespread agreement that the absence of praise and recognition is detrimental to employee engagement (e.g., Gostick & Elton 2007; Harter, Schmidt & Keyes 2003). Both studies report a strong correlation between manager recognition and employee morale. Schultz (2015) argues that rewards are crucial objects that induce learning, approach behavior, choices, and emotions. Dopamine neurons, which emit a global reward signal, provide guidance for behavior. Behavior that is positively recognized, will be repeated by the individual, a phenomenon known as positive reinforcement (Schultz 2015).

Indian CoPs<sup>278</sup> seemingly subscribe to the above viewpoint at both the individual and organizational level. At the individual level, an absence of mood-

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<sup>277</sup> The term 'praise' has been further refined to include ability praise and effort praise (Covington 1992, 2009), but will not be reviewed in depth here.

<sup>278</sup> Other Indian institutions do likewise. Even the Indian Income Tax Office issues Certificates of Appreciation to taxpayers. <https://www.incometaxindia.gov.in/Lists/Press%20Releases/Attachments/526/PressReleaseCert-Appreciation-19-09-2016.pdf>

enhancing positive feedback from German CoP members was observed. One example was the OCB dimension of 'cheerleading'<sup>279</sup>, i.e., an expression of encouragement and reinforcement of coworkers' accomplishments through words and gestures (Organ 1990).

*They are not very open with appreciation. I feel they hold back deliberately.*  
(Company B/17.06.2016/ASG/India/225)

*You don't get much active appreciation from them <...>. Sometimes I have to ask "Was it okay?" but that's like fishing for compliments. [smiles]*  
(Company B/15.06.2018/BP/India/226)

German participants agreed, though the responses were nuanced. Some echoed the Indian sentiment

*Es wäre schön, wenn wir in Deutschland so viel Lob aussprechen könnten wie in Indien.* (Company A/09.03.2018/BL/Germany/227)

Others explained it in terms of cultural self-categorization:

*Nix geschumpfen ist genug gelobt sagt der Schwabe<sup>280</sup> (laughing agreement from group).* (Company B/31.0.7.2017/MF/Germany/228)

The majority explained it in terms of CoP self-categorization:

*In sozialen Bereichen – bei Therapeuten oder Sozialarbeitern ist es bestimmt anders. Da ist es eher zu erwarten, dass man sensibel reagiert. Wir sind Ingenieure – uns fällt es schwieriger, über Gefühle nachzudenken oder zu reden.* (Company B/14.03.2016/KK/Germany/229)

*Es ist für uns schwierig Lob und Motivation auszusprechen. Ich mußte erst mal üben, bevor ich so eine Lob-Mail losgeschickt habe.* (Company B/24.01.2017/FM/Germany/230)

Some had reservations about expressions of recognition for reasons of effectivity:

*Lob ist so eine Sache. Wenn man für etwas gelobt wird, was selbstverständlich ist, ist es auch komisch.* (Company D/10.04.2017/BE/Germany/231)

*Wenn man immer ‚good job‘ schreibt, verliert es an Wert. Es wird zur Gewohnheit – bedeutungslos.* (Company D/10.04.2017/CM/Germany/232)

<sup>279</sup> Cheerleading was later assigned to the category of helping behavior (Organ 1998).

<sup>280</sup> Swabians are natives of a cultural, historic and linguistic region in southwestern Germany called Swabia. This well-known saying is supposed to reflect their taciturn behavior and frugality with praise, and was invariably quoted at some point by every group in this study.



*Im Alltag hat man wenig Zeit. Man möchte schneller zum Punkt kommen, das Thema effizient abhaken. Honig um den Mund schmieren hat wenig Anerkennung im deutschen professionellen Umfeld. (Company B/12.04.2016/JK/Germany/233)*

Praise in India is viewed as elevating self-perceptions of ability and feelings of self-worth (giving face). It is augmented through communicating it to a wider public, particularly to superiors<sup>281</sup>.

*Wir haben das Feedback weitergeleitet an den Gruppenleiter und es kam bei den Kollegen gut an. (Company B/17.05.2019/AB/Germany/234)*

*Ich habe meine Dankesmail in der Abteilung in Indien an der Pinnwand gesehen. Daraufhin habe ich den PM gefragt, was es auf sich hatte und er sagte ‚Das ist für mich als Projektmanager eine Anerkennung meiner Leistung. Auch eine Motivation für uns alle‘. (Company B/24.01.2017/PM/Germany/235)*

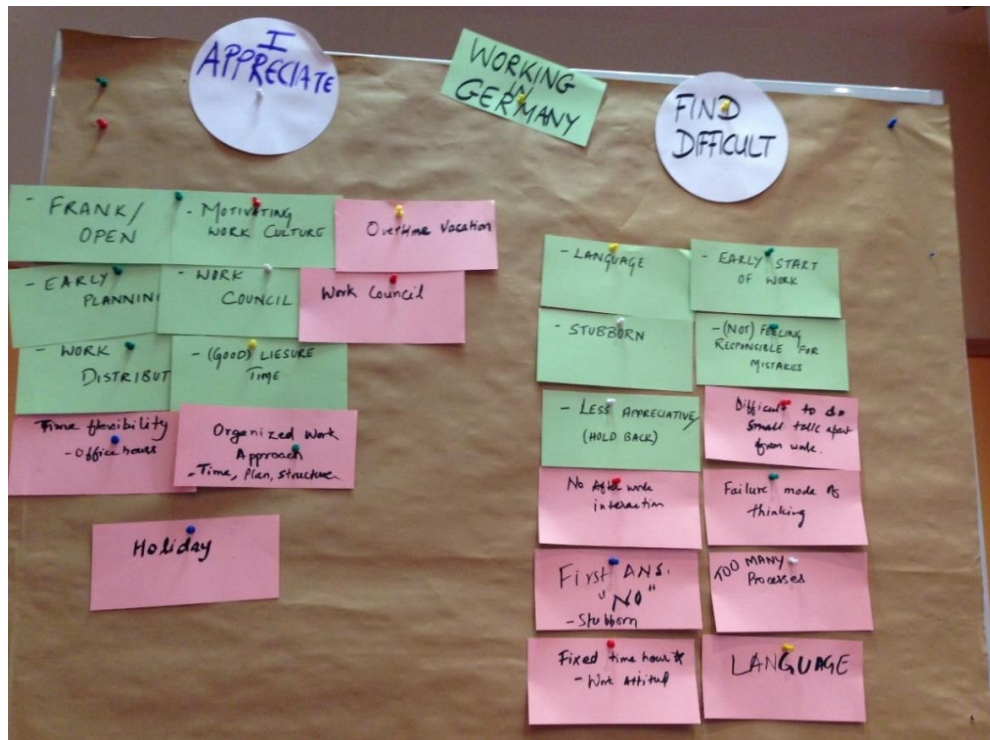


Figure 30. India: Working in Germany (Company B).

**4.5.3.2 Critical feedback.** Instructional feedback is implicitly corrective and may be viewed as a sign of failure by the recipient. Failure is usually regarded as a signal of low ability and low level of self-worth (Xing et al. 2018). It is therefore a truism

<sup>281</sup> „Bosch-Managerin Krenz ist überzeugt, dass eine persönlich formulierte Anerkennung des Vorgesetzten an den Mitarbeiter für entsprechende positive Aufmerksamkeit Sorge.“ <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/beruf-chance/beruf/virtuelle-teams-arbeiten-mit-kollegen-in-indien-15474185.html> FAZ online 5.3.2018

that corrective feedback that is not handled perceptively can damage self-esteem to a degree that it impairs performance. This is openly expressed by Indian participants:

*The trouble is critical feedback is hard for us, the world comes to an end. We suffer, sometimes for a long time.* (Company B/28.03.2019/RG/India/236)

Neurobiological studies bear out that there is actual physical suffering involved in situations which yield negative rewards or are anticipated to do so. Bechara and Damasio's (1994) experiments with cards in a gambling game revealed that skin conductance responses – a measure of arousal and anxiety<sup>282</sup> – varied depending on the nature of rewards yielded when a card was selected.

German CoPs appear to handle critical feedback by reverting to the separation of the affective and the rational domains in professional life<sup>283</sup>.

*Als konstruktive Kritik wird alles gesehen, was zu einer Lösung führt.* (Company B/23.03.2017/SH/Germany/237)

Indian CoPs appear to regard it as a disruption to emotional connectedness (cf. Sinha 2013, p. 232)

*We tend to get into each others' zones – we don't have enough concept of personal space. You can see it in India in a crowd – it's even a physical thing. But there's a price we have to pay for this involvement in other's emotions. We don't know sometimes where to draw the line – we are easily hurt or offended if people do not act the way we think.* (Company D/12.01.2019/RP/India/238)

A conscious effort needs to be made to avoid any damaging fallout:

*We have a problem with our emotionality. Relationships are so fragile they have to be protected at all costs. It can be really difficult, but somehow, we still manage to maintain harmony.* (Company D/12.01.2019/IRS/India/239)

Hall (1977) first proposed the concept of high-context vs. low-context communication. The information in high-context communication lies in "the physical context or it is internalised by the person. A low-context communication is just the opposite; i.e., the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code" (Hall 1977, p. 91).

As high-context communication relies more on implicit signals, effective interaction requires empathy strategies. Empathy "enables us to perceive the emotions

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<sup>282</sup> Cf. Gudykunst's AUM or anxiety-uncertainty management theory (1993) for intercultural interaction.

<sup>283</sup> A gap from the German perspective that will be discussed in Chapter 5.

of others, resonate with them emotionally and cognitively, to take in the perspective of others, and to distinguish between our own and others' emotions" (Riess 2017)

It begins with an awareness of other-emotion:

*We are concerned about how the listener will react to our answer, how he will perceive us, what he will feel about it. (Company A/02.04.2018/RA/India/240)*

Self-focused emotion regulation – i.e., the extent to which one regulates one's own emotions to reach a goal – is used in tandem with other-focused emotion regulation, i.e., regulating the other's emotions to reach a goal (Pekaar, Linden & Born 2017; Holt et al. 2017):

*Ich habe festgestellt, wir können sie [die Inder] nicht so hart rannehmen. Man muss auf die Wortwahl achten. In Deutschland nimmt man sich hart ran aber meint es nicht so. Wir benötigen Tipps und Tricks mehr Stabilität in die Sache reinzubringen. Wenn es ein harscherer Ton im Projekt herrscht, wollen die Inder nicht mehr bleiben, sondern suchen sich was anderes aus. Wenn einer sich falsch angemacht fühlt, dann will er da raus. Da ist die Stabilität der Gruppe gefährdet. Wir wollen wissen, wie man kommunikativ mit ihnen umgeht, wie man eine Vertrauensbasis schafft. (Company C/28.03.2018/CR/Germany/241)*

*It's a two-way thing. Goals can also be achieved through the right choice of words. Let me give you a personal example which can be applied to work life too. My father was in hospital and too incapacitated to go to the bathroom by himself. The ward boy<sup>284</sup> was new and didn't want to accompany him because he said it wasn't part of his job. Actually, it was but I didn't go into that. Instead I told him how much he would spiritually benefit from this. I told him that he would be blessed because he had helped an old person in need. 'Think of him as your father and how you are doing your duty by him' I said and he understood it. I can't say he was enthusiastic, but that moral and emotional argument worked whereas an 'it's your job' wouldn't have. (Company B/19.09.2019/PS/India/242)*

The communicative package reveals an attempt to synchronize self- and other-emotion to achieve the ideal result:

*My system is: Push his ego and tell him about his mistakes. If he goes away saying all my effort are in vain, then you have lost out. I would take his body language into account to calibrate how I communicate with him. I analyze him and do it. (Company B/16.04.2016/PS/India/243)*

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<sup>284</sup> A ward boy in India is a hospital attendant who provides basic care for hospital patients.

*I will evaluate the other and based on that I will give feedback. Is this a slightly sensitive person or very or not at all? (Company B/16.04.2016/PS/India/244)*

Feedback is correspondingly couched in mitigating terms. Fraser (1980) describes the concept of mitigation in terms of the intention of the speaker to reduce unwelcome effects of his/her performing a certain kind of speech act. The perlocutionary aims the speaker wishes to achieve involve – among others – making it more acceptable for the hearer to face bad news<sup>285</sup> and react cooperatively to a criticism.

*It is important not to unnecessarily frighten and disturb. You need to add the family, the jokes etc. You need to tell him you didn't mean to harm him. Modulate it as much as possible. (Company B/16.04.2016/PS/India/245)*

The need for mitigating language was seen in nuanced terms:

*They [the German colleagues] have only one style of communication for everybody. Directness is not only bad, but it should be on a case to case basis. (Company B/29.03.2018/EG/India/246)*

*We take it negatively because it is a very competitive environment and we will be seen as not as good as others. We don't like to be criticized in front of others anyway. (Company A/02.04.2018/SB/India/247)*

**4.5.4 Organization-Wide.** The centrality of human resources is a theme running through Indian organizational signaling. For Indian organizations, human capital is taken seriously as a valuable contribution to the company's interests. Capelli et al.'s (2015) research shows that Indian organizations "build employee commitment by creating a sense of reciprocity with the workforce, looking after their interests and those of their families and implicitly asking employees to look after the firm's interests in return"<sup>286</sup> (p. 13).

One way of doing this was to show appreciation. In a study cited by Capelli et al. (2010), annual reports in the Indian information technology industry thanked their employees multiple times, but completely neglected to mention labor costs:

One interesting study of the annual reports in the Indian information technology industry found that the most common mention of any human resource issue – so common, in fact, that it happened on average more than once in each report

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<sup>285</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>286</sup> Cf. the concept of bounded emotionality which "refers to an alternative mode of organizing in which nurturance, caring, community, supportiveness, and interrelatedness are fused with individual responsibility to shape organizational experiences" (Mumby & Putnam 1992, p. 475).

– was to thank employees for their contributions. The second most common HR mention was to highlight individual employees, typically for their special contributions or sometimes for their life experiences. That was followed in frequency by mentions of employee capabilities and efforts to train and develop employees. And the fourth most common mention was to discuss contributions employees were making to the broader community, outside of their work tasks. Equally interesting is what was not presented. Despite the fact that labor accounts for far and away the biggest component of operating expenses, human resource costs were never mentioned in these reports (Murthy & Abeysekera 2007, cited in Cappelli et al. 2010, p. 63).

If employee well-being is treated as a priority, it is not solely for altruistic reasons in the tech sector, which is particularly prone to high voluntary turnover rates<sup>287</sup>. This factor did not go unnoticed by the German colleagues.

*Die Fluktuation ist besonders hoch bei uns, in anderen Bereichen hat es sich stabilisiert. (Company B/11.05.2017/BS/Germany/248)*

Tech companies in India therefore need to invest in strategies to retain high-performing individuals with skills and experience. Organizational commitment not only prevents high voluntary turnover rates, absenteeism and tardiness, it also upgrades performance and OCB (Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe 2004).

Meyer and Allen's (1997) three-component model of commitment proposes that organizational commitment is experienced by the employee as three simultaneous mindsets encompassing normative, continuance and affective organizational commitment. Normative commitment reflects commitment based on perceived obligation towards the organization; for example, rooted in the norms of reciprocity. Continuance commitment reflects commitment based on the perceived costs – both economic and social – of leaving the organization. Affective commitment reflects commitment based on emotional ties the employee develops with the organization primarily via positive work experiences.

Positive work experiences to induce affective commitment – i.e., the emotional attachment to an organization – can take various forms. It may accrue from relational leadership, which covers both nurturant and paternalistic leadership styles. In both styles, managers take a personal and benevolent interest in the workers' off-the-job lives and attempt to promote workers' personal welfare while offering career-related

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<sup>287</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/ites/it-companies-go-all-out-to-stop-attrition-of-skilled-young-staff/articleshow/70693130.cms>

support (Gelfand, Erez & Aycan 2007). Though the concept of paternalism<sup>288</sup> evokes conflicting perceptions culturally (Aycan 2006), there is little doubt that socioemotional leadership influences performance by managing group members' emotional states such as feelings of frustration and optimism (Humphrey 2002). Rost (1993) asserts that the content of leadership includes both technical know-how and understanding of leadership as a relationship (Rost 1993, p. 4).

These assertions are qualified to some extent by findings which indicate the limitations of positive emotions (George & Brief 1996). Schaubroeck et al. (2013) suggest that too much positive affect in the workplace – in the form of stress-busters and entertainment – only enhances organizational effectiveness up to a point. After a certain point, it leads to complacency and a lack of initiative.

They also highlight that a complete lack of positive affect in the workplace also results in complacent behavior — the underlying reason being low levels of energy and motivation. It is imperative that employers create positive affect at work through team outings, organizational celebrations, availability of stress-busters like board games, access to social networking, etc., to keep employees motivated and energized.

*Das Persönliche ist wichtig für Inder, scheint's. Der Abend mit den indischen Kollegen beim Team-Event hat mehr gebracht für die Zusammenarbeit als die 3 Tage Workshop davor. Wir waren Paintball-Spielen und danach beim Abendessen. Die Rücksprachen über 3 Hierarchieebenen haben nicht so viel gebracht wie dieser Abend. (Company B/07.05.2019/CG/Germany/249)*

Positive work experiences are reflected in the organizational climate. Organizational climate is one<sup>289</sup> construct for conceptualizing the way people experience and describe their work settings. It defines the shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to the policies, practices, and procedures employees experience (Schneider et al. 2013). When workers perceive that their organization is concerned about their well-being, they are more amenable to the efforts of management to focus on strategic outcomes of value to the organization (Schneider, Ehrhart & Macey 2011).

A concept related to OCB is that of 'organizational spontaneity'<sup>290</sup> (George & Brief 1992). They define organizational spontaneity as voluntarily performed extra-role behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness. Unlike OCB, organizational

<sup>288</sup> Webster's Dictionary (1975) defines it as "the principle or system of governing or controlling a country, group of employees, etc. in a manner suggesting a father's relationship with his children" (Aycan 2006, p. 446).

<sup>289</sup> Another alternative construct is organizational culture, which has been discussed in Chapter 2. It has more to do with shared basic assumptions, values, and beliefs that characterize a setting and less to do with how people experience them (cf. Schneider et al. 2013).

<sup>290</sup> Based on Katz (1964).

spontaneity is designed to be recognized in reward systems (Viswesvaran & Ones 2002).

Another related concept is that of prosocial organizational behavior (POB), which has been defined as behavior performed with the intention of promoting the welfare of individuals or groups to whom the behavior has been directed. POB can be either role-prescribed or extra-role, and it can be negative towards organizations although positive towards individuals (Brief & Motowidlo 1986).

Some aspects of the theories above, along with situational exigencies such as the dynamics of the labor market, encourage Indian tech organizations to aim for a climate which fosters positive affect. Apart from rewards such as promotions and managerial positions, the idea is to create a positive workplace experience. The buzzword “fun at work”<sup>291</sup> concisely encapsulates this strategy.

*In Indien haben wir ein ‘Fun at Work’ Team. Alle 4 Wochen wird etwas organisiert – Schauspieler eingeladen, mit Tanz und Verkleidung. Heute ist der Tag der traditionellen Kleidung, oder Parodien oder so was. Hier im Büro würden uns alle für verrückt erklären. (Company B/31.07.2017/AR/Germany/former expat/250)*

*Work is a bit dry out here. Where are the fun events? Even our bosses get involved in the things we organize [in India]. When the Germans come to India, they’re quite different. They don’t mind Bollywood dancing on stage or wearing glittering clothes. I was quite surprised when I came here that they don’t do all that. (Company D/10.06.2017/PP/India/251)*

It is linked to both organizational spontaneity and POB as it is expressly sanctioned by the organization and (sometimes implicitly) role-prescribed.

*Was mir allerdings auffällt ist, dass das Team von selbst für kleine Events sorgt, so z. B. proaktiv das Thema Teamausflug angeht oder von sich auch beim letzten Meeting einen Kuchen organisiert hat. Für die Spassthemen (die ich dem Team vermutlich nicht schnell genug angehe), geht es doch auch mit der Disziplin. (Company D/02.06.2017/SS2/German expat in India/Email/252)*

Such signals are judiciously deployed as a means of conveying regard and generating goodwill for the employer.

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<sup>291</sup> Even a brief Google search throws up multitudinous ideas for “fun at work” activities. It is also the subject of journalistic interest, e.g., [economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/india-inc-new-credo-fun-activities-for-staff-to-keep-them-motivated/articleshow/11293002.cms](http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/india-inc-new-credo-fun-activities-for-staff-to-keep-them-motivated/articleshow/11293002.cms)

*About 8-10 years ago we realized that we weren't doing enough to make our staff feel wanted and appreciated. So, we started a rewards and recognition project to amp up what we'd already been doing. It's simply not enough to have an occasional event like an annual team award, an annual company party or promotions party for all those who've been promoted. It has to be a continuous ongoing thing, like monthly team work awards. Then we started family days with kids' entertainment to show our appreciation for the family which is standing by the dad or mum who is spending a lot of time away from home. Also, tickets for films or book vouchers – something for the whole family to use. And we're still not where we want to be. There's more - tickets for cricket matches, flash mob events or appreciation cards in the office. (Company D 20.09.2019/PB/India/253)*

#### **4.6 Emotion in TMC**

The significance of emotions and emotional signalling in a technologically-mediated world becomes evident simply by viewing the proliferation of emojis, i.e., pictographs, used in text-based communication in media interchange<sup>292</sup> (Miller et al. 2016). At a deeper level, it has led to research areas such as affective computing (Picard 1995)<sup>293</sup> that employs computer intelligence to model human emotional behaviors. The search is on for technologies endowed with advanced emotional competences – ideally to be able to recognize human emotions, express emotional signals and even simulate a human-like emotion process (Scherer 2010, p. 4).<sup>294</sup>

The awareness that TMC poses a challenge to emotion detection has led to artificial intelligence (AI) systems which have begun to address the issue. The latest innovations deploy machine learning and big data processes to analyze voices for both momentary feelings and lasting personality traits<sup>295</sup>, a tool of apparent interest both in

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<sup>292</sup> Overall, there are 2,823 emojis in the Unicode Standard, with 157 new emojis added in June 2018 alone. Source: <https://emojipedia.org/faq/>

<sup>293</sup> Affective computing is "computing that relates to, arises from, or influences emotions. Models are suggested for computer recognition of human emotion, and new applications are presented for computer-assisted learning, perceptual information retrieval, arts and entertainment, and human health and interaction" (Picard 1997, p. 1).

<sup>294</sup> The current interest in sociable humanoid robots, often in health care, poses an intriguing shift in the way robots are viewed as semi-human partners rather than as tools. A precursor is Alexa, about which Amazon Vice President Prem Natarajan says "We want it to be your assistant, your companion, advise you on things". Alexa's learned intelligences includes adapting to cultures and natural language understanding (30.10.2018). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRWTQRY7up8>

<sup>295</sup> <https://www.zeit.de/2019/07/stimme-biometrie-messbarkeit-emotionen-persoenlichkeit>



therapy<sup>296</sup> and in organizational contexts.<sup>297</sup> The issue of how far physical expressions of emotion are to be viewed in AI through a culture-specific lens is an ongoing debate (cf. Jack et al. 2012), with the use of AI emotion recognition systems in intercultural settings still in a nascent state<sup>298</sup>.

There is a school of thought that approves of the lower level of socioemotional communication in TMC as being beneficial to task performance (Walther 1996). TMC “promotes rationality by providing essential discipline <...> by filtering out affective components of communication and emphasizing the content” (Dubrovsky 1985, p. 381), but the theme has not been showcased in recent research.

Where workplace emotionality is traditionally discouraged by social and occupational expectations (Waldron 2012), organizations often lack a vocabulary for discussing emotional experience (Sandelands 1988). It has been argued that non-verbal expressive cues are therefore particularly important as behavioral information in organizations (ibid). In f2f organizational situations, preferences are transmitted, either explicitly or implicitly, via emotion cues like facial expressions, voice intonations, gestures, body positions (Feidakis, Lord & Hoffmann 2014)<sup>299</sup>. As discussed in Chapter 3, the exchange of such emotion data in TMC is limited due to the lack of enriched channels, leading to impoverished affective communication.

Dinh et al. (2014) highlight that emotional and embodied architectures have important consequences on information processing. Embodied architecture through body language has significant effects on perceptual experiences (Dinh et al. 2014, p. 319).<sup>300</sup> The processing time of information is fastest in emotional and embodied architectures, such as detecting an angry face in a crowd<sup>301</sup> (ibid, p. 210).

Emotion recognition in an intercultural TMC context is impeded by lack of contextual knowledge:

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<sup>296</sup> Some researchers posit that computational approaches for inferring therapy outcomes are comparable or even superior to those obtained using human-rated behavioral codes. (Nasir M, Baucom BR, Georgiou P, Narayanan S. 2017. Predicting couple therapy outcomes based on speech acoustic features. PLoS ONE 12(9): e0185123. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185123>).

<sup>297</sup> One example is audEERING, founded as a spin-off of the TU Munich, which lists the multinational corporations using its software to audio-analyze the surroundings, speech and over 50 mental states of the speaker. <https://www.crunchbase.com/organization/audeering#section-overview>

<sup>298</sup> Moves in this direction are already apparent, such as cultural awareness issue for AI systems such as Alexa (Natarajan 2018).

<sup>299</sup> Ekman and Friesen (1969) contend that these nonverbal expressive cues cannot be lumped together in terms of emotion recognition. They propose a hierarchy of cues from the most controllable to the most leaky, with facial expressions being more controllable and voluntary, while leakier channels such as the body and voice tend to be more spontaneous.

<sup>300</sup> It has even been argued that the experience of trust is enhanced through touch (Levav & Argo 2010).

<sup>301</sup> Based on Oehmann (2002).

*Ich finde den Akzent und das Flüstern am Telefon schwierig. Sind sie so schüchtern oder woran liegt es, dass sie so leise sprechen? (Company B/07.02.2019/DQ/Germany/254)*

An (in this case, erroneous) emotional judgement was reached since remote collaboration precluded knowledge of the physical context: the Indian colleagues worked in crowded open-plan offices where speaking at low volumes was officially required.

Additionally, dyadic telephone or skype calls do not readily allow for the vicarious appraisal of “social referencing” i.e., to rely on a more experienced person's affective interpretation of an event to assess the meaning of situations (Parkinson & Simons 2009). It inhibits the co-regulation of appraisal, i.e., whether one's appraisal of the situation is being validated and endorsed or whether it is being ignored (De Leersnyder, Boiger & Mesquita 2013).

*The trouble is Indians often don't know what they [the Germans] are thinking or feeling. They [the Germans] listen silently and the Indians don't know whether it is all rubbish and whether to stop or just go on talking. It's really hard to continue explaining in such an atmosphere. (Company B/06.04.2018/BA/India/255)*

*Kritik üben ist schwierig. Meistens kommt nur Schweigen zurück, auch wenn man sachliche Fragen stellt, wie ‚Woran lag es, dass dieser Code nicht geändert wurde?‘. (Company D/19.01.2016/RT/Germany/256)*

Social presence theory (Short et al 1976) posits that media such as video have a higher degree of social presence than audio or text messaging. They also believe that a medium with a higher degree of social presence is perceived as being more personal. When non-verbal and relational cues are filtered out, there is less sense of social presence (Walther & Parks 2002) and emotional connect.

This might explain the constant increase in emoji use over recent years (Barbieri, Ronzano & Saggion 2016). Emojis are considered as a substitutive tool for non-verbal cues (Kaye, Wall & Malone 2016), used for the express purpose of conveying emotional intention (Bosch & Revilla 2018). However, research indicates that the use of emojis varies depending on the communicational context (Bosch & Revilla 2018). It is used more in dialogic contexts such as instant messaging apps or texting as compared with communicating via email (Kaye, Wall & Malone 2016). In addition, its usage increases in socioemotional contexts<sup>302</sup> compared with task-oriented

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<sup>302</sup> All of the birthday greetings retrieved in the corpus of Sampietro's study included emoji as visual enhancement of the greeting (Sampietro 2016).

ones (Sampietro 2016<sup>303</sup>). Emojis are also used most by millennials<sup>304</sup> (Emogi Research Team 2016), particularly with friends and relatives or similar age interlocutors (Bosch & Revilla 2018). Finally, emoji use is structured by a combination of linguistic and social contexts, as well as cultural conventions (Park, Baek & Cha 2014). The more polite and distant the conversation between people, the more abstract, geometric and static the emoji will become (Lin & Chen 2018). As there is considerable potential for misconstrual in emoji exchanges (Miller et al. 2017), interactants in unfamiliar cultural contexts are understandably cautious about their use of emojis.

The context studied here reveals most of the qualifiers for lack of emoji use. It is predicated on formal, task-oriented intercultural communication within an asymmetrical hierarchy, at least from the Indian perspective (see Chapter 3). Its use is limited to WhatsApp or chat-type platforms as channels favored by the Indian participants<sup>305</sup>, although they much less popular with their German counterparts, possibly due to fewer millennials.

*Über Facebook bin ich mit vielen indischen Kollegen befreundet. Sie mögen so was, scheint's. (Company B/14.05.2019/JS/Germany/257)*

Wilson asserts that the choice of oral channels over written channels “may well be guided by affective needs as much, if not more, than by cognitive needs” (Wilson 2006, p. 664).

*Sie [die Inder] scheinen die informelle Kommunikation zu bevorzugen. Lieber rufen sie an als uns schreiben. Für die Dokumentation wäre es bestimmt viel besser, wenn wir es schriftlich festhalten können. (Company B/06.06.2019/MS/Germany/258)*

In the absence of behavioral activity, emotion detection becomes heavily dependent on sentiment analysis of text input (cf. Feidakis, Lord & Hoffmann 2014). As the perusal of any great literature or online opinion platform attests, expressing and evoking emotion is not limited to face-to-face interpersonal interaction. However, expression in literary texts, personal correspondence or online platforms is driven by emotional intent: the content or information conveyed is affective in nature<sup>306</sup>, buttressed by ‘seductive’ language and details that are emotional and personally

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<sup>303</sup> Sampietro's study concerns Spanish WhatsApp messaging.

<sup>304</sup> Millennials are individuals born between 1982 and 2003 (Strauss & Howe 1991).

<sup>305</sup> India has more users of the messaging platform WhatsApp, over 200 million or 1 in 6 Indians, than any other country in the world, according to a company spokesman. Source: The New York Times 28. November 2018

<sup>306</sup> This also holds good for the fabrication of “fake news” and appears to corroborate the theory that propositions that are classified as highly affective are remembered better (Martins 1982).

involving (Kneepkens & Zwaan 1994). Many of these strategies are also employed in organizational communication by professionals skilled at managing feelings mechanisms<sup>307</sup>. Emotions in this sphere are viewed as a controlling instrument for organizations.

These options are less accessible to development engineers in a TMC environment. Therefore, the question of emotion detection (i.e., recognizing socioemotional cues), emotion expression, and affective strategies remains unaddressed in a largely text-based interactional context.

Language has both a direct and an indirect link to emotion as it both reflects conceptualization of emotion and expresses emotion (Foolen 2012). In an intercultural context, variances in conceptualization along with the semantic domain, e.g., cross-linguistic differences in emotional expression (Wierzbicka 1999), stretch the envelope for the processing of affective messages.

Text input, even regarding task-based subjects, reveals differences in communicative styles worldwide (Bolten 1999<sup>308</sup>). Both perception and conception of communicative systems are prompted by “the interdependency of individual characteristics, socializational typicality und store of cultural knowledge” (ibid: *own translation*).

*Ich hatte neulich eine interessante Erfahrung. Die Kollegin aus Indien hat mir eine Nachricht geschickt „Found the solution!“ und ich wusste nicht, wie ich darauf reagieren soll. Was soll ich damit anfangen? Wollte sie nur Anerkennung? (Company B/ 01.08.2017/SR/Germany/259)*

In this study, it is additionally complicated by English as a lingua franca, which is not the first language of any of the communicators.

*We got this mail from a German colleague which sounded a bit angry-like. We all read his email but we didn't really know how he was feeling – how seriously to take it. (Company A/02.04.2018/MK/India/260)*

*Mein Englisch ist solala. [hand gesture denoting ‚mediocre‘]. Und ihr Englisch ist sehr dialektisch. Unsere Kommunikation ist schon dadurch*

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<sup>307</sup> Emotions in this sphere are viewed as a controlling instrument (“Steuerungsressource”) for organizations (Remus N. 2016 Emotionen als Gestaltungsvariablen eines integrativ-reflexiven Internen Kommunikationsmanagements. In: Huck-Sandhu S. (eds) Interne Kommunikation im Wandel. Springer VS, Wiesbaden).

<sup>308</sup> In his four-dimensional comparison between the annual reports of Ford in the USA and Germany, Bolten posits a static, well-ordered, technology-oriented communicative style in Germany which may conceivably be construed by readers as reflecting the precision, perfection and technology-focus expected from German cars „...unter Umständen aber auch als Beleg für jene Präzision, Perfektion und Technikzentrierung interpretiert, die man von deutschen Autos erwartet“ (Bolten 1999).

*eingeschränkt. Wenn ich Fakten vermitteln muss, geht es gerade so. Für alles andere habe ich gar keinen Kopf. Freundlich Rüberkommen und so was kann ich ganz vergessen. (Company B/30.01.2019/MK/Germany/261)*

Such communicative failures in remote communication may occur when interlocutors transfer the forms, meaning and culture of their first language to the foreign language and culture, both when expressing themselves and in interpreting the other (cf. Selinker 1983<sup>309</sup>)

*Nachdem sie eine Bitte ausgesprochen haben wegen Unterkunft oder so kommt immer dieser Satz am Ende: „Please do the needful“<sup>310</sup>. Es hört sich so fordernd und unhöflich an. Und gar nicht, was ich so erwarten würde. (Company A/29.05.2018/MD/Germany/HR department/262)*

Even typography can be perceived as having an emotional connotation. This is particularly evident in the following example from India, where the font chosen was perceived as expressing anger:

*I remember a mail both in red and in bold which was ccd to everyone. It left me disturbed for a very long time. Did he really think increasing the font was a good idea? (Company B/16.04.2016/PS/India/263)*

Conversely, the choice of font was perceived as a useful channel of communication in the German CoP:

*Wenn wir etwas fett schreiben oder mit Farben, wollen wir nur die Wichtigkeit der Sache hervorheben. Eine rote Betreffzeile ist nur eine Wichtigkeitsmarkierung. Auch damit man es auf Anhieb sieht. (Company B/20.02.2019/MK/Germany/264)*

Further interpretative markers for detecting affect – whether mood or transient emotion – possibly include modes of expression and tone.

*Meine Antwortmail über ein Arbeitsthema war wohl zu zeitnah und zu forsch, habe ich später mitbekommen. In der 4. Woche meiner Zeit in Indien wurde ich gefragt, ob ich die Email tatsächlich so gemeint habe. Scheinbar habe ich nicht den richtigen Ton getroffen<sup>311</sup>. (Company B/23.03.2016/PS/Germany/265)*

<sup>309</sup> Selinker's (1983) theories concern language acquisition: types of transfer in learning a second language.

<sup>310</sup> This is a commonly used phrase in Indian English, particularly in the corporate sector, meaning "do whatever is necessary". It is considered socially appropriate. <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/india-english-sayings-twists/index.html>

<sup>311</sup> The mail mentioned was sent by the participant just before his trip to India and was personally discussed in the fourth week of his stay there.

When asked: *Nee, ich habe die Kollegen vor der Reise nicht persönlich gesehen oder gekannt, nur über Mailkontakt.*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, affect-based trust emphasizes empathy, affiliation, and rapport based on shared regard for the other person (McAllister 1995). These factors remain largely unexpressed in task-based text communication. Though it is possible to create cognition-based trust based on performance, the lack of social communication could result in a more fragile and temporal form of trust (cf. Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998; Robey, Khoo & Powers 2000).

Another significant effect of remote collaboration is the reduction in interpersonal influence of emotion. Every human being is aware of the way in which "a person or group influences the emotions, or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes" (Schoenewolf 1990, p. 50). Emotional responses can be modified by the reactions and social cues of others, but they would need to operate reliably and quickly, often through non-verbal signals (Lord & Kanfer 2002).

Two factors considered important for the emotion contagion process mentioned earlier are emotional mimicry and social appraisal. The first is emotional mimicry which defined as the imitation of the facial, verbal, or postural expressions of others (Hess & Fischer 2013), thus leading directly to convergence in subjective feelings (Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson 1994)<sup>312</sup>. Mimicry elicits sympathy and influences perceived charisma (Immordino-Yang 2011).

The other factor is the social appraisal discussed earlier in which the emotional expression of others confers important information about the situation. It has been argued that this may lead congruent appraisal of the situation and congruent emotion with others (Bruder, Fischer & Manstead 2014), although it may also be argued that cultural regulation and familiarity (cf. social contact theory) will gradually lead to emotional convergence. Remote collaboration via TMC does not actively contribute to any of these scenarios.

The VUCA model becomes once again apparent in terms of the emotional affordances of intercultural TMC interaction. Without the habitual security afforded by familiar emotional cues, each step in Scherer's (2009) appraisal mechanism is fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity: Where the relevance, implication and normative significance of emoting/emotion elicitors remain unclear, coping potential is correspondingly affected.

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<sup>312</sup> The mirror-neuron mechanism appears to play a fundamental role in both action understanding and imitation. (Rizzolatti and Craighero 2004).

Emotions as relational engagements (Mesquita 2010) need deliberate management in remote teams. Promoting relationality is essential to prevent the likelihood of sub-group dynamics characterized by an us-versus-them attitude across different sites (Polzer et al. 2006; Hinds, Neeley & Cramton 2014). Fault lines along which groups are most likely to split into sub-groups (Cramton & Hinds 2005) need to be anticipated and affectively guarded against

In the absence of most of the benevolence signals dealt with in this chapter – especially physical cues, informal social interaction and “fun at work” – bonding is left to the talents and capacities of individual employees.

*I work offshore from here with a colleague from Viet Nam and have got to know him like a brother. None of my German colleagues bothered to and now they come up to me and say “Can you tell your Vietnamese friend to do this faster?”. He’s not my [emphasis] friend, we all started out on the same footing and I took the trouble to establish a relationship with him online. In the meantime, we’ve even got nicknames for each other, even though we’ve never set eyes on each other in person. (Company A/24.08.2019/RJ/India/266)*

*Well I’m Indian too and I don’t think I can establish relationships to that degree. However, I do think emotional bonding at work is important, and being that much more quiet and reserved, I manage it at a personal level within my team. We’ve got team members in Shanghai and in California and we have regular VCs every week even if it’s a problem with the time zones. (Company A/24.08.2019/BD/India/267)*

To conclude, the wealth of organizational literature on the subject shows that team bonding holds immediate relevance to productivity and cooperation worldwide, whether collocated or remote. What varies is the conceptualization of what bonds teams/ CoPs together. On the face of it, Indian team members vocalize the affective elements in team bonding to a higher degree. The German perspective – which emerges from the issue of gap factors – will be delineated in the following chapter.

## **5 Chapter 5: Gap Factors: Germany**

One of the most important ways in which cultural differences can impact the success of a collaboration is by shaping people’s strategies for and expectations about interpersonal communication. Luhmann (1984) defined communication as a process of threefold selection consisting of information, message, and understanding<sup>313</sup>. It is a recursive meaning-making process that is inherently intersubjective.

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<sup>313</sup> Information, Mitteilung und Verstehen (Luhmann 1984).

At the same time, every specific interaction involves a 'social voice' grounded in the cultural patterns and conventions of 'sociocultural historicity' (Bolten 2002; own translation).

<....> we make meaning together, we learn meaning from each other, we share meaning. If we are to make sense to each other, we have to rely on the conventions of our language use, the traditions of our culture and the patterns of our relationships. When we speak, we therefore speak not with our own voice but with "social voices" – the words and worlds of meaning we inherit from others (Cameron, 2001). (Thurlow 2010, p. 229)

Complementary to Chapter 4, this chapter will elaborate on the communicative gaps brought up by the German participants. They form a mirror image in many cases to the affective gaps perceived by the Indian counterparts in Chapter 4.

As Tannen (1979, 1987) reminds us, the communicative styles of the two CoPs being discussed in this and the previous chapter are not entirely discrete entities. There are, however, clusters of features which distinguish the communicative style of both entities and "the extent that particular features are used more often and in similar ways by certain participants, and used not at all or in different ways by other participants <...>" (Tannen & Wallat 1987, p. 256).

These clusters of communicative features are shaped and reshaped by shared values, worldviews, norms, and thinking styles of the group to which they belong (cf. Gudykunst 1997). As the outcome of communicative action rests with the receiver (Szyzka & Malczok 2016), the absence of the expected responses constitutes the gaps perceived by the German participants. They will be subsumed in the following pages under the general category of communicative efficiency and content.

### **5.1 Communication: CoP Perspectives**

Group interaction research holds that groups need to support both task and socioemotional communication to achieve success (Emmit & Gorse 2003).

Task communication is the facts, opinions, ideas, and arguments that group members need to surface in order to inform their decision making.

Socioemotional messages convey charisma, humor, agreement, and interpersonal regard, and are also considered critical in order for groups to have effective and satisfying conversations (Walther et al. 2015, p. 5).

At the same time, norms and routines in German tech CoPs are expected to revolve around efficiency, also in communicative terms. While the gaps posited by the Indian participants in Chapter 4 fall under the broad category of socioemotional



messaging, the gaps in clarity and communicative content perceived by the German participants in this chapter pivot around the theme of efficient communication:

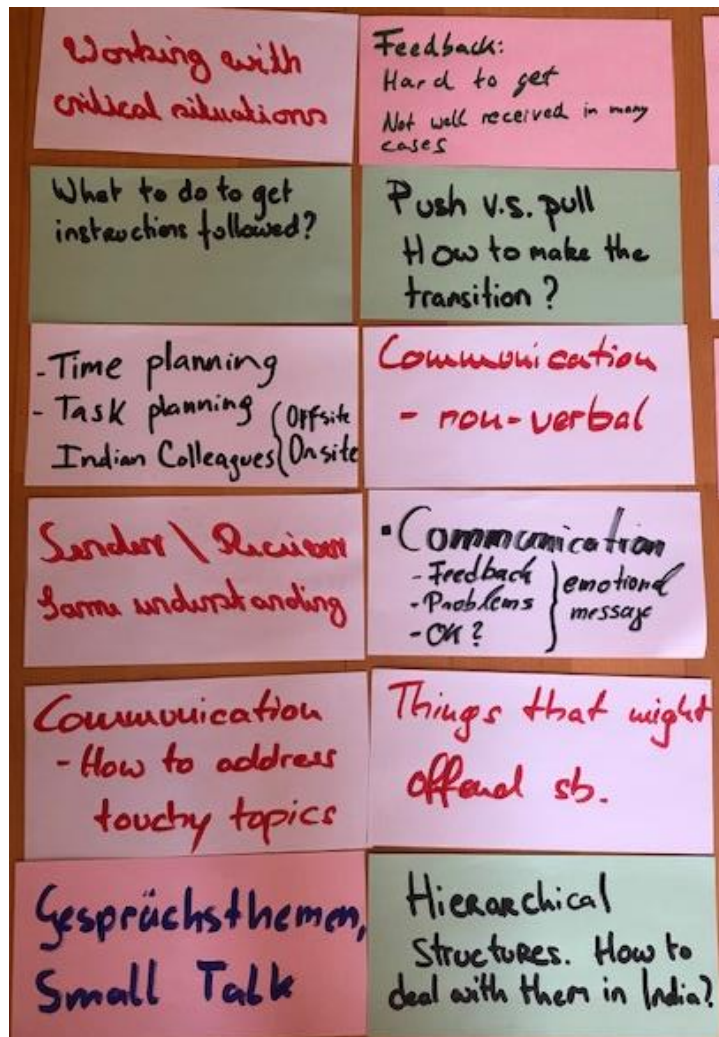


Figure 31. Germany: Topics to Discuss (Company A)

German CoPs perceive gaps in the communication of their Indian counterparts as an impediment to task-related issues:

*Wie schafft man es Transparenz zu bekommen? Wir wollen wissen, wie es läuft. Läuft das Projekt gut? Was läuft schlecht? Aber es kommt nichts.*

(Company B/17.4.2019/AW/Germany/268)

Emotional messaging for German CoPs is by no means irrelevant, but primarily in terms of its impact on project goals.

*Wie kann ich am besten kommunizieren, damit die Aufträge zu meiner Zufriedenheit erfüllt werden?* (Company B/14.03.2016/FK/Germany/269)

To compensate for the gaps in communicative content, German participants felt obligated to intensify their own efforts to pull information

*Sie sind fleißig, verbindlich, nicht so offen wie wir Europäer. Man muss bohren, um an Infos zu kommen, besonders negative. (Company B/10.07.2017/JP/Germany/270)*

The gaps were perceived as a twofold impediment to communicative efficiency, concerning both the nature of withheld information and the additional effort to recover it.

*Wir wollen Transparenz, einen offenen Informationsfluss, einfach die Offenheit im Austausch. Wir wollen zügig mit der Arbeit vorankommen. (Company B/17.4.2019/AN/Germany/271)*

One definition of 'efficiency' is as follows: "the comparison of what is actually produced or performed with what can be achieved with the same consumption of resources (money, time, labor etc.)"<sup>314</sup>. It is also defined thus:

"Efficiency signifies a level of performance that describes using the least amount of input to achieve the highest amount of output. Efficiency requires reducing the number of unnecessary resources used to produce a given output including personal time and energy".<sup>315</sup>

As is evident from both definitions, it is a concept that is centered on avoiding unnecessary expenditure of time and energy to achieve the best possible outcome:

*Wir müssen Ressourcen haben, die fehlenden Informationen rein zu holen, zu steuern. Das ist sehr zeitintensiv. (Company A/29.06.2018/AT/Germany/272)*

*Es ist sehr zeitaufwändig, Antworten zu entlocken oder erst 2 Tage vorher erfahren, es klappt nicht. Diese virtuellen Konferenzen sind zum Teil eine Plage – zeitaufwändig, schlechte Leitung, emotionale Distanz. (Company B/25.04.2017/MB/Germany/273)*

Orbe's (1998) analysis of communicative practices reveals that each practice represents an intricate selection process based on six factors that are interdependently connected. These are "a) preferred outcome b) field of experience c) abilities d) situational context e) perceived costs and rewards f) communication approach" (Orbe 1998, p. 15).

In a professional context, the selection is further influenced by the prevalence, salience and weightage of the norms and practices of a particular CoP. It harks back to the prototypical self-concept discussed in Chapter 2, one that subsumes the beliefs,

<sup>314</sup> <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/efficiency.html>

<sup>315</sup> <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/efficiency.asp>

perceptions and informal obligations that are the foundation of an unexpressed agreement within a group<sup>316</sup>.



Figure 32. Germany & India: Self-categorization of values (Company B)

Beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations evolve over time into enduring organizational routines<sup>317</sup>, independent of the actors who engage in them (cf. Edmondson, Bohmer & Pisano 2002). Certain attributes of categories are peripheral while others are more central (Rosch 1978), and self-ascription revolves around the central defining features.

The pinboard self-categorizations (see above example) were driven by corresponding norms, both tacit and explicit. Liang et al. (2012, p. 73) distinguish between descriptive norms (people's perceptions of what is commonly done in specific

<sup>316</sup> A glance at the German CoP self-categorization pinboards reveals parallels to Costa et al.'s personality trait of Conscientiousness. Their proposed facets of Conscientiousness are Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement Striving, Self-Discipline, and Deliberation. "By Competence we mean the sense that one is capable, sensible, and accomplished. The concept of Order, the tendency to keep one's environment tidy and well organized, Dutifulness refers to strict adherence to standards of conduct; the classical definition of Achievement as a striving for excellence. We view Self-discipline primarily in terms of persistence, the ability to continue with a task despite boredom or other distractions, Deliberation means caution, planning, and thoughtfulness" (Costa, McCrae & Dye 1991, p. 889-890).

<sup>317</sup> Howard-Grenville (2005) defines a routine as a 'repetitive, recognizable pattern' that involves interdependent actions and multiple actors.

situations), injunctive norms (people's perceptions of what is commonly approved or disapproved of within a particular culture) and personal or moral norms, such as the norm of reciprocity.

Descriptive and injunctive norms are often congruent:

For example, individuals who attend a formal meeting may notice that, because most others are silent and attentive (descriptive norms), they are required to act in a similar manner and that they will incur social sanctions if they do not comply (injunctive norms) (Lapinski & Rimal 2005, p. 131)

'Direktheit' in Fig. 30 is a norm prescribed to achieve task goals efficiently. It therefore warrants mention, while 'relationship' remains unexpressed, even it might be potentially significant as a personal norm.

*Was ich an Ihnen schätze ist die Freundlichkeit, die Herzlichkeit, der Wille zu helfen. Menschlich gesehen ist es eine sehr positive Erfahrung mit den indischen Kollegen zu arbeiten. Wir können uns davon eine Scheibe abschneiden (Company A/09.03.2018/MF/Germany/274)*

The value of relationships in organizational interaction is acknowledged, but usually within the utility frame:

*Beziehungen sind schon wichtig. Mein technischer Koordinator war hier in Deutschland und wir haben eine persönliche Beziehung entwickelt. Nach der Rückkehr hat es sich fürs Projekt als sehr hilfreich erwiesen. (Company B/24.01.2017/PM/Germany/275)*

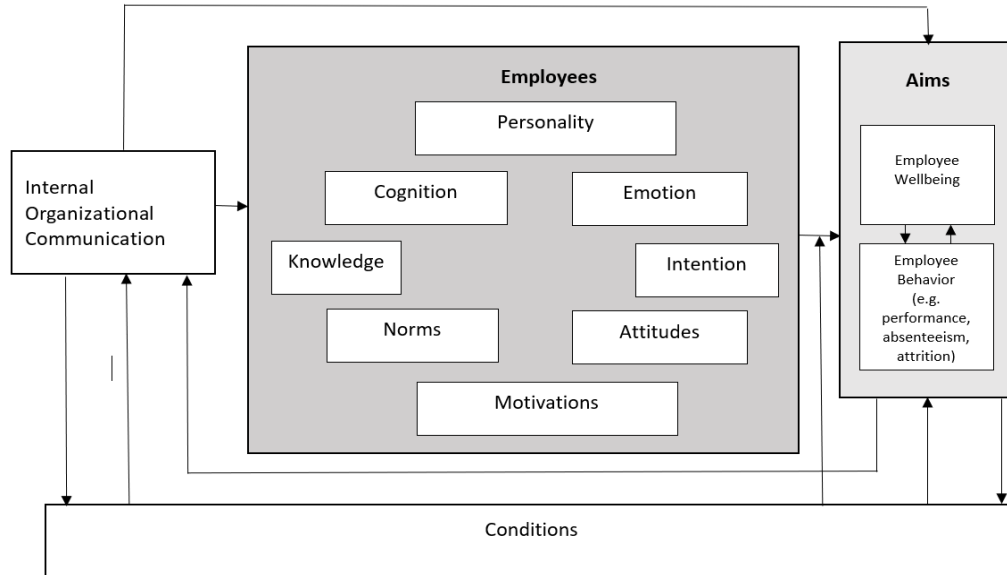
*It's not that we don't want better relationships, we just don't need it at work. (Company B/09.05.2017/PK/Germany/276)*

To qualify the preceding remarks, the intention here is not to argue for an unbridgeable divide between the two CoPs. Regardless of geography, all of the participants concurred that goal orientation and prioritizing are beneficial for team and organizational outcomes (cf. Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock 2012). There was also a general agreement that ineffective communication processes and practices would impede efficiency and goal accomplishment.

Second, the dichotomy between task and relationship levels of communication is not reflective of real-life communication. While the content/task level refers to the actual subject matter and the relationship level is about "one or several of the following assertions: 'This is how I see myself...this is how I see you...this is how I see you seeing me...'" (Watzlawick, Beavin Bavelas & Jackson 1967, p. 52), both levels are

present in every communicative interaction. In simple terms, content represents the 'what' of the message, relationship the 'how' (Bolten 2017)<sup>318</sup>.

The diagram below illustrates the multiple interrelated layers, even within organizational communication:



*Figure 33.* Cycle of antecedent-focused emotion regulation in a cultural context (based on De Leersnyder, Boigner & Mesquita 2013)

Third, neither the affective gaps nor the efficiency gaps posited by either CoP were necessarily of secondary value per se to the other:

*I like the honesty<sup>319</sup> and the transparency of people over here. I know where I stand if a colleague says 'no time' and you don't take it personally. It is good not to have to read between the lines. I like this. (Company A/ 08.12.2016/HP/ India/277)*

*At the same time, it's good to work with people who don't do politics, no beating about the bush and we thinking what to think, what to say. Makes working so easy, so uncomplicated. (Company D/ 01.04.2019/VK/India/278)*

Putting all of these elements together, this chapter will examine the gaps mentioned by the German participants from varying scholarly perspectives. It will examine expectations based on paradigms in implied contracts, OCB, and

<sup>318</sup> „Der Inhaltsaspekt vermittelt die ‚Daten‘, der Beziehungsaspekt weist an, wie diese Daten aufzufassen sind“ (Bolten 2007, p. 19).

<sup>319</sup> It has been posited that socially adept individuals are less honest due to their awareness of and ability to adapt to social contexts. <https://www.zdf.de/wissen/leschs-kosmos/ungelogen-die-wahrheit-hinter-der-luege-100.html>

psychological safety before leading into pragmatic theories pertaining to the communicative gaps.

## 5.2 Psychological/Implied Contracts and OCB

Organizational routines may be either explicitly determined by formal contracts or implicitly agreed upon and expected. Formal contracts are generally in writing. They are compensatory and enforceable, but an agreement regarding beliefs is also a contract, the key attribute of which is subjectivity (Rousseau 1989).

Developing the concept of psychological contract first identified by Agyris in 1960, Rousseau distinguishes between psychological and implied contracts<sup>320</sup>. A psychological contract represents “an individual’s belief regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between the focal person and another party” (Rousseau 1989, p. 123). The parties involved are the employee and the organization.

An implied contract is “a mutual obligation existing at the level of the relationship (e.g., dyadic, interorganizational)” and forms “patterns of obligations arising from interactions between parties” (ibid, p. 124)<sup>321</sup>. Psychological contracts are at the individual level and are highly subjective. Implied contracts, on the other hand, are at a relational level and exist as the result of a degree of social consensus regarding what constitutes an obligation (ibid).

Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall (2008) highlight that the psychological contract can be conceived of as a sense-making process, whose main function is to reduce insecurity by integrating all of the issues that cannot be addressed in a formal, written contract, thus increasing the perceived predictability of organizational actions. Such observations would also apply to implied contracts within and between groups/CoPs.

As discussed in the previous chapter, OCB is discretionary behavior that extends beyond normal job requirements. Studies connect OCB only tangentially to psychological contracts; for instance, in terms of how OCB is negatively affected by psychological contract violation (e.g., Robinson & Morrison 1995).

A look at the prototypical group norms depicted by German tech CoPs (e.g., figure 32) reveals a far closer relationship to implied contracts than to OCB. In fact,

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<sup>320</sup> Rousseau’s socio-psychological term is not to be conflated with the legal term, though there are commonalities. The legal term is defined as follows: “An implied contract is a legally-binding obligation that derives from the actions, conduct, or circumstances of one or more parties in an agreement. It is assumed to exist, and no written or verbal confirmation is necessary” ([https://www.investopedia.com/terms/i/implied\\_contract.asp](https://www.investopedia.com/terms/i/implied_contract.asp)). In legal terminology, an implied contract is legally binding, in Rousseau’s version it is an obligation at a relational level.

<sup>321</sup> Once again, we return to the concept of social exchange theory and the reciprocity that underlies interaction.

most of the points included in the first two dimensions of Kwantes et al.'s (2008) table below are considered quasi-obligatory rather than discretionary extra-role behavior in German CoPs.

Table 3

*OCB dimensions (Kwantes et al. 2008, p.236; last three abbreviated); gap factors of German CoPs highlighted*

Conscientiousness	following regulations and procedures, being punctual every day doing highest quality work informing ahead of time if time off is needed, <b>not spending time on conversation unrelated to work</b> obeying rules, regulations and procedures, performing duties with care and unusually few errors, meeting and beating deadlines
Initiative	<b>Risking disapproval to express beliefs for good of the company,</b> <b>using own judgement to assess what is best for the organization</b> <b>informing others to prevent unanticipated problems</b> <b>informing others of job-related problems they do not know</b> <b>expressing opinions honestly even when others may disagree</b> <b>Motivating others to express their ideas and opinions</b> <b>Making innovative suggestions to improve department</b>
Volunteerism	Helping others, volunteering without being asked, helping to organize departmental get-togethers
Boosterism	Defending the organization when outsiders criticize it, showing pride when representing the organization in public
Sportsmanship	Taking undeserved work breaks, complaining about trivial matters, making problems greater than they actually are

As Kwantes et al.'s (2008) table encapsulates the gaps perceived by the German CoPs to a remarkable degree, it will be used as a starting point for the discussion. The focus will be particularly on the factors in the initiative dimension, every one of which apply to German CoPs. Initiative is related to the OBC theme of 'civic virtue' proposed by some researchers (e.g., Podsakoff et al. 2000). It means 'organizational participation' or "sharing informed opinions and new ideas with others,

and being willing to deliver bad news and support an unpopular view to combat groupthink” (Graham 1991, p. 255).

The points highlighted below depict the implicit expectations of German CoPs that remained unfulfilled, thus constituting communicative gaps.

As with implied/psychological contracts, the aim of communication is to reduce uncertainty (Barnlund 2008). Information asymmetry, a condition wherein one party in a relationship has more or better information than another (Bergh et al. 2018), aggravates potential uncertainty. One means of reducing information asymmetry between two parties is through signaling (cf. Spence 2002).

As is substantiated by the tech self-categorization of German CoPs, clear and transparent communicative signaling rather than content-low socioemotional messaging is part of the implied contract. The first highlighted point, the belief in not spending time on conversation unrelated to work has already been discussed from an Indian CoP viewpoint in Chapter 4.

*Ich weiß im Vorfeld genau, was ich sagen möchte. Es ist viel Inhalt in wenigen Sätzen. Ich bin ein analytischer Mensch, das findet man in meiner Kommunikation wieder. (Company D/ 19.01.2016/TK/Germany/279)*

The highlighted factors in the ‘Initiative’ dimension reflect a vital concern, that of promoting operational success through an open and exhaustive information exchange.

The gaps in this category are numerous, ranging from withholding strategies from Indian CoPs such as silence, message equivocality in the form of mitigating language for problem-reporting, and over-accommodation to avoid refusals.

*Das Gesamtpaket (Software) sollte am Montag geliefert werden. Auf Nachfrage wurde uns zugesichert, dass ein Teil davon 2 Tage später nachgeliefert würde, danach kam aber nichts. Auch auf Nachfrage – Schweigen. (Company D/ 19.01.2016/OS/Germany/280)*

*Da sind Augenblicke, wo ich denke, das kann nicht sein. Ich habe das Gefühl, In Indien gibt es kein ‚nein‘. Egal was ich fordere, kommt da ein ‚ja‘ und dann müssen wir es ausbaden. (Company B/ 16.05.2017/MK/Germany/281)*

The following two intertwined concepts of trust and psychological safety form the background to the concerns related to the ‘Initiative’ dimension.

### 5.3 Trust

The concept of trust has already been briefly explored in Chapter 3, and will be re-addressed for the concerns of this chapter. As mentioned earlier, trust has a social function in reducing the complexity of social life (Luhmann 1979). In unfamiliar situations, reciprocal behavior aligned to familiar norms is the most fundamental means



of generating interpersonal trust, particularly at the initial stages when the actors have little verifiable information about each other from first-hand, personal experience (McKnight & Chervany 2006). In a remote collaboration, the unfamiliarity inherent to this initial stage can stretch out for longer periods, particularly in the absence of face-to-face communication and volatile team constellations.

Certain cognitive aspects influence initial trust: reputation inference and social categorization. The former means inferring positive traits based on second-hand information. The latter refers to in-group categorization, i.e., placing the trustee in the same grouping as oneself, or stereotyping, i.e., placing the trustee in a general grouping from which inferences can be made about trustee attributes (ibid, p. 31).

Of the two categories of trust - affect-based trust and cognition-based trust (McAllister 1995; Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng 2011), cognition-based trust refers to “trust that is based on performance-relevant cognitions such as competence, responsibility, reliability, and dependability” (McAllister 1995, p. 26).

McAllister (1995) argues that when a certain level of cognition-based trust is met, it is easier to form emotional attachments, thus suggesting that cognition-based trust positively influences affect-based trust (Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng 2011, p. 864). In reverse, Hofstede (2009, p. 89) argues that feelings of sympathy and antipathy are early warning systems which guide the choice of whom to trust, primed by perceived group membership as a quick decision aid.

Mayer et al.'s (1995) trust factors encompass competence, benevolence and integrity. Competence includes ability, benevolence implies a concern for others beyond their own needs and having benign motives (Dietz, Gillespie & Chao 2010), and integrity calls for adherence to a set of principles acceptable to others encompassing fairness and honesty (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman 1995).

The caveats to this division are readily apparent: first, a clear demarcation between the two categories of rationality and emotion is fundamentally questionable; and second, trust is a dynamic process that morphs through the different states with increasing interactional experience over a period of time (Schweer 2008).

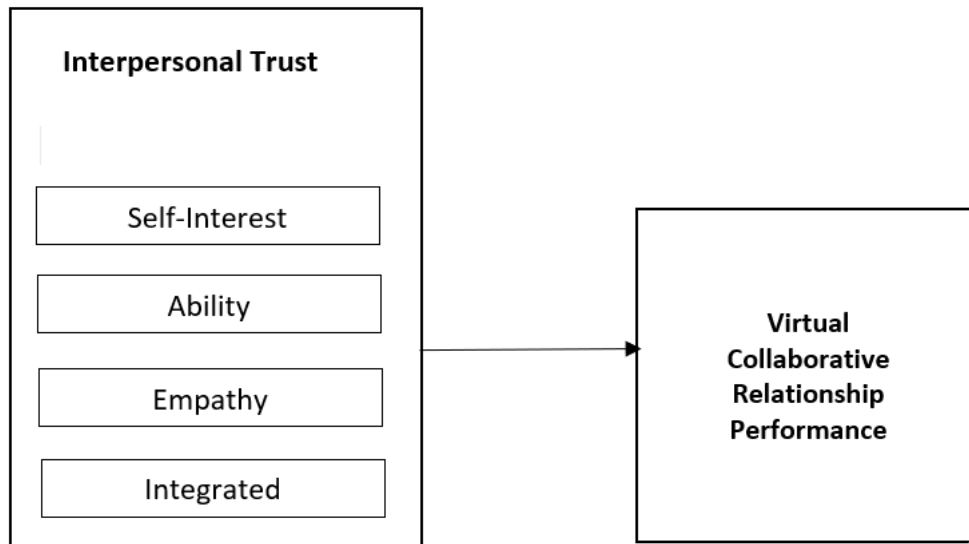
Trusting as a social process entails behaviors such as signaling, negotiating, sense-making, contracting, cooperating, reciprocating, investing, imitating, or complying (Möllering 2013). Given this range, there is reason to argue for the centrality of trust as a social reality, one which includes both emotional and cognitive dimensions (Lewis & Weigert 1985).

Paul and McDaniel (2004) have identified three types of interpersonal trust: calculative, competence, and relational, all of which are combined into the type called integrated trust. Calculative trust is based on conceptualizing trust as a form of

economic exchange. It is an economic calculation where each party assesses the benefits and costs to be derived from creating and sustaining a relationship.

Competence trust is whether the other party is capable of doing what it says it will do.

The third type, relational or benevolence trust, is the extent one feels a personal attachment to the other party and wants to do good by the other party. The last-named is also termed affect-based trust (Paul & McDaniel 2004).

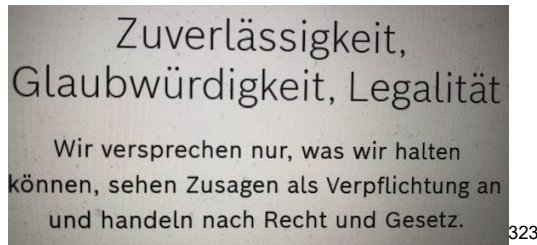


*Figure 34.* Interpersonal trust and VCR performance model (Paul & McDaniel 2004, p. 187)

The integrated perspective of interpersonal trust (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman 1995; Zaheer, McEvily & Perrone 1998) combines the different types of trust. All three types are interrelated, even though they may be separable and vary independently of each other (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman 1995). For example, some relationships may rely more on a combination of calculative and competence trust, while other relationships may be based more on a combination of relational and competence trust. Further, one type of trust may evolve into another, deeper type of trust (Paul & McDaniel 2004, p. 188).

Competence trust is particularly relevant in knowledge-based economies because it acts as an indicator of the other party's ability to perform as anticipated (Rousseau et al. 1998). It is also required in complexity reducing collaborative efforts when the skills needed to perform a task are distributed among team members (cf. Newall and Swan 2000). In followership contexts, belief in leadership competence is the most important element of cognition-based trust (Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng 2011).

There are two further aspects of cognition-based trust excluded by Paul and McDaniel (2004): the aspects of predictability and reliability<sup>322</sup>. Predictability is the degree of regularity in behavior over time (Dietz and Den Hartog 2006). Reliability is an assessment of whether the other party can be relied on to fulfill their obligations (Zaheer, McEvily & Perrone 1998).



*Ich kann den Indern nicht glauben. Sie meinen, sie wollen mich nicht enttäuschen, aber dann tun sie es doch, weil sie keine Probleme melden und die Termine platzen. (Company B/08.05.2018/MH/Germany/282)*

Judging by the responses in this study, affect-based trust appears to hold greater relevance to the Indian CoPs, while cognition-based trust comes more into play in German CoPs.

Hubig (2014) highlights the mutual conditionality (the chicken-and-egg loop) between trust and communication. Trust in remote teams is largely based on meeting reciprocal expectations. It is a product of interaction created during a successful communicative process that determines its continued success. Hubig (2014) postulates that this reciprocal effect needs to be set in motion by one party who is willing to take the initiative by extending trust<sup>324</sup>.

*Das Problem ist, wir haben eine andere Art und ein anderes Verständnis von Kommunikation. Es gibt Gerüchte und Misstrauen hoch zwei wegen „ja ja ich habe es verstanden“ und dann kommt nix dabei raus. (Company C/12.3.2018/CR/Germany/283)*

<sup>322</sup> Zaheer et al. (1998) perceive predictability as a type of trust in and of itself, but dropped reliability.

<sup>323</sup> <https://www.bosch.de/karriere/warum-bosch/kultur/>

<sup>324</sup> „Vertrauen ist damit nicht nur Voraussetzung persönlicher Interaktion, sondern zugleich Interaktionsprodukt: Es entsteht erst im Kommunikationsprozess und bestimmt diesen zugleich maßgeblich, es ist Ergebnis einer gelungenen Interaktion und Basis für weitere gelingende Interaktionen. Ein Henne-Ei-Problem scheint hier gegeben, ein komplexer Kreislauf gegenseitiger Bedingtheit, bei dem sich Ursache und Wirkung wechselseitig beeinflussen und einer der Kommunikationspartner den Anfang machen muss, denn die Gewährung von Vertrauen kann genau das Verhalten erzeugen, das logisch gesehen seine Bedingung zu sein scheint. Vertrauen fängt also bei uns selbst an“ (Hubig 2014, p.359).

*It's hard to be open about some things. It's a kind of insecurity – we are afraid it will ruin our relationship and our chance of success. (Company A/3.4.2018/ADS/India/284)*

There are two possible reasons why cognition-based trust, particularly competence and reliability, might be in the foreground of the German CoP discussion. The first is the context of remote collaboration. In the virtual world, “trust is a way to manage people whom you do not see” (Handy 1995, p. 41). Collocation reinforces social similarity, shared values, and expectations (Jarvenpaa and Leidner 1999). Replacing collocation by technology undermines the emotional relationship aspects of trust (Paul & McDaniel, 2004, p. 185). TMC occludes cues related to normative behavior cues, social context cues and affective cues<sup>325</sup>, and it also prevents actors from attuning to individual characteristics (cf. Walther 2011). Hence, performance-relevant cognitions such as ability, skills, dependability and reliability gain salience in helping to manage VUCA conditions.

The second reason is embedded in the in-group self-categorization of German tech CoPs which regularly cite capability and reliability as value dimensions. Trust from a relationship-based perspective has been described as operating according to the social exchange process (cf. Whitener et al. 1998). The antecedents of cognition-based trust are equally grounded in reciprocity. The degree of compliance with one's own CoP norms is an indicator to assess trustworthiness and it leads to preparedness to engage in a trusting relationship.

Scholars such as Möllering (2013) call for research into 'trusting' as a process instead of 'trust' as an outcome. When the actors gain familiarity, the components and nature of trust also change. Certain components are critical to each life cycle stage of virtual teams - planning, inception, organizing, transition and accomplishing the task (Greenberg, Greenberg & Antonucci 2007). It highlights the difficulty of and the effort required to sustain trust in virtual teams.

#### **5.4 Psychological Safety**

Information exchange is most effective in a climate of psychological safety<sup>326</sup>, which encourages team members to speak up and share their knowledge and skills. It holds particular value in knowledge economies involving teamwork to achieve a shared outcome (Edmondson & Lei 2014). Studies show that in R&D teams, an increase in psychological safety reduces team turnover and improves performance (Chandrasekaran & Mishra 2012).

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<sup>325</sup> Social cues hypothesis (Sproull & Kiesler 1986).

<sup>326</sup> Or communicative climate (Gibbs 1961).

The concept of psychological safety was first introduced early as the 1960s, notably by Edgar Schein and Warren Bennis (1965). They posited that psychological safety is fundamentally about reducing interpersonal risk, which necessarily accompanies uncertainty and change. Schein (1993) later argued that psychological safety helps people overcome the defensiveness, or learning anxiety, that occurs when they are presented with data that contradict their expectations or hopes. With psychological safety, he reasoned, individuals are free to focus on collective goals and problem prevention rather than on self-protection (Edmondson & Lei 2014).

The concepts of psychological safety and trust are closely intermeshed. Edmondson (2003) argues that: “both describe intrapsychic states involving perceptions of risk or vulnerability, as well as making choices to minimize negative consequences, and, <...> both have potential positive consequences for work groups and organizations” (Edmondson 2003, p. 8).

Variations in dimensions of trust obscure the sense of psychological safety. Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson 1999). It is a group-level phenomenon (Edmondson & Lei 2014), in which: “members believe they can participate openly and actively without fear of suffering adverse personal consequences, such as being derogated for their ideas and observations or for the manner by which they express them” (Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng 2011, p. 864).

What forms of trust might constitute the antecedents of psychological safety? Schaubroeck et al. (2011) posit that affect-based trust in leadership enhances the feeling of psychological safety. They hypothesize that “affect-based trust in the leader is positively related to team performance through the mediating influence of team psychological safety” (Schaubroeck, Lam & Peng 2011, p. 865).

This hypothesis is potentially applicable to the sub-team at each geographical site, but it is less relevant to the interaction between remote mirror-teams, where leadership behaviors are locally distinct. In remote collaboration, a common leadership at some organizational level is structurally present but operatively absent, and care and concern are harder to convey between geographically-dispersed sub-teams.

Some researchers have used the term participative safety, which encompasses information sharing and trust, among others (e.g., Anderson & West 1998; Axtell et al. 2000). Gong et al. (2012) make the argument that proactive employees engage in more information exchange and that the relationship between information exchange and creativity is fully mediated by trust. Employees who speak up are likely to have inferred that the context is a safe one to do so (Liang, Farh & Farh 2012).

It is not easy to draw causation inferences between psychological safety and speaking up. It could be both a consequence and an antecedent of psychological safety (Liang et al. 2012).

*That's probably the essential difference, you know. We speak up more, work better if the relationship is good, they develop a relationship if we work well<sup>327</sup>. (Company B/06.04.2018/BA/India/285)*

Speaking up is facilitated by familiarity with professional behaviors and expectations that are, in turn, generally contingent upon CoP norms and practices. Uncertainty about the taken-for-granted beliefs of the other group group can impede the creation of a joint climate of psychological safety.

As Edmondson (2003) highlights:

Psychological safety describes individuals' perceptions about the consequences of interpersonal risks in their work environment. It consists of taken-for-granted beliefs<sup>328</sup> about how others will respond when one puts oneself on the line, such as by asking a question, seeking feedback, reporting a mistake, or proposing a new idea. I argue that individuals engage in a kind of tacit calculus at micro-behavioral decision points, in which they assess the interpersonal risk associated with a given behavior (Edmondson 1999). In this tacit process, one weighs the potential action against the particular interpersonal climate, as in, 'If I do this here, will I be hurt, embarrassed or criticized?' A negative answer to this tacit question allows the actor to proceed (Edmondson 2003, p. 6-7).

The norms relating to speaking up may thus lead to varying consequences depending on each CoP's practices. Consequently, self-protection is commensurate with what is reflected the norms of one's own sub-group.

*Die Zusammenarbeit [mit Indien] war eigentlich gut, aber man musste immer nachfragen. Was ich wissen will ist, wie soll man in Diskussionsrunden eine offener Art anstoßen? (Company B/22.11.2016/JS/Germany/286)*

*Even in schools if you said something or asked a question it depended on what the teacher thought. If it was thought silly, you would be in big trouble. So we always evaluate whether a remark or question is well-thought out enough to ask. Here [in Germany] it's the opposite. People say, there are no silly*

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<sup>327</sup> This remark recalls the two broad metacategories of task and relations behavior postulated by some scholars. The most important goal of task-oriented behavior is to accomplish professional tasks as efficiently as possible, while the most important goal of relation-oriented behaviors is to increase the quality of human resources and relations (Yukl 2002).

<sup>328</sup> Detert and Edmondson (2011) term taken-for-granted beliefs about when and why speaking up at work is risky or inappropriate as 'implicit voice theories'.

*questions – ask when you are in doubt, say what you think. It has taken me a long time to do this in front of a group or to question my team leader. I am only able to do it because he encourages me all the time to do so and I am in an environment in which it is normal and even appreciated. Otherwise it would be impossible. (Company A/24.08.2019/RJ/India/287)*

Self-protection includes aspects of face. Most people feel a need to manage risks to minimize harm to their image, especially in the workplace and especially in the presence of those who formally evaluate them. This is both instrumental (promotions and other valued rewards may be dependent on impressions held by bosses and others) and socioemotional (we prefer others' approval than disapproval) (Edmondson 2003, p. 255-256).

*The clarity of communication in India, between Indian employees is much better than to outsiders. To outsiders it is impossible to say 'no'. Within the local team it's best, then it becomes progressively more difficult to say 'no'. (Company B/17.06.2016/RMT/India/288)*

*Even if we have no idea we will say 'yes, yes' when we are working for [emphasis] someone but not when we are working with [emphasis] someone. (Company B/29.11.2016/AS/India/289)*

Face in German tech CoPs is enhanced by clear and unambiguous signaling, also termed voice. Voice is defined as upward-directed, promotive verbal communication (Premeaux & Bedeian 2003). Van Dyne and LePine (2003) emphasized that voice includes speaking up with suggestions as well as concerns.

Accordingly, Liang et al. (2012) propose that there are two types of voice—promotive and prohibitive. The first category of promotive voice is the expression of ways to improve work practices and procedures to benefit an organization (Van Dyne & LePine 1998). "Such voice is 'promotive' in the sense that it is focused on a future ideal state or what could be" (Liang, Farh & Farh 2012, p. 74-75).

*Wir leben in unserer Arbeit vom Widersprechen – wir sind dazu erzogen. Wir müssen Dinge umsetzen. Da wir nicht unfehlbar sind, ist es im Prozess eingebettet, dass man von den Anderen hört, ob man auf dem richtigen Weg ist. Wir machen Entwicklungen, für die es noch keine 100-%ige Lösung gibt. Wir müssen uns austauschen, es ausprobieren, und da ist es extrem wichtig, dass jeder seine Meinung dazu beisteuert. Daher bekommt man ein optimales Ergebnis. Auch die Kinder sind so – mein Sohn diskutiert mich in Grund und Boden [smiles]. Wir erziehen sie auch dazu. (Company B/13.3.2017/TW/Germany/290)*

The second is prohibitive voice, which describes employee expressions of concern about existing or impending practices, incidents, or behaviors that are harmful to their organizations. It serves an important function for organizational health, primarily because messages signaling potential danger or identifying previously-undetected problems can be placed on the collective agenda to be prevented or resolved (ibid, p. 75).

*Wie kriegt man es raus, wenn es nicht läuft? Es gibt einfach kein ‚nein‘, auch wenn die Sache nicht läuft, keine Rückmeldung bei Problemen (Company B/22.5.2017/PF/Germany/291)*

Remote collaboration creates uncertainty regarding psychological safety in interaction. Thus, the actors take refuge in the ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1984) of familiar social systems and codes of conduct which define both the rules guiding action and the resources empowering action. Routinized patterns of behavior are adhered to, even if the actors are free to act differently (Whittington 1992). Information sharing increases when it is believed to be usual, correct, and socially-expected workplace behavior (Constant, Kiesler & Sproull 1994, p. 404).

## 5.5 Conflict Approaches

Information sharing behavior becomes particularly pertinent in contexts of conflict. Unfortunately, conflict is a pervasive aspect of organizational life “within and between individuals, within and between teams and groups, within and between different levels of an organization, within and between organizations” (Deutsch 2003). The four main forms of conflicts posited within organizations – interpersonal, intra-group, inter-group and interorganizational conflict (Jones, Gorge & Hill 2000) – do not hold equal significance to this study. The primary focus of the participants was on interpersonal interaction, often dyadic, which was extended to the inter-group plane through team discussions.

There is a wide range of definitions for the term ‘conflict’. The interactional element is emphasized in Barki and Hartwick’s (2004) definition of conflict as a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals. Conflicts may arise between parties from their perceived incompatibility of opposing interests, goals, or behaviors (Tjosvold 1997).

Thomas (1992) identifies conflict as the “process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his” (p. 265). In Robbins and Judge’s (2009) definition, conflict is “a process that begins where one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively



affects something that the first party cares about” (Robbins & Judge 2013, p. 368). It is often given a bad name by its association with disruption, violence and disorder (Tjosvold 1997), although research also points to the positive effects on conflict on performance (e.g., De Dreu & van de Vliert 1997).

Conflicts are often broadly classified as socioemotional and cognitive conflicts<sup>329</sup>. Socioemotional conflict, also referred to as affective conflict, involves interpersonal incompatibilities among team members (DeDreu & van de Vliert 1997), or interaction that evokes negative affect in the other (cf. Ajzen 1991). Task conflict – sometimes termed cognitive or substantive conflict – involves disagreement about task issues (Rentsch & Zelno 2003). It also tends to be associated with constructive conflict management strategies and with positive team outcomes (Tjosvold 1997).

This two-dimensional approach simplifies a complex concept as both task and socioemotional components co-exist variably (Rentsch & Zelno 2003). Task conflicts that involve challenging others’ ideas or criticizing an inadequate product can be construed as personal rejection and lead to a socioemotional conflict (ibid).

*Ich habe das Gefühl, wir wollen etwas haben und sie [die Inder] sagen, ‘ja ich mache es’, einfach weil man gefühlsmäßig nicht ‚nein‘ sagen möchte. In Deutschland sind wir eher auf der Sachebene. (Company B/13.04.2018/KD/Germany/292)*

Ajzen (1991) proposes that a central factor in the theory of planned behavior is the individual’s intention to perform a given behavior. It is influenced by three variables: the expected consequences of the action, the expectations of how others will evaluate the action, and perceived behavioral control compatible with Bandura’s (1977, 1982) concept of perceived self-efficacy<sup>330</sup> (Ajzen 1991, p.182).

Five conflict-handling modes to describe conflict management in organizational work groups have been delineated: avoidance, accommodation, competition, collaboration, and compromise (Rahim 1983).

Avoidance and accommodation behaviors are both characterized by reluctance for confrontation. Avoidance is characterized by behaviors that either ignore or refuse to engage in conflict, while accommodation behavior is characterized by an obliging concern for others. Competition, collaboration and compromise may be summed up as follows:

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<sup>329</sup> Other types to be found in literature include process conflict (Jehn & Mannix 2001) and status conflict (Bendersky & Hays 2011).

<sup>330</sup> Bandura’s (1977, 1982) concept of perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations (Bandura 1982, p.122).

Competition behavior is characterized by each party's pursuing his or her own interest without regard for others. <.....>. Collaboration behavior is characterized by attempts to identify and achieve outcomes that integrate the interests of all parties involved. This behavior emphasizes openness to others' points of view, objective consideration of all information, and shared efforts to solve problems and reach a jointly optimal solution <...>. Finally, compromise behavior is characterized by intermediate concern for self and others. The parties acknowledge differences in preferences and then work toward settling on some middle ground (Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song 2001, p. 1253).

Traditionally, Western psychology demarcates between positive and negative emotion. Negative emotions are further sub-divided into powerful and powerless. Powerless negative emotions such as trepidation, sadness or fear have the potential to elicit avoidant behavior, while powerful negative emotions such as anger, contempt or jealousy indicate the potential to attack or confront (cf. Friedlmeier 2013).

Both avoidance and accommodation can be seen negatively in organizational contexts. Avoidance behavior is perceived as evasive and apathetic towards conflicting points of view and outcomes in general (Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song 2001). With accommodation being one-sided behavior, information and alternatives are not fully considered and debated. Without an integrative consensus-building process, decision quality may suffer (ibid).

At the same time, as conflict is also associated with significant cost to organizations<sup>331</sup>, conflict avoidance can be beneficial in some circumstances, depending upon personality issues, cost–benefit analysis, power imbalance, type of work, length of relationship and autonomy (Barsky & Wood 2005). It has been posited that accommodation behavior tends to create efficiency in decision-making (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey & Lin 1991).

Those scholars advocating the broad culture approach align conflict approaches along national-cultural lines. It is argued, for instance, that collectivist cultures are more prone to high-context communication, particularly in conflict situations (e.g., Gudykunst 1997; Gudykunst and Matsumoto 1996). Members of individualist cultures are considered more direct in their communication and place less emphasis on the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others (e.g., Singelis & Brown 1995). This and other cultural models from the functionalist paradigm need to be regarded with the commensurate degree of caution (cf. McSweeney 2002).

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<sup>331</sup> Workplace Conflict and How Businesses Can Harness It to Thrive Global Human Capital Report CPP 2008. Available at: [https://www.cpp.com/pdfs/ CPP\\_Global\\_Human\\_Capital\\_Report\\_Workplace\\_Conflict.pdf](https://www.cpp.com/pdfs/ CPP_Global_Human_Capital_Report_Workplace_Conflict.pdf) [Google Scholar]

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Ting-Toomey (2008) uses Hall's taxonomy to maintain that "low-context cultural members tend to use confrontational, competitive, dominative, defending and assertive communication styles, high-context culture members tend to use accommodation, obliging, avoiding, defusing, compromising, forbearance and passive-aggressive conflict styles" (Ting-Toomey 2008, p. 47).

However, there are diverging perceptions of whether just so-called cultural characteristics are the central issue here (Dibbern, Winkler & Heinzl 2006, Gregory, Prifling & Beck 2009). As Zhang and Wei (2017) posit, when individuals highly value their interpersonal relationships with others, they may take the potential costs to relationships into consideration in deciding how to handle conflict. An avoidance approach to conflict is then preferred to prevent disruption in relationships from confrontation<sup>332</sup> (Zhang & Wei 2017).

Numerous other variables play into the concept of conflict. They include goals<sup>333</sup>, gender, psychological safety, cultural assumptions, power relations and virtuality. In addition to the variable of cultural assumptions, power relations and virtuality come to the fore in the findings in this chapter.

**5.5.1 'Accommodation': India.** The Indian CoPs in this study appear to prefer accommodation rather than confrontation and focus on face-saving to avoid disagreement (cf. Nicholson & Sahay 2001). Socially-desirable responding is universal across cultures<sup>334</sup>, and power asymmetry and negative anticipation (Zhang & Wei 2017) led Indian CoPs to deploy conflict avoidance or accommodation strategies:

*Sie [die indischen Kollegen] haben Schwierigkeiten, klare Meinungen zu formulieren, wenn man gegen eine Idee ist. (Company A/01.07.2016/DS/Germany/293)*

*Proaktivität rauskitzeln ist schwierig – sie sind überwiegend reaktiv. (Company A 29.06.2018/CP/Germany/294)*

*Der Satish, der länger bei uns ist, kann andeutungsweise ‚nein‘ sagen oder er gibt uns den Hinweis. Ich habe das Gefühl, auch er geht Konflikte eher aus dem Weg. (Company B/ 10.04.18/MK/Germany/295)*

Accommodation behaviors are focused more on maintaining team harmony than negotiating integrative, optimal solutions (Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song 2001, p.1257). This is intensified in the power asymmetry contexts prevalent in India's

<sup>332</sup> Zhang and Wei (2017) discuss the role of what they term 'superficial harmony' in conflict avoidance.

<sup>333</sup> Wilmot and Hocker (1998) additionally subdivide the variable of goals into content goals, relational goals, identity goals, process goals and face-saving goals

<sup>334</sup> Paulus (2002) terms this type of socially desirable response based on what appears more normatively appropriate as impression management.

software work ethos. When enumerating a list of strengths of the Indian IT industry, the report of the Indian Export Promotion Council for software (ecs) expressly lists the “accommodating nature of Indian IT workforce” as one of its strengths (ecs 2014, p. 11)<sup>335</sup>.

Ardener and Ardener’s muted-group theory (1978) suggests that groups at the top of a social hierarchy strongly determine the worldview and the communication system of a society<sup>336</sup>. This renders those outside the dominant group ‘inarticulate’ by muting their responses in an asymmetrical relationship, regardless of geography. In order to confront dominant structures and achieve any measure of success, co-cultural members strategically adopt certain communication behaviors (Orbe 1998).

One of the communication practices when a power imbalance is given is for the non-dominant group to avert controversy<sup>337</sup>. Communication is averted away from controversial or potentially dangerous subject areas (Orbe 1998). As Bourdieu (1977) phrases it, “the concessions of politeness are always political concessions” (p. 95).

As previously mentioned, power imbalance accrues from various status hierarchies<sup>338</sup>, including organizational role and expertise. Employees are often reluctant to share information that could be interpreted as negative or threatening to those above them in an organizational hierarchy (Roberts & O’Reilly 1974; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin 2003).<sup>339</sup>

Accommodation ties in with “the harmony model of conflict management” (Pines & Zaidman 2014)<sup>340</sup>, in which politeness is defined as a lack of directness in speech. To avoid provoking a situation which has the perceived potential for negative emotional reactions (Barki & Hartwick 2004), the Indian participants were cautious about not compromising their perceived organizational role:

*We are all from the service industry, so we think they will see us negatively, as unwilling to do things if we say ‘no’ to a request. (Company A/03.04.2018/SS/India/296)*

<sup>335</sup> <https://commerce.gov.in/InnerContent.aspx?id=88>

<sup>336</sup> The Ardeners maintained that there were ‘dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structure within it’ (Ardener 1975b, p. 20). Their theory is often cited in the context of Women’s Studies.

<sup>337</sup> In her story “July’s People” (1981, p. 94), Nadine Gordimer refers to ‘the servant’s formula, attuned to catch the echo of the master’s concern, to remove combat and conflict tactfully.’

<sup>338</sup> Status hierarchies naturally develop in small group settings (Phillips & Thomas-Hunt 2007).

<sup>339</sup> LeDoux (1995) points out that fear is the most fundamental of emotions from an evolutionary perspective, because fear is the basic mechanism of self-preservation for every species. It can result from a perception of something in the environment that represents danger. Alternatively, memories and experiences can teach us to be fearful of or anxious about an as-yet-unseen danger (Ashkanasy 2003).

<sup>340</sup> In a study based on the interaction between Indian and Israeli teams, Pines and Zaidman (2014) posit that the Indian colleagues “find the direct and confrontational style of their Israeli colleagues to be harmful to an atmosphere of cooperation” (p. 11).

For some participants, voice is based on default positions:

*You don't disobey your elders. If you say 'no' to an elder, they [sic] will feel disrespected. It starts with the parents, later transposed to the teacher, then the boss, then the customer. It's a never-ending thing. (Company C/10.10.2016/GR/India/297)*

Each leadership approach calls for a corresponding individual adaptation.

*Another issue is the combination of open speaking and hierarchy. If I tell my Group Leader here [in Germany] what is wrong he will actually take it positively and appreciate it. This would be unimaginable in my team in India. (Company B/06.04.2018/BA/India/298)*

Personalized benevolence in an organization seen as an extended family emphasizes strong personalized trust (Farh & Cheng 2000) and facilitates voice:

*If I cannot do something, I cannot say 'no' to the customer directly, though I can say so to my Indian manager. It is then up to him to say 'no' in any way he can or likes. (Company B/05.12.2016/SK/India/299)*

From a German perspective, organizational hierarchy is not perceived as a crucial obstacle to open speaking. The realities of power are acknowledged, but not within daily operational interchange:

*Auch bei uns werden die Ampel bei den oberen Hierarchiestufen grüner, aber Probleme werden selten komplett verheimlicht. (Company C/12.03.2018/CR/Germany/300)*

Expertise is another form of status that reflects one's relative standing in a group. It determines one's ability to contribute to and be listened to in a task group (Berger et al. 1998). Values are assigned to the interlocutors' contributions depending on their status grouping in different functional social categories (cf. Phillips & Thomas-Hunt 2007).

*Es gibt gewisse Experten bei uns, die von den Indern nie widersprochen werden. Der Bernhard ist einer davon. Ein Inder hat mal zu mir gesagt, als ich ihn darauf ansprach ‚Für mich ist er eine Leitperson. Es ist wichtig, eine Leitperson zu haben‘. Wenn Kollegen aus dem Land kommen, sind sie auf der Suche nach so einer Leitperson, scheint's. (Company B/13.03.2017/JL/Germany/301)*

Imputed status results in the extent of the contributions made, particularly in the presence of those whose functional expertise is considered higher:

*B, der [indische] Tech-Head hat mir während des Workshops nichts gesagt, aber wenn wir in der Pause miteinander gesprochen haben, wurde er ganz offen. Da habe ich richtiges Input und auch Feedback bekommen. (Company B/18.04.2019/AW/Germany/302)*

**5.5.2 ‘Streitkultur’ (‘culture of confrontation’): Germany.** On the other hand, for the German participants, conflicts were actually to be prevented by unambiguous, pre-emptive signaling:

*Probleme die existieren werden von den Indern häufig nicht benannt. Wenn man fragt, werden grüne Ampel gezeigt und beim Kunden entpuppt es sich anders – die Qualität entspricht nicht den Erwartungen <...> Das ist etwas, was in Deutschland weniger gut ankommt. Die Kultur hier ist, was habe ich gemacht und wo stehen wir gerade. Ich erkläre das vorhandene Problem, damit die Führungskraft nicht vor Ort überrascht wird und dem Kunden eine angemessene Antwort liefern kann. Man mag keine unliebsamen Überraschungen. Das Problem kann die Führungskraft auch besser vertreten gegenüber dem Kunden und es wirkt auch professioneller. (Company B/17.10.2016/J-OR/Germany/303)*

For the German CoP, this attitude stemmed from a belief in the oft-cited concept of ‘Streitkultur’. ‘Streitkultur’ may be translated as a culture of debate, confrontation and dispute. It is a widespread concept in German discourse, one viewed largely favorably<sup>341</sup>, whether in professional, public or political life<sup>342</sup>. It was mentioned without exception as part of a preferred – even obvious – self-categorization grounded (sometimes tongue-in-cheek) in a professional tech ethos<sup>343</sup>:

<sup>341</sup> It would fair to say that it has positive connotations in the term „streitbar“ which means “disputatious“ willing to engage critically in a dispute ( „bereit, den Willen besitzend, sich mit jemandem um etwas zu streiten, sich mit etwas kritisch, aktiv auseinanderzusetzen, für oder um etwas zu kämpfen, sich r jemanden, etwas einzusetzen; kämpferisch“: <https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/streitbar>).

<sup>342</sup> The influential weekly newspaper ‘Die Zeit’ dedicated an issue (5. September 2019) to the theme, with its Editor-in-Chief Giovanni Lorenzo declaring that dispute is, in principle, a good thing (Zeit Newsletter 6.9.2019). The accompanying film features a quote from Jochen Bittner, one of its editorial heads, that is worthy of any tech culture. „Wir streiten nicht, weil wir einen Meinungszirkus veranstalten wollen, sondern weil wir ständig auf der Suche sind nach den besseren Lösungen, den besseren Antworten.“ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hw29YhfeXY&feature=youtu.be&wt\\_zmc=nl.int.zonaudev.zeitverlag\\_freunde\\_der\\_zeit\\_newsletter\\_der\\_freunde\\_der\\_zeit\\_%2336.nl\\_ref.zeitde.bildtext.link.20190907&utm\\_medium=nl&utm\\_campaign=nl\\_ref&utm\\_content=zeitde\\_bildtext\\_li nk\\_20190907&utm\\_source=zeitverlag\\_freunde\\_der\\_zeit\\_newsletter\\_der\\_freunde\\_der\\_zeit\\_%2336\\_zonaudev\\_int](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hw29YhfeXY&feature=youtu.be&wt_zmc=nl.int.zonaudev.zeitverlag_freunde_der_zeit_newsletter_der_freunde_der_zeit_%2336.nl_ref.zeitde.bildtext.link.20190907&utm_medium=nl&utm_campaign=nl_ref&utm_content=zeitde_bildtext_li nk_20190907&utm_source=zeitverlag_freunde_der_zeit_newsletter_der_freunde_der_zeit_%2336_zonaudev_int)

<sup>343</sup> This reminds us of the view that “machines and technology are seen as culture-free, based on universal principles <...>. The paradigm of universality of technology does not allow technicians and engineers to entertain the thought of cultural influences in every aspect of their work as this culture-sensitive approach lies outside of the frame of their professional belief system” (Nazarkiewicz 2012, p. 32).

*„Streitkultur“: Ich möchte einen Spruch dazu beitragen. Mit Ingenieuren zu streiten ist wie mit Schweinen im Schlamm zu ringen. Am Ende stellt man fest, es gefällt ihnen [general laughter]. (Company B/28.03.2017/TD/Germany/304)*

*Wir haben eine laute, aggressive Konfliktgestaltung – wir kennen es nicht anders in unserem Berufsumfeld. Wie macht man es anderswo, in diesem Fall in Indien? (Company A/05.10.2016/JH/Germany/305)*

The belief in a ‘Streitkultur’ lies in a clear demarcation between cognitive/substantive and affective/socioemotional conflicts. The former involves differences of opinion among group members about the tasks being performed (DeChurch & Marks 2001), in terms of either recognizing or solving a problem (Rahim 2002). On the other hand, affective conflict deals with interpersonal relationships or incompatibilities not directly related to achieving group's function (Priem & Price 1991). Therefore, unlike socioemotional conflicts, cognitive conflicts are seen as stimulating positive effects such as innovative thinking and creative solutions (Amason & Schweiger 1994; De Dreu and West 2001).

*Die Einstellung ist: wir können uns nicht verbessern, wenn wir uns nur gegenseitig loben. Kritik - auch Selbstkritik - hat mit Weiterentwicklung zu tun. (Company B/01.02.2019/EM/Germany/306)*

*Null Toleranz, fehlerfrei Qualität – die Anforderungen sind bei uns sehr hoch. Ich erwarte von den indischen Kollegen auch Widerspruch, dass sie sagen, ‘nein ich sehe es nicht so’. Man wächst am Austausch, an der Reibung. (Company B/07.06.2019/FH/Germany/307)*

Informational diversity requires that group members reconcile conflicting viewpoints (Williams and O'Reilly 1998). During expressed conflict, informational diversity is processed more thoroughly by exchanging varying perspectives, asking questions and challenging assumptions on how to handle a task (Amason & Schweiger 1994). Active confrontation through negotiation promotes intergroup communication and increases understanding (Putnam 1997).

*Wo bleibt die Professionalität? Mit so einer Einstellung kann man nicht vorwärtskommen. Man wächst an der Auseinandersetzung, die zum Ergebnis führt. (Company B/16.05.2017/MK/Germany/308)*

By bringing underlying issues into the open, cognitive conflicts help to sharpen insights and pave the way for integrating seemingly opposing interests (Fisher 1997).<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Starting with undergraduates, students in Germany are encouraged to pursue ‘Eristik’, named after the Greek goddess of dispute. Various research positions are examined,

*Eigentlich drückt man die Wertschätzung einer Idee aus, wenn man kritische Bemerkungen macht. Es bedeutet, dass man sich mit der Idee auseinandersetzt. (Company D/19.01.2016/SK/Germany/309)*

Organizations tend to believe that they have to choose between “tough” productivity-oriented or “soft,” people-oriented approaches (Tjosvold, West & Smith 2003). Socioemotional factors are acknowledged as realities but also viewed as a threat to professionally desirable self-positioning.

*Wir würden uns nie als ‚sensitive‘ bezeichnen wie die indischen Kollegen es tun. Bei der Arbeit würden alle sagen ‚Weichei‘. (Company B/16.05.2017/EH/Germany/310)*

*Oder nicht konfliktfähig. (Company B/16.05.2017/MK/Germany/311)*

*Wo haben sie ihn aufgetrieben? (Company B/16.05.2017/DS/Germany/312)*

Paradoxically, in a ‘Streitkultur’ based on cognitive differences, conflict is congruence. It is expected that those who are socially similar (engineers) will agree to leverage their cognitive diversity through expressing disagreement. There is a tacit expectation that each member will contribute his or her particular identifiable area of expertise (Stasser, Stewart & Wittenbaum 1995).

Thus, task issues are believed to be highly manageable within a ‘Streitkultur’, while socioemotional issues are relegated to a secondary role, often deliberately:

*Auch wenn man ein emotionales Motiv hat, sucht man krampfhaft nach rationalen Beweggründen für eine Vorgehensweise. Es wird eine Kausalität ausgearbeitet, die nicht vorhanden sein muss. So lassen sich Konflikte leichter austragen als auf emotionaler Ebene. (Company D/19.01.2016/K-HP/Germany/313)*

Cognitive differences are not considered conflicts, but supportive of goal attainment:

*Wir kommunizieren regelmässig ueber Skype und ich finde es schwierig, dass wir keine Widerworte bekommen, auch wenn es sinnvoll wäre. Ich möchte in einer Diskussion einen anderen Blickwinkel bekommen und er sagt nur ‚ja ja ja‘. (Company B/18.04.2019/RN/Germany/314)*

The socioemotional element is nonetheless sensed by this interlocutor, who goes on to add:

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critically disputed or concurred with in order to produce new insights.  
<https://www.goethe.de/de/spr/mag/20708758.html>



*Ich weiss nicht, ob er es wirklich nicht weiss, oder ob er sich nicht traut, etwas zu sagen. (Company B/18.04.2019/RN/Germany/315)*

The above interlocutor was aware that the reluctance to engage in a potentially disruptive discussion might have stemmed from any (or all) of several factors such as lack of self-efficacy, fear of retaliation or a desire to maintain face for all parties (cf. De Dreu & van de Vliert 1997), but nevertheless it ran counter to his belief in sensible, rational behavior ('sinnvoll').

The idea of considering personal socioemotional sensibilities evoked innumerable reactions, ranging from understanding to puzzlement to outright derision<sup>345</sup>:

*Was ich gelernt habe, wenn man es versteht, die Inder mit zu nehmen, die Erwartungen abzugleichen, ist das Thema Qualität durchaus gegeben. Die Akzeptanzgrenze von beiden Seiten muss ausgelotet werden. Wenn man eine persönliche Beziehung aufbaut und nicht so ergebnisorientiert ist, wie wir es sind, funktioniert es einwandfrei. (Company B/13.04.2018/NW/Germany/316)*  
*Feedback is certainly wanted, at least that's the impression I get. But they seem to handle it differently, especially if it's critical. They also seek a lot of approval before doing something. (Company A/19.07.2018/AW/Germany/317)*

*Habe ich auch von ihnen [den indischen Kollegen] gehört. Vorsicht bei Kritik. Daraufhin habe ich gesagt, "if someone sugarcoated a message it would just make me annoyed. Doesn't he take me seriously? Does he think I'm a tender plant who needs to be handled with kid gloves?" Weiss nicht, wie das bei denen angekommen ist. (Company A/29.06.2018/SK/Germany/318)*

It is important to be cognizant of the fact that a 'Streitkultur' is not to be conflated with competitive behavior, which "involves concealment of information, competitiveness, and negative attitudes toward alternative solutions" (Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song 2001, p. 1253), nor does it sanction competitive interactions that "involve the use of power and domination as one party tries to force its views on the other" (ibid).

Despite the abrasive nature of the term, 'Streitkultur' at its best is closest in nature to collaborative behavior in that it "emphasizes openness to others' points of view, objective consideration of all information, and shared efforts to solve problems and reach a jointly optimal solution" (ibid). Ideally, it involves situations in which different perspectives are welcomed and analyzed without an emotional overlay.

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<sup>345</sup> Triandis (1989) contended that culture is not a homogenizing device, and people in a country may internalize the dominant cultural values to different degrees. The same obviously applies to CoP norms.

*Es wird einem hier beigebracht, dass man klar sagt, was einen stört mit Hilfe von Beispielen. Dann kann man auch auf der sachlichen Ebene bleiben.*

(Company B/14.11.2016/TS/Germany/319)

Similarly, from Costa et al.'s (1991) perspective, accommodation need not necessarily exclude frankness of communication. For instance, Costa et al.'s (1991) personality theory dimension of agreeableness includes both straightforwardness and compliance.

Straightforwardness implies directness and frankness in dealing with others.

<...> Compliance is an interpersonal style that is seen when conflicts arise; compliant individuals defer to others instead of fighting; they are meek and mild. In a positive sense, this trait is seen in a willingness to cooperate (Costa, McCrae & Dye 1991, p. 888).

**5.5.3 'Fehlerkultur' ('error culture'): Germany.** The scientific understanding of the negative effects of errors is much better developed than that of the potential positive effects of errors (van Dyke et al. 2005). However, their potential long-term positive consequences such as learning, innovation, and resilience have also been addressed in research (e.g., Sitkin 1996; McCune 1997).

Van Dyke et al. (2005) distinguish between error prevention that "aims at avoiding negative error consequences by avoiding the error altogether" and error management that "focuses on reducing negative error consequences and on increasing potentially positive consequences" (p. 1228). Sitkin (1996) highlights that pure error prevention does not necessarily allow for learning to occur; experimentation contributes to learning and error management, but not to error control (cf. Huber 1991). Both error prevention and management lie within the concept of the "Fehlerkultur" advocated by the German participants. It holds particular relevance in tech CoPs as it is reflected in the error-handling procedures in software: anticipation, detection and resolution of application errors<sup>346</sup>.

*Wovor haben sie so viel Angst? Es gibt bei uns den Spruch ,Wenn man keine Fehler macht, hat man auch keinen Code geschrieben.'*

(Company B/04.04.2017/FF/Germany/320)

Communication about errors probably constitutes the most important error management practice (Keith & Frese 2005). The same holds true for error prevention. Along with other latent conditions such as time pressure, fatigue, and inexperience (Reason 2000), inadequate communication can translate into error provoking

<sup>346</sup> <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/16626/error-handling>

conditions within the workplace. Hence, effective error management crucially depends on establishing a healthy reporting culture<sup>347</sup>, i.e., an organizational climate where workers will be willing to report near misses and accidents openly and honestly (Reason 1997).

The first step in a 'Fehlerkultur' begins with prevention, which is communicatively best served by admitting vulnerability in cases of uncertainty.

*Fehler zugeben und aus Fehlern lernen gehört zu unserer Kultur. Wenn einer einen Fehler zugibt, wird keinem den Kopf abgerissen. Wäre schön, wenn diese Kultur auch in Indien verbreitet wäre. (Company B/ 07.02.2019/BS/ Germany/321)*

Ignorance and even incompetence are both states which can be remedied by admitting vulnerability or asking questions, a theme that is not only limited to organizations<sup>348</sup>.

*Then there's this unwillingness to say 'I don't know enough about the topic'. Some just don't say anything, others claim they know stuff they actually don't. Somehow things do get done, but often in such cases things do go south. So, you have to stay on your toes, always open to the possibility that you've been blind-sided. We're always ready to explain things and it could save time and trouble if they would just admit it. (Company A/20.07.2018/BS/Germany/322)*

*In Deutschland gibt es den Spruch ‚Fragen kostet nix‘. Das heißt, scheue dich nicht zu fragen. (Company B/23.03.2017/MS/Germany/323)*

In the next step, if a mistake cannot be eliminated, it is to be seen as a teachable moment to be exploited for continuous learning (cf. Carroll 1998). In a 'Fehlerkultur', talking openly about errors increases error detection and correction and stimulates learning (Edmondson 1996). The precondition to open discussion is prompt acknowledgement of the error, free from self-justification or excuses. The time between the occurrence and the detection of an error is crucial because errors that remain undetected produce negative consequences that are more severe than errors that are detected quickly (Keith & Frese 2005).

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<sup>347</sup> Cf. psychological safety.

<sup>348</sup> The refrain to the theme song of the children's program Sesame Street (Sesamstrasse) is as follows: ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPHi5xn\\_q5c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPHi5xn_q5c))  
Der, die, das, Wer wie was, Wieso weshalb warum?  
Wer nicht fragt bleibt dumm.  
1000 Tolle Sachen die gibt es überall zu sehen  
Manchmal muss man fragen, um sie zu verstehen.

*Warum ist die Problemrückmeldung so schleppend? Wie schaffen wir es, dass die Inder mehr Verantwortung dafür übernehmen? (Company B/11.05.2017/SW/Germany/324)*

The position on error detection and reporting is reinforced by the professional ethos of a technological CoP (cf. Chapter 2).

*Unsere Kommunikation ist problemgetrieben. Bei einer Telcon habe ich eine technische Frage wegen einer Fehlerquelle in die Runde gestellt. Dann waren einige Sekunden lang Ruhe. Die indischen Kollegen haben dann mit dem nächsten Punkt einfach weitergemacht, ohne den ersten richtig abzuschließen. Sie haben die Fehlerquelle nach der ich gefragt habe, offensichtlich doch nicht überprüft. Darüber wurde einfach geschwiegen. (Company B/31.01.2017/CF/Germany/325)*

Grice (1975) posits that if one person asks a question, the other person's response should abide by basic conversational maxims, such as responding with the relevant information to the question. Failure to do so through non-response, framing bad news positively, or not disclosing all of the facts can be construed as deception, or lying by omission (Bok 1978, Bies 2010).

Non-disclosure or partial disclosure lessens the likelihood of the receiver or the organization pursuing corrective responses (Bies 2010). Avoiding bad news undermines change, which may lead to even more bad news in the future (cf. Bies 2010).

*Offenheit ist für uns wichtig, weil man dadurch Fehler früher aufdeckt. Wenn man Probleme rechtzeitig angeht, kann man sie viel schneller und effektiver bekämpfen. Ist auch bei Krankheiten der Fall. (Company B/31.7.2017/SB/Germany/326)*

A German tech CoP's 'Fehlerkultur' is a system-centered rather than a person-centered approach, i.e., when an adverse event occurs, the important issue is not who blundered, but how and why the defences failed (Reason 2000).

'Fehlerkultur' implies emotion control, which is "the use of self-regulatory processes to keep performance anxiety and other negative emotional reactions at bay during task engagement" (Kanfer & Ackermann 1996, p. 153-154). Negative emotions divert attentional resources away from the task at hand (ibid). Learning can take place when the actors think about errors metacognitively (e.g., planning, monitoring, and evaluating actions during task completion), and when the negative emotional impact of errors is reduced (Keith & Frese 2005).

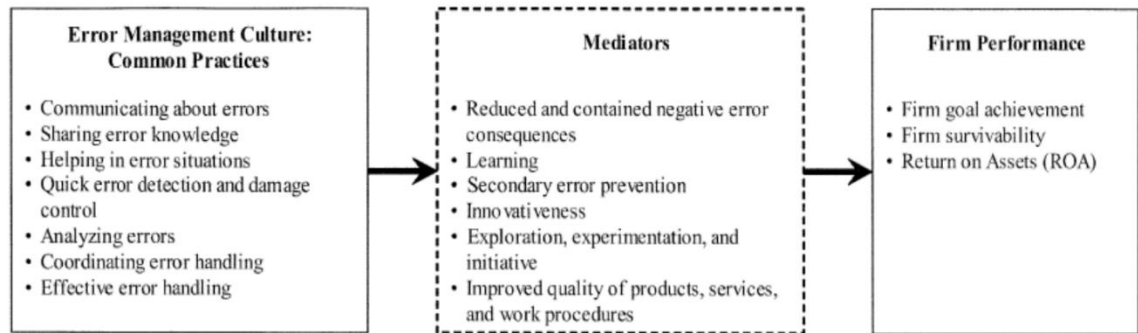


Figure 35. Error management culture and its potential effects<sup>349</sup> (van Dyck et al. 2005, p. 1230)

A 'Fehlerkultur' is by no means foreign to Indian CoPs, but an affective, person-centred approach is selected for ontological security<sup>350</sup>

*Indians have the tendency of not voicing concerns until you have reached breakdown point. We have that bias – keep the people happy, don't irritate anybody, stay positive, something will work out. (Company A/24.08.2019/BD/India/327)*

At the same time, the benefits of a 'Fehlerkultur' are fully endorsed, particularly by the Indian participants with greater exposure to the concept:

*Yes, but frankness is better in business life, even if it is difficult otherwise. Much better than telling the people in Germany 10 months later about the problem. (Company B/17.06.2106/RMT/India/ team leader addressing his team members/328)*

## 5.6 Information Exchange

Particularly in the remote network of tech CoPs in this study, a free and unimpeded knowledge flow<sup>351</sup> is crucial for maintaining performance. The single most effective instrument is to establish and maintain trust through consistent and open communicative signaling, whether affective or cognition-based.

As discussed in Chapter 3, engineering CoPs often operate on clear-cut assumptions that they are all welded together by an overarching interest in getting to

<sup>349</sup> Stippled lines indicate theoretically-described mediators.

<sup>350</sup> A sense of ontological security is generated by actions which reflect or are reflected by how a society sees itself (cf. Steele 2008). It can be dislocated by non-routinized conditions or behaviors.

<sup>351</sup> MNCs share three types of transactions: capital flows (investments etc.), product flows and knowledge flows (Gupta & Govindarajan 1991). In knowledge-intensive teams the focus is almost exclusively on knowledge flows.

the bottom of technological issues to achieve productive outcomes. This mission can be torpedoed by gaps in information exchange. Succinctly put,

*Mein Problem ist: Wie kriegt man die Info, wie die Lage tatsächlich ist?*  
(Company B/23.03.2017/TB/Germany/329)

Information exchange refers to conscious and deliberate efforts to exchange work-related information, knowledge, and ideas (Johnson et al. 2006). The term knowledge sharing is also sometimes used to refer to the exchange of information and knowledge (e.g., Cummings 2004).

The locus of competence trust around which German CoPs revolve requires transparency of communication:

*Ja es zeigt, dass man die Kompetenz besitzt, sagen zu können, was richtig und was falsch ist.* (Company B/ 23.03.2017/UL/Germany/330)

Transparent communication mitigates risk in knowledge-intensive project teams:

*I've learnt a lot through painful experience and seen green KPIs which worked out completely differently. I suspect they are saving face but we would rather they said 'I don't understand' rather than make a mess we need a lot of time to sort out afterwards.* (Company A/ 9.1.2018/AH/Germany/331)

From a German CoP viewpoint, task performance is best achieved by transparent, fact-centered communication<sup>352</sup>. Fact-centered communication is largely transactional – focused on conveying a message – rather than interactional, i.e., focused on creating and nurturing social relationships.

*Man trennt bei uns die sachliche Ebene von der persönlichen Ebene. Wenn ich eine emotionale Diskussion losgelöst von Daten, Zahlen, Fakten führen muss, wird es für mich schon schwierig. Wir Deutsche sind mit Kant und mit Vernunft groß geworden – ‚sapere aude‘ hat er gesagt, glaube ich oder so ähnlich.*<sup>353</sup>  
(Company B/31.01.2018/WP/Germany/332)

**5.6.1 Knowledge/Information Withholding (KWI).** Against this background, knowledge withholding in all its forms remained the major communicative gap brought up by the German participants. Though some research indicates that the ability to

<sup>352</sup> Nazarkiewicz (2010) refers to it as a tendency to organize conversations in a fact-oriented and expert-centered true-false logic.

<sup>353</sup> The reference is to the Latin phrase meaning “dare to know” or “dare to think for yourself” attributed to Horace (20 BCE) and popularized by Kant (“Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?” 1784, Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung. Beginn des Traktats. (EA1784) Immanuel Kants vermischte Schriften; Hrsg: Johann Heinrich Tieftrunk; Bd.2. Halle 1799, p.1).

mask one's identity in TMC results in more uninhibited interaction<sup>354</sup> (Jaffe et al. 1995), it does not appear to be the case in this study.

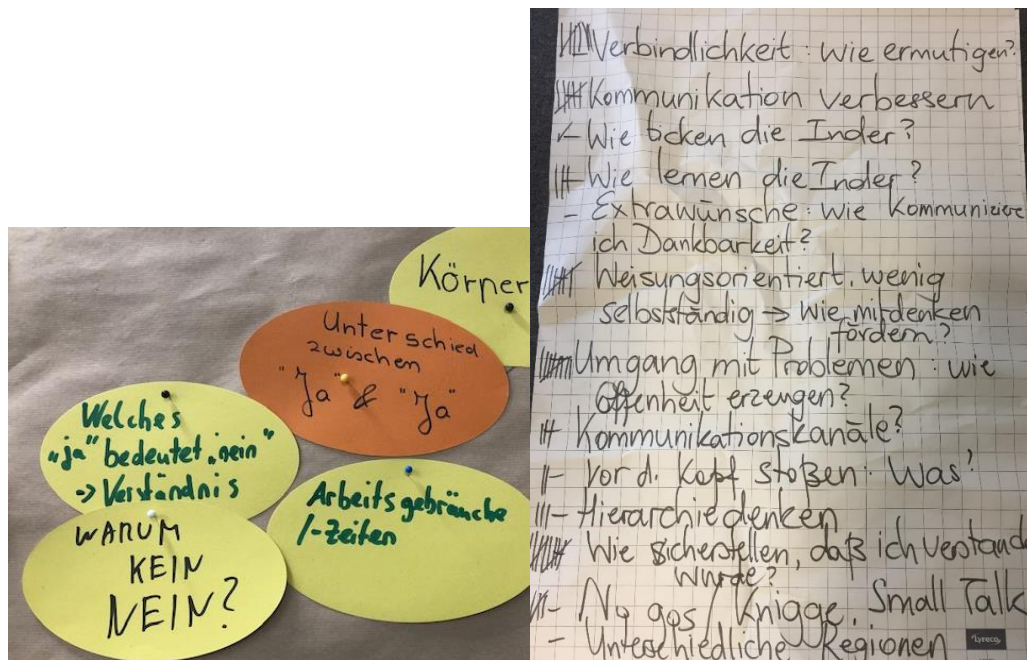


Figure 36. Germany: Topics to Discuss (Company B)

As previously discussed, a reciprocal exchange of information has to be carefully weighed in terms of costs and benefits for both parties. Research indicates that individuals often do not work in environments where they feel safe to speak up (Detert & Edmondson 2011). Both conflict avoidance and accommodation lead to knowledge-withholding behaviors, albeit with variances in incentive and communicative strategies. Without psychological safety, voicing ideas that challenge the status quo may bring forth the risk of being misunderstood and other undesirable social consequences (Morrison & Milliken 2000).

As knowledge encompasses the information, ideas, and expertise relevant for tasks performed by organizational members (e.g., Bartol & Srivastava 2002), it will be used interchangeably with the term 'information'. Knowledge withholding is an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or even conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person (cf. Connelly et al. 2011<sup>355</sup>). In conceptualizing KWI, Tsay et al. (2014) contend that knowledge withholding is not simply the absence of knowledge sharing. Instead, KWI is the intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that may be able to contribute to a team's performance (Tsay et al. 2014, p. 54).

<sup>354</sup> This might apply to social media, but complete anonymity is impossible in team-organized interaction.

<sup>355</sup> Connelly et al. (2011) use the term "knowledge hiding".

Kidwell and Bennett's (1993) reasoning on effort withholding applies to a great measure to information withholding. They propose that the behavior of effort withholding is triggered by three factors: the extent to which a team member wants to conform to normative expectations based on existing organizational justice (normative conformity), how well interpersonal bonds, or bonds between different parties, are maintained based on social exchange (affective bonding), and how a choice to withhold after considering the task features is deemed as rational (rational choice). The same triggers would apply for knowledge withholding.

Knowledge withholding is often a self-protection measure aligned with the ontological security of one's own social systems. As Nonaka, Toyama & Konno (2000) suggest, in traditional Western epistemology 'truthfulness' is the essential attribute of knowledge. In the absence of knowledge sharing – which includes giving feedback, opinion and problem sharing – suspicions of knowledge-withholding strategies arise.

*Das <...> Problem ist die nicht offene Kommunikation. Nicht jeder sagt alles an alle, Risiken werden möglichst nicht erwähnt (Company B/08.05.2108/NN/Germany/333)*

*Their definition of 'lie' is very digital. If you try to be a little soft or tactful when you say something and they don't understand it properly, they are feeling that you are trying to lie to them. (Company B/29.03.2108/EG/India/334)*

Connelly et al. (2011) posit that dyadic interaction is the main way in which knowledge is transferred within organizations. Though dyadic interaction takes place at the micro level of this study, the participants observations belong to the category of team/group interaction, as knowledge known to the Indian CoP is perceived as being withheld from the German CoP. This affects not only individual but also team performance.

*Wenn ich falsch liege, korrigiert mich der indische Kollege nicht. Sie waren viel länger da, aber ich wurde nicht widersprochen. Wie können wir mit dem Projekt vorankommen? (Company B/22.11.2106/ML/Germany/335)*

Knowledge withholding and lack of knowledge sharing have different antecedents, although their impact is similar. A lack of knowledge sharing may be driven by mistake, accident, or ignorance (Connelly et al. 2011, p. 67). Also, employees are primarily rewarded for their task performance, and time spent responding to a knowledge request may detract from the time available for their core responsibilities (ibid, p. 77). It might also result from ignorance, i.e., lack of insight into how relevant the seemingly withheld information is:



*Well, some questions are not asked by the Indian colleagues because these young engineers don't know there are questions to be asked [emphasis].*

Company B/15.04.2106/PS/India/336

*We keep on hearing that we don't report problems until the last minute but sometimes it's hard to tell when a problem is just a small blip which will disappear and when it will balloon into a big cyclone. So we usually wait it out for clarity – we don't want to tell the Germans about every rain shower which might or might not become a big storm. Such things will probably improve more and more with experience, but this is a new project, new team, new youngsters. (Company D/01.04.2109/BV/India/337)*

Analogous to voice behavior (Liang, Farh & Farh 2012), knowledge withholding is an intentional, planned behavior<sup>356</sup>. Although deliberative in intent, it is not necessarily intended to cause harm. Knowledge withholding is engaged in for various reasons in remote teams, including 'us-versus-them' dynamics across different sites. Knowledge withholding in such cases is used as a device to protect one's own sub-group by preserving confidentiality. It may also be intended to protect the other party's feelings<sup>357</sup>, or protect the interests of a third party (cf. Connelly et al. 2011).

*If we come with a problem, they will think there is a problem in him. (Company D/07.10.2109/HK/India/338)*

*We also don't know when to report a problem. How long to wait? How to do it? We also have to wait for our boss to give the go-ahead first, no? (Company D/07.10.2109/AL/India/339)*

Peng (2013) posits that organization-based psychological ownership moderates knowledge-withholding behavior.

The organization can also be experienced by individuals as an important target of ownership. Individuals who have a strong ownership feeling for the organization will feel possessiveness and psychologically attached to their organization (Peng 2013, p. 403).

Without venturing into speculation about psychological ownership at an organizational level, German CoPs expressed psychological ownership for their immediate product.

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<sup>356</sup> Knowledge withholding is not to be conflated with effort withholding, which may involve shirking, job neglect, social loafing, or free riding (Kidwell & Bennett 1993).

<sup>357</sup> Walther (2011) refers to the behavioral disconfirmation effect in which an individual anticipates an unpleasant interaction with a target person and, to avert the unpleasantness, overaccommodates in order to improve the person's demeanor.

*Ich habe ihm [dem indischen Kollegen] klargemacht ich möchte eine Arbeit auf Augenhöhe, nicht nur ein 'yes Johannes, yes Johannes, yes Johannes'. Sie sollen genauso Verantwortung für die Aufgabe übernehmen. (Company B/13.04.2108/JL/Germany/340)*

A reluctance to take interpersonal risk can create physical risks in high-risk settings such as aircraft cockpits. Cockpit crews invest in clarity of communication<sup>358</sup> as admitting mistakes and asking for help may be essential for avoiding a potential catastrophe (Carroll 1998; Grote et al. 2010).

Although not as obviously high risk as in the cockpit example, the German CoPs aspired to be a high-reliability organization (Reason 2000) with a system approach. Product quality was seen as vital to passenger safety by participants working in certain fields, such as radar and safety systems.

*Es ist recht einfach. Wir entwickeln Produkte, wofür wir verantwortlich sind und wofür wir auch haften, wenn es Probleme gibt. Ich entwickle beispielsweise Bremsen und wenn es mal zu einem Unfall kommt, muss ich nachweisen können, dass ich alles Menschenmögliche gemacht habe, um das zu vermeiden. Das lernen wir bei der Arbeit aber auch in Schulungen – Produkthaftung, Produktverantwortung usw. (Company B/01.02.2109/EM/Germany/341)*

Even in other fields, withholding behavior was perceived as posing a threat to product quality (cf. Chapter 2).

*Wie kann ich abschätzen bei der Qualität was ich erwarten kann, wenn man [den Auftrag] nicht ablehnt? (Company B/04.04.2017/CM/Germany/342)*

**5.6.2 Communicative Strategies in KWI.** Edmondson (2003) posits four specific risks to image that people face at work: being seen as ignorant, incompetent, negative, or disruptive. All four lead to withholding strategies to minimize risk. Verbal self-monitoring thus becomes the primary means of preventing any damaging outcomes.

All linguistic expressions are, to some extent, 'euphemized' – they are modified by a certain kind of *ensorship* which stems from the structure of the market, but which is transformed into *self-censorship* through the process of anticipation <....> Tact is nothing other than the capacity of the speaker to assess market conditions accurately and to produce linguistic expressions which are

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<sup>358</sup> Miscommunication may also arise due to lack of English language proficiency. Tajima, Atsushi. (2004). Fatal miscommunication: English in aviation safety. World Englishes. 23. 451 - 470. 10.1111/j.0883-2919.2004.00368.x.

appropriate to them, expressions which are suitably euphemized (Thompson 1991, p. 19-20, italics in original)<sup>359</sup>.

Euphemizing is most commonly deployed when conveying what is perceived as 'bad news'. Bad news has been defined as "information that results in a perceived loss by the receiver, and it creates cognitive, emotional, or behavioral deficits in the receiver after receiving the news" (Bies 2013, p. 137-138).

This definition of bad news recognizes that bad news is subjectively determined (Ptacek & Eberhardt 1996) and that the badness of the news is socially mediated, shaped by a variety of contextual and temporal factors (Izraeli & Jick 1986)<sup>360</sup>. Although the affective consequences of negative information are consistently stronger than those for good information (Bies 2013), there are variances in both perception of what constitutes bad news (reception) and how it is to be presented.

**5.6.2.1 Accommodation.** Sacks (1987) proposed that 'yes' responses are generally favored over 'no' responses but reluctance to refuse a request is a typical example of accommodation behavior. From the Indian CoP perspective in this study, refusal messages are negative and disruptive as bad news is "any information that adversely alters one's expectations for the future" (Back et al. 2005, p. 169<sup>361</sup>). Unambiguous refusals are to be avoided for reasons of courtesy to the requestor:

*We simply consider it rude to say 'no' so we'll say 'we'll see if we can do it' which actually means no. It's really hard for us to say 'no' but it's beginning<sup>362</sup>. If the person is not saying 'yes' it means 'no'. (Company A/08.12.2106/AS/India/343)*

Impression management theory proposes that being associated with bad news can pose a threat to one's social identity and legitimacy (Bies 1987). A refusal thus reflects badly on the refuser as it impacts his/her self-presentation and face management (Bies 2013)

*It is hard for us to refuse anything. If I don't know the answer, I take the request and distribute it to my expert friends and learn how to do it. Time is the crucial*

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<sup>359</sup> Certain situations are experienced by the protagonist as a victim. "But since he knows this in advance, in order not to be victimized he might prefer to play it safe, be cagey, stick to the line from the beginning, offer some peremptory phrases designed to deflect hostile attention by uttering the correct magic words, by paying obedience to authorities and stratagems of that kind" (Galtung 1981, p. 825).

<sup>360</sup> In some group contexts in which member socialization is important, norm-related communication may be more prominent than in other contexts (cf. Levine & Moreland, 1994).

<sup>361</sup> This definition stems from the world of medicine research, but is nevertheless appropriate here.

<sup>362</sup> Despite being used almost parenthetically, 'but it's beginning' is an indication of an attempt at accommodation behavior.

*bit here, because I don't know how long it will take. So I will finish it, but I cannot estimate when. If I say 'no', I have lost the opportunity. If opportunity is knocking at your door, never say 'no'. That is what we are taught to think. (Company B/17.06.2106/ASG/India/344)*

*In the personal scenario you don't want to hurt someone so you say 'yes'. Social status is based on accomplishments in professional life. So, you have to say 'yes' to show that you are interested in accepting a challenge. (Company A/08.12.2106/ST/India/345)*

This runs contrary to German expectations where refusals are factually grounded and even welcomed:

*Wie kriege ich sie dazu, realistisches Feedback zu geben. Nicht das was er meint sein Gegenüber hören will. Wenn etwas nicht machbar ist, soll man auch 'nein' sagen können. (Company B/ 17.4.2019/DS/Germany/346)*

If a refusal proves unavoidable, refusal ritual tactics<sup>363</sup> are employed to mitigate the message which the German interlocutor is unable to interpret. Misinterpretation arises through the use of different cultural scripts, which are “representations of cultural norms which are widely held in a given society and are reflected in the language” (Wierzbicka 2007, p. 56).

They constitute a certain naïve axiology, that is, a naïve set of assumptions about what it is good and bad to do or say, and even to think and feel. Any given speech community has such shared assumptions, and although not everyone necessarily agrees with them, everyone is familiar with them because they are reflected in the language (ibid).

*Ich merke immer noch, es gibt Signale die ich falsch interpretiere, weil er es durch die Blume sagt und ich kriege es nicht mit. (Company B/01.03.2019/H-GH/Germany/347)*

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<sup>363</sup> One such is 'shoring' (“e.g., manipulating the news to help people emotionally: scaling down the badness—not as bad as you think, it could have been worse, playing up the positive”) (Bies 2013, p.138).



Figure 37. Germany: Topics to discuss (Company B)

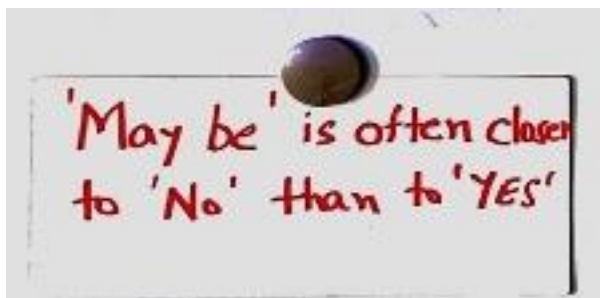


Figure 38. India: Self-explication<sup>364</sup> (Company B)

A second element to accommodation is abstaining from disruptive or negative behavior by contradicting the other party, a behavior that has already been addressed under the sub-heading of power asymmetry.

*Selbst wenn er im Recht wäre, hätte er [der indische Kollege] es nicht gesagt. Ich hatte die Erfahrung, dass er dabei war als ich meinen Chef Kontra gegeben habe. Ich konnte an seinem Gesicht ablesen, wie es ihm zu Mute war.*  
(Company B/13.03.2017/UM/Germany/348)

Accommodation behaviors can be a strategy leading to a compromise where differences are worked through until some middle ground has been reached (cf. Montoya-Weiss, Massey & Song 2001)

*We communicate a lot, so that things not said really are sorted. We are always ready to do adjustments, so others can understand what we want we have to*

<sup>364</sup> This card has already been included in a general overview in fig. 26 and has been extracted here for emphasis.

*show them our positions and ask for theirs. (Company B/07.05.2019/VK/India/349)*

Compliance as an interpersonal style (Costa, McCrae & Dye 1991) can lead to accommodating to the wishes of the requestor, even against one's better judgement:

*Wir Inder sind auch bei ‚nein‘ flexibel. Auch wenn wir mal ‚nein‘ sagen, kann man uns bei Bedarf umstimmen. Ist gar nicht schwierig [laughs]. (Company B/07/10/2019/SP/India/350)*

**5.6.2.2 Avoidance.** Avoidance behavior can be manifested as nonparticipation or non-response (Montoya-Weiss; Massey & Song 2001). It subsumes prohibitive voice, which signals potential danger or undetected problems as well as vulnerability strategies (e.g., admitting lack of knowledge, asking for help). Both are closely interconnected in preventing errors that might endanger work-related outcomes.

*Bei mir ist das Problem nicht, dass die Sachen nicht rechtzeitig geliefert werden, sondern vor allem, dass es kein Feedback dazu gibt. Das ist das eigentliche Problem, dass wir keine Rückmeldung dazu bekommen. (Company B/28.02.2019/FA/Germany/351)*

Prohibitive voice is withheld to avoid any negative consequences associated with the delivery of bad news (cf. Bies 2013), including blame<sup>365</sup>. Blame has a multitude of facets. Cognitive theories of blame hold that blame is fundamentally a judgment or evaluation that we make about an agent in light of their actions, attitudes, or character (Tognazzini & Coates 2018). Wallace (2011) holds that blame is an emotional response to ill will displayed in others' actions.

*The problem with us is that we are not listening to the content because we are already thinking about our response and the impact it will have – how it will affect the other person, how it will affect our relationship and so on. What will they think of us? (Company A/2.4.2018/PB/India/352)*

Silence or non-response is one avoidance strategy in a potential blame scenario<sup>366</sup>. It is also one of the most elusive forms of communicative behaviors to study and describe (Barnlund 1989). The absence of the other voice can be intentional, "as deliberate and pointed as presence" (Lang 1996, p. IX-X). At an interpersonal level its functions include affirming harmony or agreement, avoiding conflict and disharmony

<sup>365</sup> The concept of blame and blame avoidance has received particular academic attention in political science research (e.g., McKenna, 2012; Malle et al., 2014; Scanlon, 2008; Sher, 2006; Tilly, 2008).

<sup>366</sup> The others are dodging questions, responding with truth that is deliberately misleading (i.e., paltering) (Rogers et al. 2017).

and discord (Jain & Matukumalli 2014). It is an inclination termed omission bias, i.e., “a greater willingness to accept harms from omission <...> than harms from action” (Baron & Ritov 2004). At the same time, it can also be used to signal displeasure<sup>367</sup> (Jain & Matukumalli 2014).

It is frequently employed to minimize risks if interaction for which outcomes are uncertain (cf. Edmondson 2003).

*Es kommt häufig nicht das, was ich erwarte. Es ist schwierig zu verstehen, warum. Wenn ich zu direkt frage, kommt nur Schweigen zurück. (Company B/07.02.2019/RK/Germany/353)*

### 5.7 ‘Push-Pull’ Communication (‘Bringschuld – ‘Holschuld’)<sup>368</sup>

The concept of knowledge withholding can vary depending on the direction in which an information flow is perceived. There are cultural variances to the question of who is accountable for initiating the flow and keeping the flow in motion.

Hence, the final aspect of this chapter will be reviewed based on ‘Bringschuld’ and ‘Holschuld’, standard German terms originating in the obligations of contractual law laid down in the German Civil Code<sup>369</sup> (§241 - §432 BGB). They correspond broadly with the concept of ‘push’ and ‘pull’ communication, terms that address the generative direction of the information flow, and constitute one of the imponderables faced by the German interlocutors.

*Es dreht sich alles um Kommunikation. Wie soll ich merken, wann die indischen Kollegen Probleme haben? Welche Anhaltspunkte gibt es dafür? Oder wenn sie ‘nein’ meinen und doch ‘ja’ sagen. (Company D/10.04.2017/WS/Germany/354)*

The terms ‘Holschuld’ and ‘Bringschuld’ refer to the contractual obligations embedded in the legal relationships between two or more people<sup>370</sup> (Wien 2012). For instance, in a sales contract, ‘Bringschuld’ refers to the obligation of the seller to deliver the goods at the buyer’s delivery address while ‘Holschuld’ requires the buyer to pick up the goods that the seller agrees to make available at a mutually agreed-upon location (ibid). Such obligations are generally specified in the terms of the contract.

<sup>367</sup> “Silent treatment” is meted out to punish the other(s) (Jain & Matukumalli 2014).

<sup>368</sup> The terms ‘push’ and ‘pull’ are not to be confused with the eponymous interactions in relational dialectics theory, which describes the dynamics of contradictions in personal relationships (Baxter L. A. & Montgomery B. M. 1996. *Relating: Dialogues and dialectics*. New York: Guilford). The theory suggests – for example – that opposing ‘push-pull’ tendencies occur between the desire to be connected as well as distanced from others in relationships.

<sup>369</sup> Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch.

<sup>370</sup> “Sie beziehen sich auf gesetzliche und vertragliche Schuldverhältnisse, <...> die Gesamtheit der Rechtsbeziehungen zwischen zwei oder mehr Personen“ (Wien 2012, p. 67).

The terms are also used in information exchange: In 'Bringschuld' ('push') the onus is on the speaker to provide/share the pertinent information, while with 'Holschuld' ('pull') it is the listener who is obliged to elicit/extract the pertinent information, e.g., by asking the right questions<sup>371</sup>. In digital terms, an interaction is 'push' if it is initiated by the data sender, and an interaction is 'pull' if it is initiated by the data receiver, thus corresponding to the concept of 'Bringschuld' and 'Holschuld' (Mast, Gueller & Huck 2005).

There are significant differences between human 'Bringschuld' and 'Holschuld' and digital data 'push-pull'. One of them is the implicit responsibility to fulfil an obligation.

*Wenn einer einen Fehler macht, übernimmt keiner die Verantwortung. Es wird einfach geschwiegen. Die Eigeninitiative fehlt. Ich möchte, dass sie proaktiv kommunizieren. (Company B/ 17.5.2019/AT/Germany/355)*

The second essential difference is that 'push' and 'pull' in digital data are largely cognitive processes in which information seeking is not fraught with interactive socioemotional issues.

Despite being a widespread phenomenon, one often referenced by practitioners, the 'push-pull' aspect of communication has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. The terms have gained some currency in applied organizational research (e.g., Hummel & Zander 2008; Hummel 2011; Brodbeck & Guillaume 2011), where it is primarily mentioned in information management contexts.

From a hierarchy viewpoint, Hummel and Zander (2008) highlight that it is vital to ensure a balance of 'Bringschuld' and 'Holschuld'<sup>372</sup>. 'Push' is when the superiors share their knowledge unreservedly, knowing that the knowledge is not lost to them, even if their monopoly over that knowledge is reduced (Hummel & Zander 2008<sup>373</sup>). If not, the efforts that their subordinates put into 'pulling' that knowledge can deteriorate into a constant and pointless search (ibid).

The terms are also relevant in projects involving information exchange between various stakeholders (Hummel 2011<sup>374</sup>). 'Push-pull' mechanisms are a strong factor in the applied psychology of project management since they pertain to interactional

<sup>371</sup> 'Information als Bringschuld': "Auswahl und Aufbereitung von Kommunikationsinhalten war alleinige Aufgabe der Kommunikatoren (Push-Orientierung)", "Information als Holschuld": "Informationen koennen auch so bereitgestellt werden, dass deren Auswahl der Rezipient selbst nachfrageorientiert vornimmt" (Pull-Orientierung) (Mast et al 2005, p. 168).

<sup>372</sup> „Es geht vielmehr um ein ausgewogenes Nebeneinander von Suche und Bereitstellung von Informationen“ (Hummel & Zander 2008, p. 253).

<sup>373</sup> „Das Wissensmonopol <...> wird abgebaut, ohne dass die Vorgesetzten ihr Wissen verlieren“ (Hummel & Zander 2008, p. 252).

<sup>374</sup> „Dabei taucht immer wieder die Frage auf, ob Information eine Holschuld oder eine Bringschuld ist“ (Hummel 2011, p.295).



knowledge sharing between project members (Brodbeck und Guillaume 2011). Interactants need to be motivated to be willing to share information ('Bringschuld') and obtain it from others ('Holschuld') (ibid).

'Push-pull' mechanisms play an important part in continuous learning. The traditional unidirectional model of objectivist learning from expert to learner is beginning to give way to constructivist and social learning (Leidner and Jarvenpaa 1995). Unlike objectivist learning which is based on 'push' communication from the source, the other two models require a transactional approach. The trend is moving away from the learner-consumer who is dependent on externally organized 'push' communication to the proactive requirements-oriented learner who selectively exercises 'pull' (Mödinger & Broßmann 2011<sup>375</sup>).

Both 'push' and 'pull' are essential in terms of information sharing. Certain organizational 'push' strategies such as status reports are fundamental to team work. Reports are "a formal, structured, and often standardized means of gathering and delivering data about the project", disseminated electronically, but without any guarantee that the recipients "read, act on, or otherwise 'receive' the information" (Bourne 2010).

Reporting is just one aspect of communicating. While reporting is unidirectional 'push', communicating "must be focused on the needs of the receiver as well as the needs of the project and the project team" as well as "maintain or enhance existing relationships" (ibid). It subsumes an interplay of 'push-pull' by seeking actively to both understand and be understood (cf. Brodbeck & Guillaume 2011<sup>376</sup>).

Communicating includes four forms of information exchange: 1) seeking information 2) giving information (i.e., revealing or disclosing information about physical, cognitive, or affective states) 3) verifying information (i.e., engaging in communication exchanges designed to increase understanding or clarification) and 4) socioemotional support (Cegala, McGee & McNeilis 1996)<sup>377</sup>.

Of the four forms, giving information is a 'push' strategy, seeking information is a 'pull' strategy and the other two are a combination of 'push' and 'pull' strategies. In combination, they require micro-behaviors such as appropriate humor expression, comprehension-checking through direct and indirect questions, encouraging input and feedback, and use of cross-checking strategies (cf. ibid; McGee & Cegala 1998).

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<sup>375</sup> „Dies impliziert auch eine Verlagerung von Lernen im Konsumentenstil („Bringschuld des Einzelnen“) hin zum nachfrageorientierten Lernen („Holschuld des Einzelnen“) (Mödinger & Broßmann 2011, p. 99).

<sup>376</sup> "sich um Verständigung und Verstandenwerden aktiv zu bemühen" (Brodbeck & Guillaume 2011, p.45).

<sup>377</sup> Cegala et al.'s study refers to information exchange between physician and patient in medical interviews but it is of relevance in organizational contexts, particularly those involving knowledge imbalance.

One way of managing communicative gaps, particularly in virtuality, is for the interactants to deploy cross-checking strategies. By using both 'push' and 'pull' in collaborative cross-checking, an erroneous assessment or action can be detected and different perspectives and assumptions can be examined to assess validity or accuracy (Patterson et al. 2006). Patterson et al. maintain that "these perspectives can differ on a number of dimensions, including goals, responsibilities, functions, authority, stance, expertise, resources, methodologies, and knowledge or information of various types" (ibid, p. 156). Additionally, 'pull' strategies can provide a valuable means of detecting KWI and pragmatic variances in communication, thus eliminating or at least mitigating adverse consequences.

As in contractual law between buyers and sellers, it is essential to ensure that all of those involved are fully aware of each party's 'push-pull' obligations for each type of information<sup>378</sup>. The communicative gaps in this chapter appear to revolve around variances in 'push-pull' understanding between the two CoPs.

*Ich schule Inder seit 2000. Wenn sie was wollen, sind sie sehr penetrant. Aber wenn man etwas von ihnen will, kriegt man das nicht so schnell. (Company B/14.11.2016/SO/Germany/356)*

As is evident from the findings on KWI, CoPs based in India in this study operate with lower 'push' input and greater expectations of both 'push' and 'pull' from their German counterparts.

*Ich schlage regelmäßige Stand-up meetings vor. Der erste Grund warum wir das gemacht haben, war das es erwünscht war. "Why should I ask you a question? You are in a senior position. Tell me what to do and follow it up" hat der indische Kollege zu mir gesagt. Wir investieren 30 minuten bis eine Stunde um abzufragen, was verstanden wurde, welche Fragen es gibt. Es gibt einen ,Sprachrohr' der die gesammelten Fragen stellt, damit keiner sich bloßstellen muss. Seitdem läuft es richtig gut. (Company B/24.01.2017/FM/Germany/357)*

This practice pivots around the issue of roles. In Indian task assignment contexts, the assigner is expected to provide initial input ('push') and then guide the assignee in the right direction by 'probing' or 'pull'. Additionally, as discussed, role imbalance dictates behavioral expectations of accommodation, leading to withholding behaviors.

The dynamics are well-encapsulated in the following exchange between an Indian and a German team member (Company B/29.11.2016/Germany/358):

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<sup>378</sup> „Dabei taucht immer wieder die Frage auf, ob Information eine Holschuld oder eine Bringschuld ist“ (Hummel 2011, p. 295).

TK (German): *I thought they would come and tell me before the project stalled that they were having problems. But they came a year later to say there were not enough funds. I did not stay in touch in-between and keep myself informed about current developments. That was the mistake I made.*

AS (Indian): *My advice is just to probe. Ask 'do you know what is the function of this tool?'. You need to ask open-ended questions, avoid yes-no questions. Say 'please help me to explain what this is for' and you can understand how much he knows.*

TK (German): *Will it be seen as a lack of trust?*

AS (Indian): *That is the meaning of probing. It is not taken as a non-trust factor. The Indians are used to being probed. It will take a little more time but is the safer option. For us probing is not a negative word, it's a positive word actually. It shows interest and involvement.*

TK (German): *It would be very different here.*

To summarize, Indian 'push-pull' behavior appears to indicate a people-centric rather than a systems-centric approach to task achievement (cf. Cappelli et al. 2010). It is also predicated on task assignment roles rather than geography, with Indians in the role of task-assigners using 'pull' strategies regardless of the geography of the task-assignee:

*Es gibt 3 Ebenen: Leute die was von mir wollen und sie sind recht fordernd. Leute von denen ich was will und und sie sind eher zurückhaltend. Und Leute mit denen ich auf Augenhöhe kommuniziere und für die ich einfach der 'Peter' bin. (Company B/04.04.2019/PN/Germany/359)*

*Mir fällt diese Ungeduld auf. Sie rufen Montag früh an und sagen, ich kriege keine Rückmeldung und dabei haben sie um 22.00 am Sonntagabend mir eine Mail geschickt. Aber wenn ich was von ihnen haben will, passiert manchmal wochenlang nichts. Umgekehrt wollen sie sofort Rückmeldung. (Company A/29.05.2018/AW/Germany/ Human Resources Service Provider/360)*

*Von der Personalabteilung habe ich gehört, dass die Damen in der Stadtverwaltung mit den Indern sauer sind. Anscheinend rufen sie [die Inder] ständig dort an und nerven, obwohl sie wissen, dass die Aufenthaltsverlängerung normalerweise 2 Wochen dauert. (Company B/10.04.2018/MR/Germany/361)*

The preferences of those higher up in the hierarchy also plays a part in determining the degree of 'push' communication.

*Bei einem Skype meeting, je nachdem wer das leitet – ich oder der indische Teamleiter - ändert sich das Verhalten der Kollegen radikal. Wenn der indische Teamleiter anwesend ist, melden sich die Kollegen nicht von sich aus, sondern warten, aufgefordert zu werden. (Company B/05.04.2019/JGO/Germany/362)*

*Es ist ein asymmetrisches Arbeitsverhältnis. Ich habe gesagt, sie sollen sich mit Fragen an mich wenden und es funktioniert. Es kommen mit sehr vielen Fragen – zu viele [smiles]. Da habe ich es abgelegt, Fragen aufzufordern. (Company B/01.08.2017/MH/Germany/363)*

It appears that technological task-oriented German CoPs operate more consistently on 'Bringschuld' expectations since any information, reports and solutions of relevance do not require solicitation in their view<sup>379</sup> (Keup 2010). All parties are required to operate on 'Bringschuld', regardless of role or personal preferences.

'Push' strategies are again favored by German CoPs for reasons of efficiency. Tech workers in multicomunicated, virtual settings often feel overwhelmed by information overload (Turner & Reinsch 2007). The simplest definition of information overload is "the simple notion of receiving too much information" (Eppler and Mengis 2004, p. 325), a condition that can lead to information anxiety (Wurman et al. 2001), fatigue syndrome<sup>380</sup>, and other undesirable consequences<sup>381</sup>.

One way of managing information overload is to economize in the allocation of personal presence (Turner & Reinsch 2007) by focusing on task-oriented 'push' communication for communicative efficiency. The function of soliciting information from others (i.e., 'pull'), on the other hand, involves communicative effort - asking information-seeking questions (e.g., Chafe 1970; Dillon 1982; Huang et al. 2017; Miles 2013), cross-check interactions and the like.

'Pull' communication using collaborative cross-check interactions incurs "costs such as interruptions, increased cognitive work, increased complexity resulting from changes to plans, diffusion of responsibility, and coordinative costs such as identifying and scheduling appropriate individuals" (Patterson et al. 2006, p. 156). The effort

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<sup>379</sup> Im Informationsmanagement bezeichnet Bringschuld die Verantwortung desjenigen, der über eine Information verfügt, diese den Betroffenen und Beteiligten rechtzeitig und umfassend und in geeigneter Form zur Verfügung zu stellen (<https://deacademic.com/dic.nsf/dewiki/200202>).

<sup>380</sup> "The exhaustion and stress caused by information overload" (Segen's Medical Dictionary 2012).

<sup>381</sup> It is debatable whether this fear of knowledge overload is exclusive to our digital age. In 1600, an English writer named Barnaby Rich complained that "one of the great diseases of this age is the multitude of books that doth so overcharge the world that it is not able to digest the abundance of idle matter that is every day hatched and brought into the world" (Cited in Nicholas Carr 2010. *The Shallows*. W. Norton. p.168).

translates into a greater frequency of communication via rich media, which requires a strong degree of motivation and interest<sup>382</sup>.

*Die Betreuungsaufwand ist sehr hoch, auch bei simplen Aufgaben. 3 Mal pro Woche Kontakt aufnehmen – ein Zeitfresser. (Company B/ 08.05.2018/AF/Germany/364)*

*Der Standort Indien wächst und die Zusammenarbeit hat sich intensiviert. Aber es gestaltet sich schwierig trotz intensivem Kontakt. Wofür ich hier 5 Minuten gebrauchen würde, brauchen wir zusammen locker 2 Stunden. (Company B/ 25.06.2019/SD/Germany/365)*

In data communication, locating information is a major problem for users. Broder (2002) has created a taxonomy of search: transactional, navigational, and informational, with informational queries as the static form. Edmunds and Morris (2000) counterpose the abundance of information and the dearth of useful or relevant information. Hence, even though good search engines exist, time and effort are expended on culling through it to discover what one needs. The quality of information found remains proportional to the user's knowledge and skills (e.g., through keyword selection or intuition).

Similarly, the appropriate strategies for remote 'pull' communication are predicated on understanding the cultural and organizational contexts leading to KWI and deploying the right strategies, which include clearly articulated questions and 'keywords' such as reassurance cues to encourage knowledge sharing. On receiving an inadequate response, the 'pull' communicator is now required to figure out the next conversational turn for ad-hoc information retrieval.

*<...> ist es schwer, ein nein rauszukitzeln – wann sie 'nein' sagen sollen aber nicht wollen oder können. (Company B/ 23.03.2017/AF/Germany/366)*

'Push' communication suggests a convenient remedy to all of these imponderables by shifting the active role to the information provider. It thus obviates unraveling the interwoven strands of WHI by using appropriate 'pull' strategies.

*Eine digitale Teilung zwischen ,ja' und ,nein' mögen wir, weil es einfacher zu evaluieren ist. (Company B/ 23.03.2017/MP/Germany/367)*

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<sup>382</sup> This also applies to digital channels; for example, the subscribe paradigm follows a 'pull'-based communication approach, where consumers need to express interest to receive a data packet.

### 5.8 'Push-pull' Pragmatics

The negotiation of meaning is a complex endeavor that demands the whole spectrum of 'push-pull' behaviors. Some studies show that in electronic discussion settings, learners conduct more negotiation of meaning than in f2f<sup>383</sup> (cf. Vonderwell 2003). Lee and Anderson's research (2009) shows similar results in the context of negotiating cultural meaning.

Hull and Saxon (2009) posit that co-construction of knowledge is enhanced by establishing "a line of questioning that supports inclusion and targeted discussion". Such questioning "requires participants to bring new information to the group that is relevant based upon consideration of what others have already suggested". It is "a kind of mediating activity that begins with the instructor<sup>384</sup> and must continue to be supported by the instructor throughout the discussion" (Hull and Saxon 2009, p. 636).

This requires that reciprocal expectations are aligned, and patterns of signaling behavior mutually recognized, a scenario that was often not given in the context of this study.

*Wir haben 2 Fehler gemacht. Der erste war, wir dachten der indische Kollege würde die Aufgabe ablehnen, wenn er sie nicht versteht oder zeitlich überfordert ist. Der zweite Fehler war nicht zwischendurch nachzufragen, wie die Sache steht. Erst am Abgabetermin haben wir festgestellt, dass kaum etwas gemacht wurde. Der Kollege musste sich einarbeiten und hatte so viel anderes zu tun, dass unser Projekt einfach runtergefallen ist. (Company B/ 06.06.2019/MH/Germany/368)*

Language is a powerful engine of cultural transmission (Gelman and Roberts 2017) and can be viewed as a shared code used to communicate with each other. A group of people using the same language (in this case English as a lingua franca) is not to be equated with sharing the same code<sup>385</sup>.

Code sharing comes into being in a speech community where values and attitudes about language use and practices are shared (Morgan 2014). These communities "develop through prolonged interaction among those who operate within these shared and recognized beliefs and value systems regarding forms and styles of

<sup>383</sup> These findings stem from computer-assisted language learning research.

<sup>384</sup> The term 'instructor' also applies in the knowledge transfer scenario of this study.

<sup>385</sup> The rules perspective is another way of analyzing misunderstandings that arise from communication differences. Regulative rules about turn-taking are one example vary among groups or even individuals (Wood 1998). Pragmatic principles facilitate communication between agents when messages are composed (Clark 1993, Givón 1992, Grice 1975). Agents who both send and receive messages must mutually agree that these ground rules are operating. When the principles are violated, comprehension time increases or misunderstandings occur. Graesser et al. 1997, p.172).

communication” (ibid, p. 1). When discourse routines differ between speech communities, misunderstandings occur, including the use of ‘push-pull’ strategies.

Signaling theory posits that when two parties (individuals or organizations) have access to different information, “one party, the sender, must choose whether and how to communicate (or signal) that information, and the other party, the receiver, must choose how to interpret the signal” (Connelly et al. 2011). This is the core of the ‘push-pull’ dilemma, receiving and identifying the signal for pulling information and establishing the corresponding ‘pull’ strategy for that signal.

*Wie gebe ich die Kollegen die Chance, auch ‘nein’ sagen zu können? Wie bekomme ich heraus, wenn die Kollegen unsicher sind oder ob sie nur ‘nein’ sagen, obwohl sie den Termin einhalten können? Ich meine, wenn sie ‘nein’ sagen, nur weil ein ‘nein’ bei uns vermeintlich gut ankommt? (Company B/07.02.2019/CL/Germany/369)*

Signaling is often done by using discourse cues<sup>386</sup>, also called contextualization cues (Gumperz 1992), non-verbal, verbal or textual, as a prompt to indicate how something is meant to be understood. In verbal communication, discourse routines include phonic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic variations (cf. Bazzanella & Damiano 1999). The discussion here is centered on the pragmatic aspects, on contextual language use as social action.

Cues are not lexical items, but rather contextually-situated uses of expressions (Redeker 2000, p. 250). Thus, cues modulate the interpretation of utterances. Prosodic phrasing based on pitch, rhythmic structure, and syllable duration are useful non-verbal cues for spoken language comprehension (Frazier, Carlson & Clifton 2006). So is the non-verbal cue of silence or non-response although, as discussed earlier, it is one of the most ambiguous signals to interpret. Responsiveness to such non-verbal cues can vary depending on cultural discourse routines<sup>387</sup>:

*Wir sind aktivem Zuhören gewohnt. Ich frage viel nach - der Inhalt wird gleich geklärt. Ich gehe davon aus, daß wir uns so am besten verstehen. Das erwarte ich auch von meinem Gesprächspartner. Bei Unklarheiten erwarte ich eine Meldung - wenn nichts vom Gegenüber kommt, nehme ich an, dass die Sache steht. (Company D/ 19.01.2016/HS/Germany/370)*

<sup>386</sup> The terms ‘cue’ and ‘marker’ are often used interchangeably, although ‘cue’ is used more typically when the predictive nature of the textual element is highlighted (cf. Müller 2005).

<sup>387</sup> Citing Jakobson (1960), Pelz refers to the phatic function of language which rejects the use of nonresponse. „Es geht bei der phatischen Funktion demnach oft darum, Schweigen zu vermeiden, da dieses Verhalten als ‚befremdlich, un blich, ja unhöflich empfunden werden könnte“ (Pelz 2005, p. 30).

Human interaction is characterized by a mechanism of alternating information exchange, an interactional mechanism termed turn-taking (e.g., Levinson 2006; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 2007). In the majority of cases, only one person tends to speak at a time and each contribution usually receives a response (Holler et al. 2015). Given a sequence of communication, the problem is to discover a rule characterizing the sequence and able to predict a plausible sequence continuation. This sequence-generating rule does not necessarily tell exactly which event must appear next in the sequence, but rather it defines a set of plausible next events (Dietterich & Michalski 1985).

In situated use, signaling cues are deployed to assist sequence-generation of response. Not all signaling cues necessarily coincide with those in the listener's speech community. In such cases, the receiver is unable to identify the kinds of cues which may predict the end of the sender's turn, calling for the receiver to come in with the next step in the sequence of the communicative exchange (cf. Holler et al. 2015).

A cue is linked to the concept of priming<sup>388</sup>, which is a non-conscious activation of social knowledge structures to guide or channel behavior within the situation (Bargh 2006). In Grice's (1975) terms, the illocutionary force of the utterance, i.e., the intention when making the utterance, is directed at the perlocutionary act, i.e., the production of a particular effect in the addressee.

One such example cited by the German participants is that of the attentional cue 'hi' discussed earlier:

*Wenn sie Kontakt mit mir aufnehmen wollen, tippen sie einfach ,hi' in den Chat. Ich weiß nicht, was es zu bedeuten hat. Meistens ignoriere ich es, weil ich soviel zu tun habe. Wenn sie ein Problem haben, können sie es doch gleich im nächsten Satz reinschreiben, oder? (Company B/ 13.04.2018/ZC/Germany/371)*

In the above example, the chat has been initiated with a slight 'push' ('hi') to nudge the addressee towards the perlocutionary act of a 'pull'. It signals a discourse transition indicating a change in turn-taking.

Cues can also be expressed as prefabricated formulaic sequences in language<sup>389</sup>. Formulaic sequences are conventionalized units that are established and entrenched routines within a speech community (cf. Langacker 1987). They are often used as a formula of politeness from a pragmatic perspective<sup>390</sup>. As they are evoked as

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<sup>388</sup> The term 'priming' was initially put forward in the field of experimental psychology (e.g., Palmer 1975) and is now applied to numerous aspects of social psychology, including semantics.

<sup>389</sup> Sinclair (1991) uses the term "idiom principle".

<sup>390</sup> Cf. Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics (1996).



a whole, the rate of information transmission is maximized (cf. Shannon 1948), but only when these formulaic cues are shared by the interlocutors<sup>391</sup>.

Routine sequences tie in with the concept of adjacency pairs in conversational organization (Schlegloff & Sacks 1973). It describes a conversational sequencing in which utterances are recognizably related to one another, thus leading to the appropriate response.

Given the recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type of which the first is recognizably a member (Schlegloff & Sacks 1973, p. 296).

The following text exchange is an example of an adjacency pair involving a formulaic politeness sequence after an email invitation to a Christmas get-together was sent out:

Indian<sup>392</sup>: *I will try to come but chances are less.*

German: *Ist das ein JA, oder ein NEIN?* (caps in the original)

Indian: *Sorry, I will not come.* (Company B/ 10.12.2019/KG/Germany/372)

Gudykunst et al. (1996) characterized high-context communication as more indirect, ambiguous, and maintaining of harmony. Power imbalance and unfamiliarity lead to a greater use of formulaic politeness cues by the Indian participants. The above message is mitigated by implying rather than uttering a refusal (*'I will try'*).

In this case, the politeness formula remained unidentified by the interlocutor as there was “a discrepancy between the literal meaning of a sentence (which corresponds to the textbase level) and the meaning that the writer intends to convey (which corresponds to the communication level)” (Graesser, Millis & Zwaan 1997, p. 171). Upon using a clarifying ‘pull’ question (*'ja' oder 'nein'?*), the uncertainty of interpretation was resolved (*'I will not come'*).

Lexical cues for mitigating or signaling uncertainty (cf. Farkas et al., 2010) include hedging and speculation.<sup>393</sup> Hedging is a particularly relevant concept in this technological context (cf. Vold 2006 on scientific claims) as it is associated with a multitude of cues. Hedge words are used as uncertainty cues (e.g., Hyland 1996, 1998) and include adjectives, nouns, verbs, and modal verbs.

<sup>391</sup> Dennett (2017) posits that the human mind is populated with learned memes. Dawkins (1976) defined memes as small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, which are spread from person to person by copying or imitation. Prefab cues may be compared with cultural memes in communication.

<sup>392</sup> The Indian colleague had arrived in Germany 5 weeks prior to the email exchange and had therefore spent a relatively short period of time onsite.

<sup>393</sup> Other uncertainty cues are also detected in speculation, inconsistency, and retraction (Farkas et al. 2010).

Is the IT-workpackage ready?

→ YES, it is going to be ready next week why not: NO ????

Do you find a solution?

→ YES, we might be able to find one next week. ???

Die Bedeutungen sind mir natürlich bekannt. Wir haben gelernt, damit umzugehen.

(Company B/10.12.2019/KG/Germany/email to practitioner)

As is seen in the above email sent by a German participant to the practitioner, even when mitigation cues are familiar and understood, a core of perplexity appears to remain.

In his theory on four sides of communication, von Thun (1981) proposes that there are four facets of implicit information within a message: factual, self-revealing, relationship and appeal.



Figure 39. 4 sides of communication (Schulz von Thun 1981)<sup>394</sup>

The factual side concerns the 'what' of the message (objective information, data), the self-revelatory side carries implicit, often involuntary, information about the sender, the relationship side contains either implicit or explicit information on the relationship between sender and receiver, and the appeal facet<sup>395</sup> addresses the response the sender is seeking from the receiver. Ideally, for both sender and receiver to be on the same page, the sender's four sides ('beaks') would resonate with the receiver's corresponding four sides ('ears').

Cues are signals to evoke 'frames' or 'the organization of experience' (Goffman 1974) when creating meaning. In Bateson's (1955) work on meta-communication,

<sup>394</sup> Source: <https://www.schulz-von-thun.de/die-modelle/das-kommunikationsquadrat>

<sup>395</sup> Cf. the conative function of language that is focused on the receiver with the intention of evoking a behavioral, attitudinal or emotional response ("einen Appell an den Empfänger, der ihn dazu auffordert, etwas zu tun, d.h. bei ihm eine bestimmte verhaltens-, einstellungs- oder gefühlsmäßige Reaktion bewirken soll" (Pelz 2005, S. 29)). See also Grice's 'perlocutionary act' (1975) i.e., the production of a particular effect in the addressee.

framing is about an exchange of cues to indicate how ongoing interaction should be understood. Minsky's (1975) cognitive approach to framing sees cognitive frames as learned mental frameworks which are selectively called upon to interpret perceptual information (Minsky 1975, p. 211).

Entman (1993) elucidates the term 'framing' as follows:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. Framing means to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, to promote a particular definition of a problem, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation and/or a recommendation of how to deal with it (Entman 1993, p. 52, italics in the original).

According to Entman (1993):

Frames have at least four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Communicators make conscious or unconscious framing judgments in deciding what to say, guided by frames (often called schemata) that organize their belief systems. The text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain key-words, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments (ibid).

Frames are associated not only with issues of what is important but also how to respond to problems (De Dreu & McCusker 1997). The salience of a frame is predicated on its accessibility to the receiver in terms of availability and retrievability from memory (Iyengar 1990).

If the frame guiding the sender is not accessible to the receiver, the cues remain undetected. With cumulative learning, interlocutors become aware of some cues behind the content of a message:

In preparation to the workshop,  
ein paar typische Ausdrücke, die bei Verzögerungen immer wieder auftauchen:

Still under process, we will update once we have status update.  
Task ~~is almost (80%) finished.~~

Mit freundlichen Grüßen / Best ~~regards~~

(Company B/19.4.2016/GW/email to practitioner)

*Es ist schwer, das eigentliche Problem zu erkennen. Zum Beispiel bei der Aussage "We're finding a random error". Man versteht schon, dass der Software-Fehler noch nicht behoben ist, aber was erwarten sie jetzt von uns?*  
(Company A/27.2.2018/SF/Germany/373)

In the above remark, the factual aspect 'beak' (sender's framing intention) has been adequately synchronized with the corresponding 'ear' of the receiver. However, the recipient remains far removed from detecting the intention and varying salience of the other three sides of the message. If the message carries implicit cues, such as an appeal for understanding or assistance, it then becomes imperative to select the right communicative turn<sup>396</sup> ('pull' or 'push') to enlarge the conversational locus and elicit the entire context from the communicator.

The entire process is a dynamic one, rife with innumerable uncertainties. The interlocutor may refuse to react to the communicative turn proffered. This could, in a worst-case scenario, lead to a conversational breakdown. A shift in topic or new attempts at re-negotiation (cf. Bazzanella & Damiano 1999) can lead to more productive outcomes. The following exchange reveals exemplifies such re-negotiation between the CoPs in a facilitated f2f setting:

VL (India): *When you Germans say 'no', is it really, really a 'no'? I am Project Manager but have no authority over the Germans. If the German says 'no', I can't force him to say 'yes'.*

DH (Germany): *From a current point of view a German says no, he can't, but he can be convinced by explaining the background.*

LP (India): *But some just say 'no' and just can't be convinced.*

DH (Germany): *If you go to them personally, it seems to work, even in Germany [laughter]. (Company B/09.05.2017/ 374)*

The exchange continues:

WB (Germany): *The 'no' from us (Germans) is just a starting point if you are not certain that it can be a definite 'yes'. If you continue the discussion and ask exactly what is not doable, then you often get a modified 'no' which can be used as a basis for further negotiation.*

SS (India): *That's the same thing with our 'yes' [general laughter]. We need to be asked in greater detail what is doable to make sure that it is the complete 'yes' package you Germans are looking for [more laughter]. (Company B/09.05.2017/ 375)*

To reduce uncertainty through communication, sensitivity to cues is required.

Each cue has potential value in carrying out this purpose. But it requires that the organism be open to all available cues and that it be willing to alter meanings until a coherent and adequate picture emerges (Barnlund 2008, p. 55).

A high degree of conversational agility is not within every individual's reach:

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<sup>396</sup> Allport's selection-for-action principle (1987).

*Ich finde es schwierig, dass man bei jedem Punkt nachhaken muss. Außerdem – ich fange nicht einfach an und überlege mir dann wie es weitergehen soll. Wir müssen strukturiert vorgehen. (Company B/17.04.2019/RN/Germany/376)*

## 5.9 Impact of Virtuality

In the light of the shape-shifting nature of ongoing meaning-making, TMC poses a general challenge in global organizational contexts (cf. Chapter 3). As discussed earlier, the lack of sustained interpersonal contact in TMC does not provide the ideal seedbed for creating trust and psychological safety. The exigencies of a VUCA environment increase the interpersonal risk which necessarily accompanies uncertainty and change (cf. Schein & Bennis 1965).

It can be compensated for with a high degree of what is termed procedural communication. Procedural communication steers and manages the team discussion at a meta-level (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock 2012). It is clearly distinguished from problem-solving interaction or action-oriented communication (which includes statements about task implementation). It is text-rich, “how-to” communication, not only aimed at guiding others through a task (Farkas 1999<sup>397</sup>), but also relating to knowledge exchange expectations.

Extended procedural communication incorporates socioemotional interaction. It helps to foster a climate of psychological safety which permits vulnerability. Vulnerability is seen as a core aspect when defining trust. Mayer et al. (1995) posit that trust in general is based on two core elements: (a) the positive expectations that the other party will behave not in an opportunistic way and (b) the willingness to be vulnerable because we trust someone. The first kind of vulnerability, often resting with the task-assigner, functions as an antecedent until predictive trust based on experience arises over a period of time<sup>398</sup>.

The second type of vulnerability arises from a position of trust which leads into trusting intention which is finally manifested in trusting, vulnerable behavior such as disclosing sensitive information (Nienaber, Hofeditz & Romeike 2015). It permits team members to admit mistakes, lack of knowledge or ask for help<sup>399</sup>. This willingness to be

<sup>397</sup> There is a distinction to be made between streamlined communication and procedural communication. The former is concisely sequential, the latter assists the user during the process to recognize a variety of interim states (cf. Farkas 1999).

<sup>398</sup> It is also a given in contexts relating to singular task-based issues such as at customer complaints hotlines.

<sup>399</sup> The risk of being refused is an inhibiting factor to admitting vulnerability. „Eine wesentliche Problematik verbirgt sich hier in möglichen Motivationen oder Zweifeln gegenüber triadischen Interventionsmöglichkeiten: Erfordert eine Hilfeleistung durch Dritte grundsätzlich eine erbetene oder eine selbstinitiierte Intervention, so geht der Helfer grundsätzlich ein gewisses Risiko ein, abgewiesen zu werden, was mit einem sozialen Gesichtverlust einhergehen kann“ (Busch 2014, p.223).

vulnerable is the affective part of trust (ibid) and it creates a dynamic that is invaluable for team communication and performance.

There are differing viewpoints concerning how TMC affects vulnerability in terms of face or image risk (Snyder 1974). Some research in online education indicates that online students feel less inhibited about admitting lack of knowledge than they would in face-to-face settings<sup>400</sup>. However, the findings apply to more anonymous settings in which it was assumed that the online instructor welcomed questions while evaluations by unknown peers could easily be overlooked. Second, it is difficult to evaluate how far these findings translate in an organizational team environment. Communication accommodation theory posits that “individuals adapt their communication behaviors <...> in such a way as to become more similar to their interlocutor’s behavior” (Giles & Ogay 2007, p. 295). There are numerous motives for convergence, including the gaining of approval from the interlocutor, for instance by adopting prestige patterns for upward convergence (ibid).

In the context of this study, virtuality and the lack of widespread knowledge about the handling of vulnerability impeded informative disclosure. ‘Streitkultur’ remained an abstract concept disseminated at second or even third-hand<sup>401</sup> to the remote Indian CoPs.

*<...> die Zusammenarbeit mit denen, die hier arbeiten, ist sehr gut. Bei Offshore funktioniert es weniger gut. Man stellt Fragen und bekommt nur rudimentäre Antworten. Es dauert bis man an die Quintessenz rankommt. Ich habe das Gefühl, sie trauen sich nicht, klar zu kommunizieren, kein Blatt vor den Mund zu nehmen. Vielleicht würde es helfen, wenn sie es tun. (Company B/10.07.2017/ BH/Germany/377)*

Despite being deployed by more experienced colleagues who had spent time in Germany, ‘pull’ communication did not sufficiently resonate to become standard practice in the Indian CoPs.

*Wie kriege ich sie alle dazu, mir eine Frage zu stellen, wenn notwendig? Santosh ist immer anmarschiert mit Fragen für andere, sogar für andere Geschäftsbereiche. Er ließ es sich erklären, und kam auf mich zu mit ihren gesammelten Fragen. Für Deutsche, die gewohnt sind, direkt eine Frage zu stellen, ist es sehr eigenartig. (Company B/13.03.2017/JH/Germany/378)*

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<sup>400</sup> Students do not feel they are regarded as ‘looking stupid’ in an online environment. One of the respondents commented that people participate more when they are not so worried about how they are being perceived (Vonderwell 2003).

<sup>401</sup> Indian colleagues who had spent time onsite in Germany as well as intercultural training sessions were the modes of transmitting such knowledge.

Personal interaction coupled with a higher density of communication via rich media contribute to the psychological safety to engage in voice:

*Wir haben stundenlange Telefonate über Skype mit 2 Leuten (aus Indien) – täglicher Kontakt. Die Erfahrungen sind sehr positiv auch zum Teil, weil ich sie schon kennengelernt habe und zusammen Kaffee getrunken. (Company A/21.04.2017/MB/Germany/379)*

*Mit Skype scheint es besser zu klappen, da kommt manchmal eine kurze Frage dazwischen. (Company B/13.03.2017/TW/Germany/380)*

*I really like German communication. It's so clear, to the point and precise. There's no ambiguity in it. My German colleague knows exactly what he wants and tells me that to the nth degree. But then, we sit around the corner from each other, so it's not a problem. In remote collaboration that's not a possibility, or at least not the confidence to approach someone you hardly know to clarify a question. (Company A/24.08.2019/RJ/India/381)*

When negotiating meaning to achieve congruence, the attentional focus on both task-relevant information and social information (Dinh, Lord & Hoffmann 2014) is a demanding endeavor<sup>402</sup>.

*Wir haben ein ganz unterschiedliches Verständnis von was abgeschlossen wurde, was der Stand des Projekts ist. Wir haben immer noch Kommunikationsschwierigkeiten diesbezüglich. Was wollen sie mir eigentlich mitteilen? (Company B/01.13.2019/MJ/Germany/382)*

Congruence refers to shared interpretations or a successful alignment in meaning; thus, communicators test out and negotiate their meanings until they develop correspondence or mutual understanding of the situation, or they accept mismatches in their framings (Dewulf et al. 2009, p. 174).

It requires the creation of an interactive construction of community through language which subsumes cultural variances (cf. von Helmolt 2017). Interpersonal meaning “is distributed like a prosody throughout a continuous stretch of discourse” (Halliday 1979, p. 66).

Hence, disentangling cultural variances in meaning requires a greater intensity of sustained TMC. This also aids in creating greater social presence<sup>403</sup>, which in turn promotes relationality and deters from knowledge withholding.

<sup>402</sup> Allport refers to an “attentional bottleneck” caused by the processing limitations of the brain (Allport 19, p.185).

<sup>403</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, social presence refers to “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (Gunawardena 1995, p.151).

Besides self-revelatory messaging, more 'pull' strategies are needed when KWI becomes apparent. Information needs to be actively sought through selective questioning<sup>404</sup>, both for fact-based information and to indirectly elicit attitudinal positions (Lapinski & Rimal 2005) and clarify norms (Hogg & Reid 2006) in the give-and-take of a discussion<sup>405</sup>. As Hogg and Reid (2006) maintain, the entire process is highly dynamic and is prey to motivated perception, subjective interpretation, and inaccurate reading of cues.

TMC gives rise to a scenario in which the German colleagues seek to economize the allocation of social presence (Turner and Foss 2018) for efficiency reasons at both ends. As discussed, the creation of social presence is seen a time-consuming enterprise, but so are the consequences of having done so:

*Wenn mein indischer Kollege Fragen hat, ruft er sofort an, und will alles sofort besprechen. Ich möchte aber, dass er sich vorher Gedanken macht und nicht sofort anruft. Nicht alles ist brainstorm-mäßig zu behandeln. (Company B/13.03.2017/AK/Germany/383)*

As summed up below, experiential f2f communication appears to create the suitable balance:

*Das ist der wohl schwierigste Teil in der Kommunikation mit indischen Kollegen: Es kommt keine Rückmeldung, wo man als Deutscher eine erwarten würde. Auch wenn man darauf vorbereitet wurde, fällt es doch immer wieder schwer, damit umzugehen. Zu diesem Verhalten kommt es häufig bei Kollegen, welche keine bis wenig Erfahrung in internationaler Zusammenarbeit haben. Auch die Off-Shore Tätigkeit begünstigt dies. Dieselben Kollegen werden sehr viel aktiver, sobald sie mit mir im selben Büro sitzen. Durch die persönliche Beziehung gibt es weniger Hemmungen und langsam begreifen die Kollegen, wie wir so ticken (Company B/05.04.2019/PN/Germany/384)*

The final phrase '*wie wir ticken*' offers an interesting insight into how self-categorization and self-concept, or what people believe is true of themselves (cf. Forgas & Williams 2002), are deeply ingrained in the human psyche. At the same time, there is a reflective awareness that behavior can vary with circumstances – in this case with increased exposure to international cooperation.

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<sup>404</sup> Graesser (1992) created a taxonomy for categorizing questions by several linguistic attributes: (a) semantic function, or type of information requested; (b) pragmatic function, or purpose for which the question was asked; and (c) communicative function, or properties of the communication.

<sup>405</sup> Pelz (2005) refers to it as a 'metasprachliche Funktion' (metalinguistic function) through which the interlocutors prevent misunderstandings by checking to make sure that the code is being shared.



## 6 Chapter 6: Conclusion

“... curavi, humanas actiones non ridere, non lugere, neque detestari, sed intelligere”

“... I have laboured carefully, not to mock, lament, or execrate, but to understand human actions.” (Spinoza: 1632-1677)<sup>406</sup>

### 6.1 Research Objectives and Process

This thesis was teleologically-driven and arose from years of experience as a practitioner in the organizational field. It started out as an assignment to discover and classify the frictional losses reported by those involved in Indian-German virtual engineering/tech collaboration. The ultimate objective was to collate a body of knowledge on which future organizational solutions could be based. The idea for a thesis was born during the process of data collection and was realized over the course of the entire enterprise.

The context of the research therefore contributes to both its strengths and limitations. The first limitation lies in the topic itself, which is weighted towards a problem-centered rather than a balanced approach. At the same time, the nature of the practitioner’s brief also provides the study’s affordances. The first affordance is that of extensive fieldwork that is vital for the centrality of the participants’ observations. Second, as data gathering was perceived as purposive and beneficial to the participants, it encouraged responsiveness and granularity of input. Third, the number of years in the field enabled a greater generalizability of the patterns reported by those involved.

Fieldwork also showed the way to identify the scholarship required for this cross-disciplinary field. Working inductively, the participants’ input naturally led to the clusters of literature on a given phenomenon.

The question of what is meant by the term ‘culture’ is one that is familiar to all of those engaged in the intercultural field. It is tempting to attribute behaviors cohesively as a cultural profile along national boundaries, particularly when the groups studied are objectively and subjectively distant from each other. Fortunately, the organizational brief offered the practitioner a credible alternative to national-cultural paradigms by focusing on a framework of tech CoPs.

The topic of this thesis concerns the communication gaps perceived in reciprocal interaction by those collaborating in German-Indian virtual technological communities of practice. The gaps are identified, classified and explored in an attempt to provide an understanding of the subjective realities of the participants. The primary

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<sup>406</sup> <http://users.telenet.be/rwmeijer/spinoza/preface.htm>

parameters in interaction are those of culture, power relations, and virtuality, all of which intersect variably to contribute to the gaps. The study views the gaps through these prisms, considers how they emerge from unfulfilled reciprocal expectations, and when they are rendered salient in interaction.

## 6.2 Summary

The preface leads into the research questions, defines terms, and describes value of the research. Chapter 1 details the research background and methods used, and closes with a review of interdisciplinary literature.

Qualitative data gathered from over 750 participants in four companies first led to the inductive hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss 1967) that gap factors in communication create dissonances and impede collaboration. Gap factors are defined as the **absence** of certain communicative actions and markers expected by the actors involved in an intercultural interaction. These gap factors constitute the attentional focus of the study.

The interactional aspect is highly relevant for the study, as gap factors are grounded in unfulfilled reciprocal expectations. When different cultural life worlds (Berger & Luckmann 1966/2011) come together in a mutually shared field, unexpected variances in socially-conventionalised routines can violate the plausibility, regularity and predictability (Nicklas, Müller & Kordes 2006) of the interaction. This thesis focuses on the perceived non-appearance of certain expected responses, and investigates how and why these gap factors become salient in German-Indian team interaction.

To avoid the 'essentialism error' ((Barrett et al. 2010, p. 3), Chapter 2 deals with the socially created notion of selfhood as defined by the participants during the fieldwork. It is illuminated against influential concepts from social psychology such as Category Membership (Sacks 1972, Schegloff 2007), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel & Turner 1979), and Social Representations Theory (Moscovici 1961/1976).

The findings from this research point towards self-categorization and positioning within an engineering/tech culture (cf. Mahadevan 2012). As organizational culture is a wide-ranging term, the concept of a Community of Practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner 2015) helps to pinpoint the defining category-generated features (Sacks 1992) and member self-image of the target groups. Its philosophy and norms, both explicit and implicit, are also reflected in the dimensions of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (Bateman & Organ 1983).

The findings indicate a distinct and particular sense of professional affiliation to a tech collective or an 'engineering culture' on the part of the German participants that is not mirrored by their Indian counterparts. This readily-accessible technology

'doctrine' is consistently referenced in terms of professional norms and behavioral expectations for the gap factors.

Having established cultural identity as CoP self-categorization in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 reviews the research question of how contextual-structural factors exert an influence on individual and group behavior. Matsumoto's (2007) proposal that culture emerges from 'interaction' and 'settings' is cited to examine the two corresponding factors of power asymmetry and virtual TMC collaboration. These intersect dynamically and cross-sectionally to create gaps, with the level of saliency depending on the given situation and individual experience.

The power asymmetry parameter revolves around the theoretical aspects of class stratification (Wright 2003), organizational power through category-bound roles (Sacks 1992), dominant discourses (Foucault 1972), and the power inherent in knowledge (Foucault 1977). All of these apply to the context study to varying degrees.

As reported by the Indian participants, the German CoPs are regarded as having the upper hand both in terms of organizational roles (customer-vendor) and age/experience (expertise-novice in a knowledge transfer context). The power imbalance called for behaviors, such as displaying deference and seeking 'guidance', that did not correspond to the German CoP expectations of 'self-agency' as depicted in Schulz von Thun's (1989) matched complementary opposites.

The structural element of virtuality introduces the gaps that are predicated on the limited affordances of TMC regarding potential for social cohesion (Allport 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006). Though communicators can learn to adapt social information (Walther 1992), asynchronous email communication, linguistic uncertainty, interpersonal unfamiliarity, and technical inadequacies impede network formation through trust (Walther 2011). In the absence of 'rich media' (e.g., Daft and Lengel 1986) and social presence (Short et al. 1976; Gunawardena 1995), subjective distance hinders the creation of cultural familiarity, a '*ba*' (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno 2000) for social learning, and the exchange of tacit knowledge (Nonaka & Konno 1998). All of these effects are further amplified by the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity of today's VUCA work environment (Abidi & Joshi 2015).

To sum up this chapter, the contextual elements of power and virtual TMC are pervasive themes that recur throughout the study, with the influence of TMC warranting separate sub-headings in chapters 4 and 5.

As a result, based on the three contextual strands of CoP culture, power asymmetry, and virtuality, Chapters 4 and 5 address the research questions regarding the nature and specifics of the gap factors reported by the participants. Codified on the frequencies and patterns of themes, they revolve around how the actors themselves

assign meaning and create sense-making in everyday professional interaction. The findings in interaction indicate complementary differences in the categories of the two groups – practically two sides of the same coin. While each Chapter deals with one CoP, its input simultaneously reveals insights into the behavioral rationale behind the gaps expressed by the other CoP.

The gaps put forward by the Indian CoPs in Chapter 4 cluster around socioemotional aspects of relational communication, while the German CoP tech narrative in Chapter 5 concerns the principles of content and efficiency in organizational interaction. Taken together, they provide a combined view of the gaps in collaborative interaction.

In terms of background, Chapter 4 first examines the concept of affect against extant theories in emotion research. It leads into the distinction between basic emotions and the sociocultural process underlying dynamic emotion-cognition interactions or emotion schemas (Izard 2009). When emotions are being expressed and perceived (cf. Van Kleef 2016), individual factors and cultural models (Friedlmeier 2013; Muehlhoff 2019) of appraisal and reappraisal are the way in which individuals interpret, evaluate, and later reconsider the motive-serving relevance of emotion-eliciting situations (Roseman & Smith 2001).

The cyclical challenge in unfamiliar intercultural interaction lies in how to appropriately convey/respond to an affective message, how to appraise unfamiliar socioemotional reactional cues, and how to close the affective loop.

Ashkanasy's (2003) five-level model of emotions in organizations offers a convenient framework to examine the findings, i.e., the gaps reported by the Indian CoPs, against extant theories. All of the levels are interlinked by the importance of positive affect as a central theme. At the within-person level, the role of positive mood is explicated in terms of Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). At the group level, the importance of benevolence signaling is emphasized. For the Indian participants, signaling positive affect can be through embodied expression, the OCB dimension of unsolicited altruism (Kwantes et al. 2008), reciprocity, hospitality, and consideration of face and other-emotions in feedback (e.g., displaying appreciation and using mitigating language in critical feedback). At the final organization-wide level, Prosocial Organizational Behavior (Brief & Motowidlo 1986) calls for nurturant leadership (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan 2007) and positive work experiences such as 'fun at work' programs to foster employee well-being.

The above findings might suggest a monolithic culturalist approach were it not for the fact that the observations were consistently qualified by the participants to present a nuanced view. For instance, hospitality or altruism were not seen as absent

per se but in terms of the degree of contextual reciprocal expectations. The actual gaps did not lie in the core but in the nimbus of an affective 'fringe' (James 1981), the special treatment in certain contexts.

This chapter is rounded off with a return to the TMC setting, and the obstacles it poses to affective signaling, emotional contagion (Bruder, Fischer & Manstead 2014) and affective trust (Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998). Affective signaling and the detection of socioemotional cues (Dinh et al. 2014) are impeded by text-based messaging in remote lingua franca communication as it involves the difficulty of sentiment analysis (Feidakis, Lord & Hofmann 2014), variations in communicative styles, and even varying connotations of typography.

Chapter 5 summarizes the input from the German CoPs as gaps perceived in communicative efficiency and content. The input recalls the prototypical self-concept discussed in Chapter 2 and the beliefs, norms and obligations of a professional ethos of a technological CoP. Without positing a complete dichotomy between cognition and emotion, the self-concept of German CoPs accords greater weightage and salience to communicative norms promoting utility and efficiency on work-related issues.

When viewing implied norms in the context of psychological contracts (Rousseau 1989) and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), it becomes evident that the tech self-categorization of German CoPs calls for the 'initiative' dimension of transparent communicative signaling (Kwantes et al. 2008) to establish and maintain trust.

The findings indicate that cognitive trust based on competence, reliability (Paul & McDaniel 2004) and predictability (Dietz & Den Hartog 2006) are central for German skill-oriented tech CoPs. Trust is elicited through proactive 'voice' (Premeaux & Bedeian 2003) as an instrument to prevent and solve problems. It is buttressed by an oft-cited 'Streitkultur' and a 'Fehlerkultur' which emphasize transactional communication routines for error-prevention and management. Work-related issues demand a disputatious approach which embraces conflicts rather than one based on accommodation or avoidance.

Information exchange functions best in a climate of psychological safety (Edmondson 2003), failing which knowledge withholding (KWI) to save face and minimize risk is activated. Gaps arise when the Indian counterparts deploy KWI strategies, including euphemistic, self-censoring expression and non-response (Bies 2013; Thompson 1991) as conflict-avoidance and accommodation strategies (Rahim 1983).

KWI leads to one core mismatch between the two CoPs: how responsibility is assigned in the knowledge exchange process. The non-alignment resides in the

sender-receiver paradigm regarding who is obligated to provide the pertinent information ('Bringschuld'/'push' communication) and who is obligated to elicit it by exercising 'pull' communication ('Holschuld').

The pragmatics of push-pull communication are driven by interactional mechanisms such as conversational routines in turn-taking (Levinson 2006; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Schegloff 2007) and clarifying cues (Redeker 2000) to manage the perlocutionary act (Grice 1975). When communicative mechanisms diverge, the four aspects of implicit information within a message (von Thun 1981) – factual, self-revealing, relationship and appeal – are inadequately framed and interpreted by the interactants. The chapter closes once again with the influence of TMC on the gaps discussed.

Chapter 6 concludes with a review of findings and implications both for further research and for organizational practice. For remote intercultural collaboration to accomplish its synergistic potential, it requires a structured yet flexible communication concept that is mindfully conducted to bridge the gaps.

### **6.3 Reflection**

Returning to the research questions at the outset, the key findings from the study may be summarized as follows:

In the current state, the interactants reported undeniable dissonances in communication routines between by the two CoPs studied. The ensuing dissonances were experientially perceived as gaps in interaction, i.e., features left *unexpressed* in contexts in which they were reciprocally expected. Not only cultural but also structural factors such as power relations and technologically-mediated communication played a significant role in the aspect of what was left unexpressed. Up to this point – i.e., concerning the last two research questions (Chapter 1) – both CoPs broadly concurred with each other.

The divergence between the two groups lay in the research questions regarding the nature and classification of the gaps themselves. On analysis, it became evident that the gaps were aligned along the prevailing sociocultural norms and practices of each CoP. The variances in norm clusters were reflected in the complementary gaps perceived in interaction.

While the brief was couched as an intercultural assignment, working with the participants suggested that culture was, counter-intuitively, just one of the numerous factors impacting intercultural communication. Virtuality and power relations and roles may not be ignored, as is apparent both in the conflict strategies discussed in Chapter 4 and the 'push/pull' concept in Chapter 5. However, the meaning and purpose of power are culturally nurtured (cf. Hofstede 1991,1997) and manifest corresponding

variances in behavior. The same holds good for the selection, salience, interpretation, and evaluation of utterances.

The reservations about the defining influence of culture stem from the fact that culture is not a static concept. It is a transient state in a constant process of conscious and unconscious revision. As the remarks below suggest, identity is so fluid that it can be acquired in practice. An acquired identity can pose a challenge when it clashes with attributed identity:

*Ich habe ein ganz anderes Problem. Was erwarten die indischen Kollegen von einem anderen indischen Kollegen? Erwarten sie die deutsche Direktheit? Wie soll ich mich gegenüber den indischen Kollegen verhalten? Wenn ich deutsch kommuniziere – klar und direkt - wird es blöd rüberkommen, weil ich offensichtlich indischer Abstammung bin. Andererseits bin ich deutsch unterwegs mit den deutschen Kollegen und mit deutschem Vertrag. Ich habe auch das Gefühl, es kommt weniger gut an, wenn ich was ganz klar sage. Von den deutschen Kollegen wird es eher angenommen. (Company B/VK/07.05.2019/Indian employee working in Germany/385)*

Admittedly, there is diversity in values or deep level diversity (Stahl et al., 2010) which is difficult to bridge through interaction. However, irreconcilable differences can exist as much within a culture as between cultures and are not germane to this discussion.

In sum, what this study makes apparent is that while cultural practices can and do vary, leading to communication gaps, it is inadequately managed TMC that poses a critical obstacle to bridging the gaps.

#### **6.4 Contribution**

The primary contribution of this thesis is in line with its original objective, namely creating a fieldwork-based corpus of material on the frictional losses caused by communication in remote German-Indian tech teams. In practical terms, it offers an overview of how and where communication gaps occur and potential means of bridging them. It sheds light on the workplace practices of German-Indian virtual collaboration, a context that is increasingly widespread, but hitherto rarely addressed.

Theoretically, it contributes to previous knowledge in several ways. It offers an extended lens to view cultural norms in organizations, particularly those of technological German CoPs, and their impact in intercultural collaboration. It examines the concept of self-categorization concretely to observe how it informs the behavior of tech teams. It expands research on specific phenomena within the communication paradigm such as knowledge withholding, reciprocity, and 'push/pull' behaviors.

Overall, it fulfils a need to gain a contextualized understanding of experiences in virtual German-Indian team interaction by integrating the key parameters of CoP culture, virtuality, and power with the manifestations of communication.

### 6.5 Limitations and Future Research

Obviously, every contribution to practice and research is accompanied by a host of unaddressed topics. There is the question of transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985), i.e., whether a different organizational context (e.g., in the fashion industry) would have yielded different insights. In a contextual vein, there is the question raised by Zaidman, Itzhaki & Shenkar's study (2018) on Indian-Israeli business professionals, i.e., whether communication tactics converge when the interactants are faced with the same contextual conditions, such as a subjective threat of meaningful loss.

The issue of closure is one of necessity in research, leaving numerous questions unanswered from a long-term perspective. Studying collaboration over a longitudinal time frame would have brought up different scenarios. Despite the general agreement on gap factors, they provided only a snapshot in time at the 'culture' stage of the journey and represent the participants' views at a certain stage of evolution. The transition from this stage to the next was delayed due to fact that the German CoPs were repeatedly confronted with similar situations. The VUCA situation in India of rapid expansion of manpower coupled with a higher tendency to change jobs meant that the German participants often felt caught in a Sisyphean cycle of dealing with newly-inducted colleagues:

*Über die Jahre ist die Sache einfacher geworden. Am Anfang hatten wir gar keine Rückmeldungen bekommen. Und es kommen immer wieder neue junge Kollegen dazu. Und wir müssen wieder von Null anfangen (Company B/ 18.03.2016/RS/Germany/386)*

The tendency to self-position as also to position one's own culture at a point in a continuum is determined by the contextual perception of the given moment (Bolten 2011, 2016):

*Die Bandbreite an Erfahrungen ist manchmal überraschend groß. Je nach Projektlage, Kompetenz des Partners und und, und, und, funktioniert die Verständigung sehr unterschiedlich. (Company A/15.03.2018/DK/Germany/387)*

As contexts change, organizations evolve with them. There were also indications in this direction, with increasing weightage accorded to agility in a VUCA environment rather than consistency.



*I don't understand the German worries sometimes – we are in an agile project, not a waterfall project and this is a much more mistake-tolerant process.*

(Company A/ 03.04.18/AJ/India/388)

*Wenn man von dieser dynamischen indischen Welt zurückkommt, ist es ein kleiner Rückschock. Es ist schon sehr zäh hier [in Germany]. Man mag keine Veränderungen. Es ist eine Rückwärtslernkurve. Ich bin in meiner Zeit in Indien viel flexibler und gelassener geworden, auch wenn ich vorher schon flexibel war. Wir müssen offener, flexibler, agiler in der Masse werden, nicht nur einzelne Menschen <...>. Im Beruf sind die Inder schon agiler, mehr open-minded. Von ihnen können wir uns eine Scheibe abschneiden. (Company D/ 28.06.17/SS/Germany/389)*

As Vogler (2013) suggests, interculturalism is “a dynamic system which is based on the pillars of exchange and dialogue of various cultural groups, and assumes the possibility of mutual enrichment” (Vogler 2013, p. 37). It is therefore likely that the fluid and processual nature of self-categorization will yield different findings in future to those described in Chapter 2.

One significant issue has remained peripheral to this study, although it has been touched upon in Chapter 2. This is the question of why, contrary to established expectations and despite a learning curve shaped by experiences of trial and error, the familiarity paradigm often does not lead to sustained coherence<sup>407</sup> within the communities of practice studied. Evidence thus indicates that intercultural cooperation is not strongly jeopardised at the start of a project but rather a year or two later (Bolten 2007).

Ideally, intercultural should result in a synergetic product created by the interactants, a product that gradually acquires its own sense of normality, its own patterns of action and its own specific store of knowledge (Bolten 2007). Familiarity is supposed to bolster dissonance reduction (Wicklund & Brehm 1976), but there are signs that this reduction does not appear to be sustainable to the inflection point at which coherence begins to emerge. This question of sustained intercultural understanding is one of obvious and immediate interest to practitioners and remains an avenue for future research.

A further subject that deserves more profound attention, particularly in view of the current pandemic, is the deep-level implications of proximate versus remote interaction. Considerable research into online education already exists and scholars

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<sup>407</sup> As opposed to ‘cohesion’, which is closed and bivalent, ‘coherence’ is open and polyvalent (Bolten 2013).

have highlighted the benefits of f2f interaction in promoting cooperative behavior and translates into successful joint cooperation (Behrens & Kret 2019).

Various reasons for prosocial behavior have been proposed, including the presence of social cues (Jahng et al. 2017) or visual cues (Rafaeli & Sudweeks 1997) in f2f interaction. However, video encounters offer almost identical opportunities for f2f interaction. Curiously, as COVID-19 has made abundantly clear, even for 'Gen Z' raised in the digital age, there remains a primeval, deep-seated human need for personal contact. Critical investigation into *what* precisely gives f2f interaction this visceral edge over video encounters is still pending<sup>408</sup>.

## 6.6 Implications for Practice

As this is a practice-driven study, attention will be directed towards some of the implications of managing remote intercultural interaction. Communication is pivotal to the success of virtual collaboration. It is the glue which binds teams separated by geographical, cultural, and knowledge boundaries. When gaps arise, information exchange becomes patchy and fragile, leading to all of the undesirable consequences discussed in Chapter 5. In a worst-case scenario it can even trigger a complete disintegration of the virtual team or project.

From a tech perspective, the time and effort involved in communication appears to be an additional chore in an already cramped schedule. Nonetheless, one primary insight gained from this study is that the creation and maintenance of a seamless communicative environment is far too crucial to be left to chance. It requires conscious deployment, starting from its inception, and then nurtured over the course of a project cycle in a state of active vigilance.

The preliminary step towards establishing a foundation for trust in intercultural collaboration is through f2f interaction. Viewed in corporate terms, the financial outlay of face-to-face communication would obviously be difficult to justify when offshoring is being touted as a cost-saving measure. Nonetheless, despite modern communication technologies which provide a high degree of information-carrying, they are only an approximation of real-life encounters. A certain measure of real-life interaction is irreplaceable, particularly at the initial stage of a collaborative enterprise.

Besides the proximate encounters to establish a basic foundation for affective trust, the next essential factor is that of maintenance. Ideally, in a VUCA environment, relational ties need to be reconfigured through intermittent proximate interaction. As

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<sup>408</sup> Hindu belief has always reflected on the abstract value of face-to-face. The concept of 'darshan' ('sight' or beholding) arises from the idea that *physical* viewing is of spiritual and energetic value. The beholding of a revered person, a deity's image, or a sacred object is believed to be a powerful form of worship. The experience is considered to be reciprocal and results in the human viewer's receiving a blessing.

this is not always organizationally feasible, TMC bears the entire burden of maintaining team cohesion. This is of particular relevance in VUCA environments characterized by shifting goalposts and correspondingly reconstituted teams.

Without sustained interaction, information exchange gradually dries up. As the trust process (cf. Möllering 2013) becomes eroded, the ultimate fragmentation of a virtual team is pre-programmed. This obviously also applies to proximate teams, but they are more likely to have easier access to fellow team members, a past history to fall back on, and fewer initial faultlines to contend with. In remote collaboration it is all too easy to relegate the physically absent to the out-group (Polzer et al. 2006), especially when an upheaval is in progress.

The question of sustainability after the initial proximate encounters was evident to the participants:

*19 Tage war ich dort beruflich unterwegs und sie haben mit uns jeden Tag etwas anderes unternommen. Seitdem ist die Zusammenarbeit ein richtiger Erfolg. Trotzdem ist es eine gefühlsmäßige Sache und ich bin mir nicht sicher, wie nachhaltig der Erfolg sein wird. (Company B/FT/07.02.2019/ Germany/390)*

As discussed in Chapter 2, the study shows that a certain degree of routinized coherence was to be achieved, but it remained a tender plant in need of constant nurturing, especially after the honeymoon stage of perceived understanding had peaked.

Consequently, an investment in rich media is an essential prerequisite. Media and the design have to be multilaterally agreed upon, also for reasons of technical availability at all sites. Then, the agreed-upon range of media has to be consistently deployed to utilize its affordances.

A communication scenario is predicated on two types of shared space: 'experimental space' for performative experimentation and 'reflective space' to discuss performance at the meta level (Kiwani & Lazaric 2019). If both spaces are successfully unified, 'Ba' (Nonaka & Konno 1998) – the common space for social and professional knowledge exchange – is created. Within such a space, gaps can be detected, explained, and bridged in a timely manner.

In intercultural teams, the reflective meta-space is particularly beneficial towards creating a cultural congruence of shared interpretations and communicative meaning. Shared space is where social interaction leads to experiential learning on a trial-and-error basis and a 'reciprocity of perspectives' (Cicourel 1970).

When facilitated competently by a cultural mediator, tacit knowledge can be made explicit, and experience distilled into knowledge. Attention can be directed towards cultural discourse practices such as cues to prevent gaps from impeding

communication effectiveness. At the same time, as interpersonal relationships develop, the likelihood of conflating individual particularities with cultural characteristics is reduced.

Communication scenarios need to be facilitated with the right combination of structure and agility. In a VUCA world lacking in predictability and control, participants are provided stability through the regularity of a structured road map for communication, e.g., on a daily or weekly basis. Agreeing upon a structure would mitigate the uncertainty created by sporadic reciprocity and unfamiliar response patterns, for instance in this 'push-pull' scenario:

*Wer spricht wen an? Soll ich den Kollegen fragen, oder darauf warten, dass er auf mich zukommt? Soll ich in der Hierarchie von oben anfangen, oder querbeet die Leute im Team abfragen, bis ich die Antwort habe?* (Company B/AH/17.06.2019/ Germany/391)

Process and communication methods such as Scrum offer a convenient structural framework to conduct interchange. However, if the sessions are structured exclusively around tasks and operate on a tight time schedule, the relational aspects which foster information sharing remain unaddressed. They are an investment in the 'groupness' of the collective, as members identify their expertise, recount their successes and failures, and acknowledge each other's abilities (De Sanctis et al. 2003).

Competent facilitation, for e.g., with a Scrum Master, includes managing the social mediation of technology through procedural communication. It is a process calling for cognition, metacognition, and social metacognition. It involves both learning *from* talk such as making cultural routines explicit to one another, and learning *to* talk (Lave & Wenger 1991 p. 108-109), e.g., by managing inclusive turn-taking for an effective information exchange.

Intercultural teams require the facilitator to be both a cultural and a process mediator. It is a process calling for cognition, metacognition, and social metacognition. In short, it requires keeping cultural aspects in mind while working out process strategies that lead to team success.

## **6.7 Concluding Remarks**

The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a spotlight on remote communication and has unexpectedly thrown up a range of issues related to this thesis. Currently, there

appears to be a continuing post-lockdown trend towards remote working in general<sup>409</sup>. As Jes Staley of Barclay's recently remarked:

"I think the notion of putting 7,000 people in a building may be a thing of the past, and we will find ways to operate with more distancing over a much longer period of time."<sup>410</sup>

'Ways to operate' is of central interest to practitioners. Some organizations are already considering hybrid approaches predicated on some proximate interaction<sup>411</sup>, but the fundamental issue of how to manage global high dispersion teams virtually remains an ongoing task.

At a practical level, what are the best ways to bridge gaps in virtual intercultural communication? What does it mean not only for team cohesion in intercultural contexts, and for professional relationships in general? This thesis suggests that now – more than ever – virtual communication needs to transcend the limitations of technology and be managed mindfully to co-construct communicative reality.

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<sup>409</sup> Twitter and Square have given employees permission to work from home "forever". (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidmorel/2020/05/26/is-home-the-new-office/#1bf2b64337d1>)

<sup>410</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/apr/29/flexible-working-will-be-norm-after-covid-19-lockdown-say-barclays-and-wpp-bosses>

<sup>411</sup> Thyssenkrupp and Deutsche Telekom favor a hybrid approach (Die Zeit, 10. June 2020, p. 18).

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## **Ehrenwörtliche Erklärung**

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass mir die Promotionsordnung der Friedrich-SchillerUniversität Jena bekannt ist.

Ferner erkläre ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit ohne unzulässige Hilfe Dritter und ohne Benutzung anderer als der angegebenen Hilfsmittel angefertigt habe. Die aus anderen Quellen direkt oder indirekt übernommenen Daten und Konzepte sind unter Angabe der Quelle gekennzeichnet.

Bei der Auswahl und Auswertung des Materials sowie der Herstellung des Manuskripts wurde mir in keiner Weise weder entgeltlich noch unentgeltlich geholfen.

Weitere Personen waren an der inhaltlich-materiellen Erstellung der Arbeit nicht beteiligt. Insbesondere habe ich hierfür nicht die entgeltliche Hilfe von Vermittlungs- bzw. Beratungsdiensten in Anspruch genommen. Niemand hat von mir unmittelbar oder mittelbar geldwerte Leistungen für Arbeiten erhalten, die im Zusammenhang mit dem Inhalt der vorgelegten Arbeit stehen.

Die Arbeit wurde bisher weder im In- noch Ausland in gleicher, ähnlicher oder anderer Form einer anderen Prüfungsbehörde vorgelegt. Ich versichere, dass ich die Wahrheit gesagt und nichts verschwiegen habe.

Hochdorf, den 20.10.2020

Vinita Balasubramanian