Virtual communication in multicultural work environment

Elli Hovinen

Author(s) Elli Hovinen	
Degree programme BBA in International Business	
Report/thesis title Virtual communication in multicultural work environment	**Number of pages and appendix pages** 46 + 2

In the last decades, new ways of communicating at work have been introduced as internationalization, as well as the increased amount of virtual communication and virtual team work, have entered the picture. This thesis examines communication in workplaces where virtual communication and culture differences collide.

The objective of the thesis is to examine how communication is currently carried out in work places, and what communication related challenges employees face. Furthermore, the study aims at finding factors which potentially lead to misunderstandings, as well as finding solutions on how misunderstandings could be prevented in the above described working environment. Using the collected data, the study explores factors which have helped the employees to successfully and effectively communicate in this modern work environment.

To limit the scope of data, it was chosen to focus in culture differences between Russia and Finland. Ten persons were interviewed with semi-structured interviews during May 2016 in Helsinki area. The interviewed persons were born and raised either in Finland or Russia, and at work they virtually communicated with persons from the other culture. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

The theoretical part of the thesis focuses on communication and culture differences which are described using the Hofstede model. Theory about virtual team work is also introduced.

The results showed that most usual challenges in communication were related to technical challenges, language barriers and culture differences. Key points for good workplace communication were to have the right persons communicating with one another, getting the point across in conversations, and making sure the messages were understood.

To make workplace communication effective, it was suggested that teams discussed about their communication habits to create a common ground for communication, and that awareness about culture related differences were brought up to the knowledge of team members.

In conclusion, it was noticed that some misunderstandings could be tackled before they even took place, by enhancing mutual understanding between team members. Beneficial for the overall communication was when the teams had an atmosphere in which asking questions was allowed and encouraged.

Keywords Virtual communication, culture differences, distributed teams,

Table of contents

1   Introduction

What kind of challenges do virtual teams face in communication, in the work places of today? What is required from a distributed team to communicate effectively at work?

The advancement of technology and internationalization have changed the way people work. Internationalization has given enterprises an access to wider talent pool as well as the ability to employ personnel across the globe. Because of this, it has become more common for employees to cooperate with colleagues and business partners from other countries, which has led to the increase of multicultural cooperation and virtual teamwork.

With this change, traditional communication habits have shifted from face-to-face meetings and phone calls, to sharing ideas at online platforms, instant messengers, emails, conference calls, and other virtual channels. While the advancement of technology has provided many improvements to e.g. communication systems, virtual communication is still new to many and can thus present its own challenges.

As concepts, culture and communication are interconnected. Since people from different cultures may not share the same presumptions, in intercultural communication messages can be interpreted very differently. Secondly, there are cultural variations in communication norms as well as in the use of virtual tools

Although Finland has been a relatively fast adapter of new technology, it is not self-evident that personnel's virtual communication skills have evolved and adapted to the change of technology hand-in-hand. This study aims at finding out how employees feel about virtual communication at work, especially when it involves persons from different cultural backgrounds.

This thesis gathers employee insight on how communication is experienced in workplaces where intercultural cooperation and virtual communication are present. By doing so, the study aims to discover factors related to the possible challenges as well as successes in communication. The factors impacting communication are presented in a review point, which was gathered to help teams reflect to their communication habits and to assess in which fields development was needed.

The main research questions are:
1. How do employees communicate in virtual and intercultural environment?
2. What communicational challenges may employees face?

In addition, this study is interested in characteristics of effective workplace communication with sub-questions:

3. What is effective workplace communication like?
4. How to make cross-cultural and virtual work communication effective?

To collect insight on the topic, the author looked for enterprises and organisations in which culture differences were present. For delimitating the scoop of the data, it was decided to focus on culture differences between Finland and Russia. Interviews were held with 10 professionals who worked in enterprises which had employees in both Finland and Russia, or which otherwise had distinct linkage in business between Finland and Russia. In the qualitative, semi structured interviews the persons were asked questions about their personal experiences in workplace communication.

The report consists of 7 parts. After the introduction, theories about communication, culture differences, and virtual teams, are introduced in chapters 2 and 3. This is followed by description of the empirical study in chapter 4. In chapters 5 and 6, the findings are explained and analysed.

This thesis is commissioned by itim International Oy, an international management consulting organisation which handles operations of a globally growing itim Group. The name itim stands for "Institute for Training in Intercultural Management" and summarises the core idea of the enterprise: providing training and tools for intercultural management as well as aid in learning about differences in national and organisational cultures.

Itim International manages 3 interconnected entities and provides them with technical solutions, material, and support. These entities are

1. the Hofstede center, which certifies and trains lecturers and practitioners in intercultural management and organizational culture based on theories developed by prof. Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede and Michael Minkov
2. a global network of trained and certified consultants who provide help to client organizations and
3. local itim country offices who additionally train and help organizations in intercultural management and organizational cultures.

Itim's products and services are constructed on prof. Geert Hofstede's theories on National and Organisational Cultures. The enterprise develops technical solutions which allow organisations to measure and develop their culture, as well as tools for learning about national cultures. By combining the theories with tools and a worldwide network of certified consultants, the organisation acts as an educational institute in the field of culture.

The author of this thesis conducted a 5-mont internship at itim International's HQ in Helsinki during summer 2015. The internship led to increased interest in national cultures and a decision for doing bachelor thesis related to communication, virtual work environment and cultural differences.

2   Communication

In Merriam-Webster online dictionary, one definition of communication is 'exchange of information'. (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2017) Cynthia Stohl defines communication as a 'collective and interactive process of generating and interpreting messages.' (Guirdham, 2011, 6) These sentences explain well of what communication is about. It has more depth than only sending and receiving messages but it's a process which can be evolved through practice, and involves interpretation.

As a process, communication requires a message sender, message receiver and a tool to transmit the message between these parties. However, the success and effectiveness of that message exchange depends on multiple factors, such as if the message will in the end be understood the same way as message sender intended. There are differences in ways mediators are able to carry some elements of the message, as well as differences in the minds of communicating persons which affects how the message elements are interpreted.

If the purpose of workplace communication is to exchange information, it should be explained that information is carried in messages which consist of units of rhetoric. One unit of rhetoric can refer to e.g. a single message in instant messaging channel, or to a phone call. Where the rhetoric units can consist of messages of written and spoken word, in virtual communication they can also be composed of emoticons, abbreviations, silences in synchronous communication channels, and so on. (Lumsden, 2008, 4)

Depending on the tool used for communication, there is a chance that some information in the rhetoric units doesn't get transmitted. Mediums may lack the ability to carry elements of the message, such as facial expressions, tones of voice, pauses, emphasis of importance, or other ques for message interpretation. In virtual communication it has been noticed that the look of emoticons on virtual platforms differ depending on the platform, which may in worst case alter the content the message sender intended to transmit. All the above can result to misunderstanding parts of the message.

When the exchanged messages are understood it can be used in creating knowledge, which is defined as 'useful and usable information'. On the other hand, if the messages are misunderstood it leads to knowledge being built on the corrupted information. Thus misunderstandings can be risky as the valuable information and knowledge may get lost in the process. Another risk is that valuable information is not recognized at all. (Brewer, 2015, 6, 20) (Lumsden, 2008, 4)

Since virtual teams operate in abstract environment, misunderstandings and miscommunication can be quite difficult to identify in early stages. As misunderstandings can go unnoticed for longer time compared to face-to-face team communication, they can become bigger problems before they are recognized, and are thus more difficult to fix.

The message and information exchange in virtual teams can be supported by structuring communication processes. Examples of communication structures could be e.g. planning team's communication and need of meetings with organization's schedule in mind, making sure that needed set-ups on technical tools side is are available to persons to use in communication, share information with team members on what tools to use for communication, and on which platform team communication should happen. Planning the team communication can help prevent miscommunication and thus increase teams' productivity. (Brewer, 2015, 18, 92, 94)

Some factors contributing to understandings as well as misunderstandings are related to language. Between languages, there are differences in ways ideas are worded and expressed, and some idioms don't translate to other languages without specific explanation. Besides this, personal differences in language proficiencies among non-native speakers affect the way individuals are able to express themselves. It has also been proven that persons with lower language proficiency levels contribute fewer ideas in conversations, compared to native or fluent speakers. (Guirdham, 2011, 116)

Especially in intercultural virtual teams, the difference in cultural expectations between team members can be a hinderer of cooperation if the differences are not recognized at first. Here the importance of personal level understanding of cultural differences comes in; although communication is a social phenomenon, it is experienced by individuals. (Guirdham, 2011, 34) Preparing the team for cultural differences in communication helps in understanding the mind set of other team members, and to reflect one's own cultural communication habits in relation to others'. Understanding where the differences lay is important, as without that knowledge it's difficult if not impossible to develop team communication towards a form that is beneficial for the team and its purpose.

A good way to help virtual teams create common ground for team communication is to use the technique of metacommunication, which can be explained as having 'communication about communication'. The purpose of this is to clarify some underlying differences in expectations regarding communication before they become issues affecting the overall information flow. By using metacommunication, teams can bring their social (cultural)

knowledge to technical, conscious level of knowledge, where the whole team can benefit from it. (Brewer, 2015, 18, 38, 92, 94)

2.1 How cultures influence communication

As concepts, communication and culture are interdependent because communication reflects one's culture, and people learn their culture through communication. (Samovar, et al., 2015, 37) To learn intercultural communication skills, it is important to first understand the concept of culture.

Cultural values have an impact on persons' actions and communication habits in a society. Humans don't universally share the same assumptions about the world because of these differences in cultural values. Since these assumptions are in some cases a prerequisite for message understanding, misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication may easily occur.

Difficulties and misunderstandings may easily arise when the communicating partners rely on different set of cultural standards and communicational rules. Cumbersome situations occur especially when people apply the cultural standards of their home culture to situations where other social rules would be more subtle or appropriate. Maureen Guirdham explains the relationship between communication and unwritten cultural rules as following:

> *"People generally use rules to interpret what they see and hear (rules of meaning) and then act on the basis of their interpretations. They employ rules of action to decide what kind of action, in this case communication action, is appropriate"* (Guirdham, 2011, 99)

With this citation it can be explained that the more the participants share assumptions and knowledge about the world, the better their communication works. (Guirdham, 2011, 33) (Samovar, et al., 2015, 339) To understand culture related conceptions better, it needs to be explained that meaningful knowledge consists of two knowledge levels combined; explicit knowledge, and tactic knowledge.

Explicit knowledge is technical know-how e.g. knowledge about how a machine works. This type of knowledge can be directly communicated. Tactic knowledge, also called social knowledge, provides context around the explicit knowledge, which again guides persons' behaviour. This information is more difficult to communicate directly, as it is often unstated. (Brewer, 2015, 20-21) An example of tactic knowledge could be e.g. when

someone at work tells "Adam is sick," the other persons will know that it also means Adam will not be working today, and they should cover up for him.

As tactic knowledge guides people by providing information on the context of information, it can be seen that differences in this level of knowledge can contribute to misunderstandings. To help the transfer of tactic knowledge, it has been found beneficial when persons build trust and establish relationships with team members they communicate with. This can be done by e.g. socialising with team members, and in online teams by adding media richness and social presence in communication. (Brewer, 2015, 20-21) (Guirdham, 2011, 356)

2.2   Theories on culture

Differences in national cultures have been studied over time by many social scientists. Well-known names in the field are e.g. Fons Tromperaars, Edward T. Hall and Geert Hofstede. The above mentioned social scientists have composed theories to describe the similarities and differences between peoples' values, norms, and behaviour in different parts of the world. Fons Trompenaars has developed the 'Trompenaars' model of national culture differences', Edward T. Hall's theory approaches on 'High and Low context cultures' and Professor Geert Hofstede's theory is known as the 'Hofstede dimensions.

These existing models unfold the topic of cultural differences from different angles. While the theories differ from one another, they share some common elements. By doing so, the theories supplement each other rather than compete or oppose one another.

Edward T. Hall's theory on High- and Low-context communication categorizes cultures by their differences communication style. In low-context communication, the information and speaker's intention is primarily communicated in the verbal content of the message. In high-context communication, the primary information lays in the non-verbal elements despite the verbal content of the message. In this style of communication, non-verbal elements and cultural aspects play very big role in the interpretation of the message. The responsibility of interpreting the information correctly is left to the message receiver. (Moksén, 2014, 19)

Fons Trompenaars' model on national culture differences was published in 1997. The model recognizes 8 different dimensions on which cultures can be compared to one another. The dimensions are called

- Universalism vs. particularism
- Individualism vs. collectivism
- Neutral vs. emotional
- Specific vs. diffuse
- Achievement vs. ascription
- Future vs. past oriented
- Polychronic vs monochronic time
- Time as a stream or a cycle

Five of the dimensions are based on differences in human relationships, and the remaining three explain how people relate to time, and their connection with the environment. (Moksén, 2014, 16-18) (Guirdham, 2011, 54) Some of the names and elements in Trompenaars' cultural dimensions are similar to Geert Hofstede's dimensions of national culture. Although these theories unveil some parts of culture in a similar way, they also bring different perspectives and ideologies on the topic.

The Hofstede model of national cultures distinguishes 6 dimensions. The dimensions were designed to reveal underlying values of societies, and by using the culture scores the model allows comparison of cultural values between two or more national cultures. The Hofstede model is explained in more detail in chapter 2.3.

2.3 The Hofstede model of national cultures

In this thesis, it was decided to focus on Hofstede's model of national cultures and use it as a framework to understand cultural differences between national cultures of Russia and Finland. In the following chapters the differences in communication styles, related to cultural values, are held in special interest. Thus, the Hofstede model is examined from communication's point of view.

The Hofstede model distinguishes dimensions of national cultures which enables the comparison of one culture's values to another with scores. Each of the six dimensions represents an aspect of cultural values, and the dimensions are further described in sub chapters below. The dimensions provide a scale with two different ends, and the score places the national cultures somewhere among the scale.

Together these 6 dimensions offer a platform for comparison. It is important to note that the score alone does not describe the culture but allows its comparison to other national cultures.

Additionally, it is important to know that the national culture scores do not define individuals, but show averages of values in societies. However, research has proven that personality and culture are not independent from one another. Comparing national culture scores shows the differences in societies' average priorities of values, onto which the individuals reflect. (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, Cultures and Organisations: software of the mind:intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival, 2010, 40,133)

2.3.1 Power Distance Index (PDI)

The two ends of the Power Distance Index (PDI) scale are called high power distance and low power distance. The scale indicates level of power distribution in a society; to which extent the less powerful members of the society accept the unequal distribution of power. Additionally, the PDI score gives information on the dependence relationships in a country, e.g. between subordinated and superiors, as well as parents and children. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 61)

Looking at the way children are brought up explains well the differences in Power Distance Index. In countries with large Power Distance index, children are brought up to show respect towards parents and older relatives, not to experiment themselves, nor to show independent behaviour. Similar kind of hierarchical system and respect towards persons with more authority can be seen at work places. Organisations in large-power-distance societies have hierarchical systems where the power is centralized to few. In high PDI societies it is unlikely for subordinates to contradict their superiors, and paternalistic and autocratic management styles are preferred. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 67-73)

In countries with small power distance index, parents encourage children to experiment themselves and also treat children quite much as equals. Age and status do not play a big role on how people behave towards others. Similarly, the hierarchical pyramids in workplaces of small PDI countries are flat, and superiors and subordinates treat each other much like equals. The hierarchical system only displays inequality of *roles*, which is accepted by subordinates. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 67, 74)

In small power distance index societies there's limited dependence of subordinates on bosses. At workplaces subordinates expect their superiors to consult them in decisions, and subordinates may easily approach their superiors, to even contradict them.

The differences in Power Distance index can influence communication. For example, in cultures with comparatively high power distance direct communication between members

of different hierarchies is generally inhibited, which leads to lower levels of disclosure and openness. (Guirdham, 2011, 106)

2.3.2 Individualism vs Collectivism (IDV)

The core dimension of Hofstede theory is a scale of Individualism vs Collectivism. The different ends of the scale define differences in ways people see themselves and their family. This dimension explains how the roles of individual and group are felt differently. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 90) The two ends of this scale could be described as following:

In individualistic societies people are expected to only look after themselves and their immediate family. Usually personal interests override the interest of the group. It is thought that a healthy person isn't supposed to be dependent on a group, and independent decision making and experimenting is encouraged. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 91-92)

In communication, it is thought that "speaking one's mind is a virtue." Honesty and telling about one's feelings is thus encouraged, even in difficult situations when telling the truth hurts. In these communities, adults are expected to be able to take direct feedback constructively. Clashing opinions and confrontations are accepted, as they may help in finding truth. Changing facts for maintaining harmony in communication is not justified. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 107)

In collectivistic societies, the importance of belonging to in-groups is highlighted; in-group bonds continue throughout lifetime and persons who were integrated to a group from a young age see the group as part of one's identity. Because it is felt that belonging to an in-group gives security and protection, disloyalty or dishonour to the group would be "one of the worst things a person can do." (Hofstede, et al., 91, 92, 107)

In most collectivistic cultures, it is considered rude to directly confront another person. If possible, one should avoid actions which could clash with society's harmony and consensus. For example, discussing a subordinate's performance directly with them may be felt as a loss of face by the subordinate. Feedback in these societies is given in more subtle ways, e.g. as indirect communication via an intermediary, or by asking for normal favours. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 122)

The essential of in-group and out-group thinking affects to business relationships in these societies. It helps members of specific in-groups to get hired, and also grants preferential treatment to customers of important in-groups. In collectivistic societies it is seen as un-

ethical if one doesn't recognize the power of in-group and threat these members better than others. In individualistic societies, the opposite of this behaviour is the norm and preferential treatment of one customer over others would be considered bad business. (Hofstede, et al., 118,122)

2.3.3 Masculinity vs Femininity (MAS)

This dimension describes the differences in the societies' dominant values, where the opposite poles desire either assertive behaviour (Masculine pole) or modest behaviour (Feminine pole). Differences are seen in the way how the "emotional gender roles" are distinct; in a masculine society it is expected that men should be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, and women should be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. However, in feminine society the emotional gender roles overlap and both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 140)

On the masculine pole of the scale, the dominant values are achievements and success. In organisations, work goal items are high earnings, recognition, opportunities for advancement and having challenges. Organisations reward people based on performance, and stress results. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 139, 167)

On the feminine pole of the scale, the societies' dominant values are caring for others and quality of life. Organizations' work goal items are having a good relationship with one's direct superior, cooperating well with others, living in an area which one desires, and having security of employment. In feminine societies, organisations reward people more based on equality, meaning according to need as opposed to performance. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 167)

There are differences in ways the societies in masculine and feminine cultures resolve conflicts in workplace: masculine cultures feel that a good fight should resolve conflicts, and feminine cultures prefer compromising and negotiating in conflict resolving. (Hofstede, et al., 166)

2.3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) describes the differences in the scale of how societies tolerate ambiguous and unpredictability. The way people feel under unpredictable situa-

tions in life is acquired and learned, and as people's behaviour reflects the cultural values it may seem incomprehensible to other societies. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 189-191,120)

In some societies, uncertainty is experienced as something uncomfortable and it creates the feeling of anxiety among the members of the society. These cultures can be described as uncertainty-avoiding cultures, and are scored with comparatively high UAI score. In these societies, there's an emotional need for rules and laws because they lead to a feelings of predictability and control. Even ineffective rules can bring comfortability because of the feeling of structure in environment. Generally, high UAI societies view is close to 'what is different is dangerous'. (Hofstede, et al., 201, 209)

In strong UAI cultures people tend to be expressive and talk with their hands. It's felt socially acceptable to show emotions, e.g. to raise one's voice or to pound the table. Also, in these cultures people like to work hard or to otherwise be busy, as time is very much valued. In cultures which avoid uncertainty, organisations contain more specialists compared to in cultures of weak UAI index: people strongly believe in expertise. In schools, teachers are expected to be experts and to have all the answers. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 196-211)

In low UAI societies, uncertain situations are not experienced as something that's threatening; instead people are not comfortable with too many rules and regulations. They refer to time as framework but don't feel the need to watch it all the time. 'Different' isn't experienced as something that is dangerous but rather as something people are curious about.

In uncertainty-accepting cultures people like to relax more compared to high UAI societies and are less anxious. There's no urge to constantly be active. People believe in common sense and in schools, students are ok with teacher not having all the answers. In low UAI cultures it is not socially acceptable to show emotions aggressively or noisily. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 196-211)

2.3.5 Pragmatism (PRA)

This dimension describes the differences in ways people relate to the future, by describing the poles of short-term (normative) orientation and long-term (pragmatic) orientation. The scores on the scale describe different points of view regarding tradition, importance of leisure time versus work, and how fast people expect to gain profit in business.

Short term oriented societies prefer maintaining traditions and fulfilling social obligations. People experience family pride and are concerned with loss of face as well as social statuses. Societal change is something that people feel suspicious about.

In general, it is felt that efforts in business should bring quick results. At work, the importance of this year's profits is highlighted, as opposed to planning profits in many years ahead. In personal lives, people value their leisure time. Also, it is socially accepted to spend money as opposed to preference of saving. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 243, 251, 275)

The opposite pole of long-term orientation can be summarised with "the fostering of virtues oriented toward future rewards - in particular, perseverance and thrift." (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 239) These cultures have respect for circumstances over traditions, and societies look at other countries and societies to learn from them.

At work, organisations value the importance of profits in the future, as opposed to now. Also, in personal lives people are sparing with resources and prefer saving versus spending money. In long-term oriented societies, it is thought that success comes from effort, and it is thought that leisure time is not important. This is very different from short-term oriented societies, where it is thought that success is luck, and leisure time is valuable. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 243, 251, 275)

2.3.6 Indulgence vs Restraint (IVR)

The dimension of indulgence introduces differences in ways societies allows people to implement their desires and impulses; are these desires extensively controlled, or generally liberated.

The pole called 'indulgence' refers to societies, in which it is socially felt ok to e.g. spend money and act as one pleases. People have a sense of freedom to choose, without social restrictions. In these societies, culture allows the feeling of enjoying leisure time and having fun. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 281)

On the pole called 'restraint' is it felt that cultural norms as well as societal prohibitions restrict, to some extent, of what persons can do. The feeling of enjoyment of leisurely activities, spending, and other indulgencies are felt as something that is 'wrong'. Thus, restraint behaviour is more tolerated. (Hofstede, et al., 2010, 281)

2.3.7 Comparison of Finnish and Russian cultures using the Hofstede model

In this chapter, we compare national culture scores of Finland and Russia with the Hofstede model. The cultural dimensions with most remarkable difference in scores are Power Distance (Finland with score 33 and Russia 93), Uncertainty avoiding index (Finland 59, Russia 95), Pragmatism (Finland 38, Russia 81) and Indulgence (Finland 57, Russia

20). With these measures, it can be stated that the national cultures of Finland and Russia differ quite remarkably.

Hofstede model on national culture
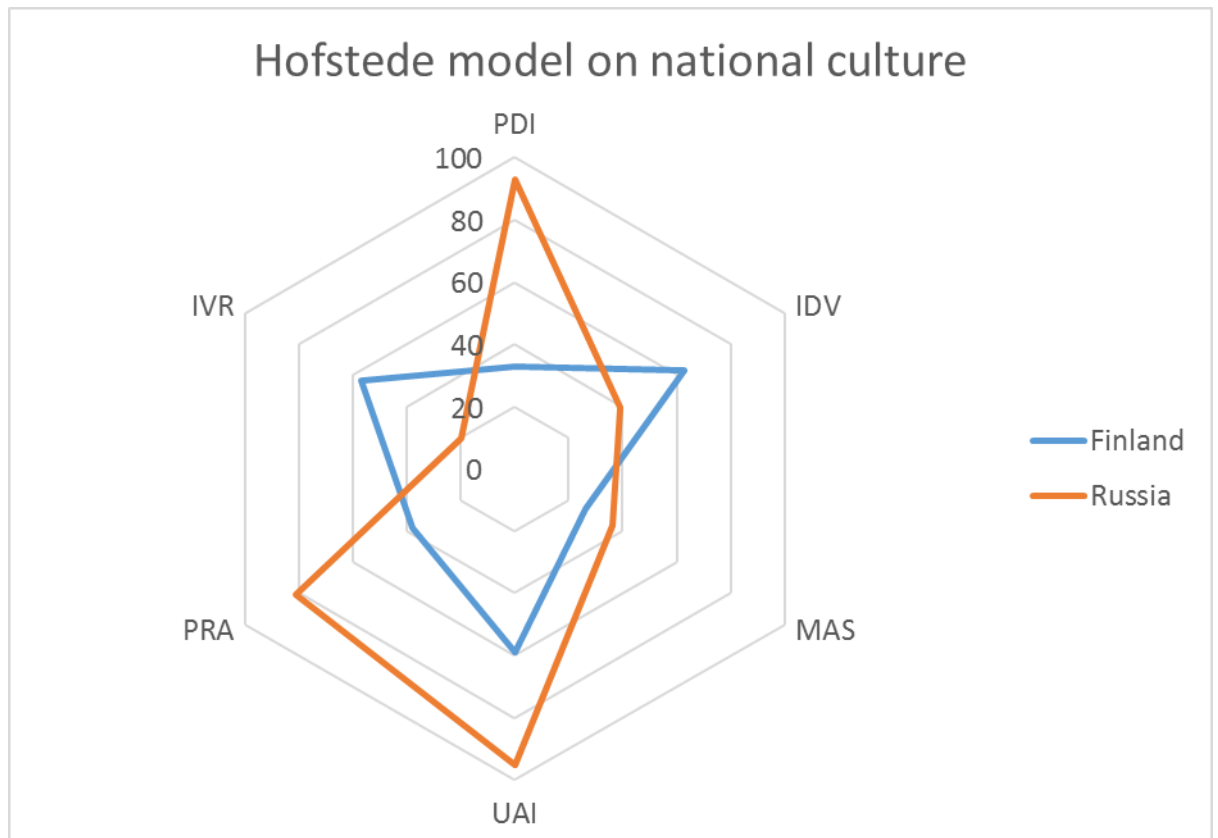
Differences in Power Distance Index may impact communication in situations where e.g. superior and subordinate come from different cultural backgrounds, and are thus used to different approaches in leadership. Another difference in views could be related to time required of responding to questions, when the co-operating persons worked for different organizations cross-culturally. For example, in Finland, hierarchical pyramids in organizations are relatively flat and because of that persons in higher positions are available for questions. In societies with comparatively taller hierarchical pyramids, such as in Russia, it may be needed from a person to use another person as a mediator when passing the question to higher levels of the organization. Thus the process takes comparatively longer time.

In Uncertainty avoiding index, Russia has a distinct score of 95 whereas Finland scores 59. This means both societies experience emotional need of rules to predict and control their operating environment. Because Finland's score is comparatively low in relation to Russia, it may be that Russians feel to some extent uncomfortable with the 'looseness' of the Finnish operating environment. On the other hand, Finns may be surprised by how

expressive Russian partners can be with their body language, since in cultures with high UAI pounding the table is socially accepted, as well as showing emotions.

In the dimension of Pragmatism, Finland and Russia are clearly distinct. In Russia, the orientation is towards planning for the future, to saving and enjoying the business profits in a longer run. Finland's score is closer to the normative pole where it is expected to focus on near future and enjoy successes relatively quickly.

When comparing Finland and Russia's cultures in the dimension of Indulgence, it can be seen that Russia is closer to the 'restraint' pole with score of 20, whereas Finland scores 57 and is placed quite in the middle of scale. Cultures which are more 'restraint' experience that it isn't socially OK to act as one pleases, to spend money, or allow other indulgencies. Compared to Russia, Finnish culture allows persons to more freely choose how they wish to spend their time.

3   Virtual teams and virtual workspaces

In this thesis, the term 'virtual team' refers to a group of 2 or more persons who work for a common goal but are distributed to physically different locations. These teams operate in environment which is called virtual workspace or virtual workplace; an environment which consists of a combination of technological solutions to share information and to communicate with employees and customers.

The number of virtual teams and virtual workplaces has increased year by year. Often traditional work can be combined with work in virtual workspaces. Utilising virtual work is beneficial to enterprises in many ways.

For traditional offices, virtual work has created opportunities as employees can participate to projects and meetings remotely. Reduced amount of business trips lowers enterprise's expenses in traveling and accommodation, and as travel time is reduced, it makes more resources available with added flexibility to personal schedules. Besides this, virtual work enables global recruiting for assembling teams with most suitable persons to work together. (Brewer, 2015, 9,18) (Khashchanskaya & Novik, 2010, 16) (Bergiel, Bergiel, & Balsmeier, 2008) (Chia, 2016)

Compared to work done in traditional offices, virtual teams' operational environment is quite abstract. Because of this, possible problems can be more difficult to identify in early stages, and misunderstandings can go undetected in virtual team communication for longer time compared to face-to-face team communication. While problems or misunderstandings are not early noticed, they can become much bigger before they are recognized. This often makes the problems more difficult to fix. (Brewer, 2015, 18-25) (Chia, 2016)

Virtual teams need tools for obtaining communication among team members. In virtual communication, messages are passed via mediums such as emails, instant messaging tools, video calls, and audio calls. Choosing which mediums are best for carrying messages in team work depends on the task as well as the communicating persons. Often combining various mediums in work communication helps the communicating individuals to transfer information with needed ques as well as to reach others' attention within desired time frame. (Brewer, 2015, 94, 96)

4   Empirical study

The aim of this thesis is to discover how employees experience virtual and intercultural communication at their work. The study is interested in discovering which factors make communication in virtual environment successful and effective. It also aims at finding out which factors lead to challenges, and how misunderstandings could be prevented in the above described working environment.

The research was conducted as empirical research as the wanted findings were much dependent on personal experiences. As the nature of this study is exploratory and aim is to seek understanding in the participants' work environment, a qualitative research method was chosen for conducting this study. (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015, 4) Interviewing the target group members with semi-structured interviews gave space to ask for clarification, and gave freedom to ensure that interviewed persons understood the questions.

In total 10 semi-structured interviews were held; 1 group-interview with 2 participants through Microsoft Skype audio call, and 8 one-on-one face-to-face interviews. All interviews were held in Helsinki area during May 2016.

Two persons were interviewed with a separate question set ('Expert interview') that allowed the interviewees to compare communicational and cultural differences more in detail. These persons were born in Russia and had lived in Finland for several years, which had given the interviewees recognizable understanding in differences in communication styles between Finnish and Russian cultures. The remaining 8 interviews were held with the standard question set, both of which can be found at the appendixes of this thesis.

In the qualitative interviews the persons were asked questions regarding their personal experiences in workplace communication. The interview started with general questions about the person and their working background. This was followed with questions about the person's insight on the topic. The order of the questions varied between interviewed persons as some additional questions might have arisen in between, and at times questions were asked in different order for better interview flow.

All interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. As all individual interviews were held in Finnish, the main points of the transcriptions were translated into English. After this the answers were re-grouped by question, and analysed. Data of two expert interviews was separately analysed as the interview questions were partly different to the question set of other interviews.

4.1 Target group

The target group of this study is employees who, at their work, regularly communicate throug computer mediated virtual communication channels, with persons from different culture than their own culture.

In order to gather insight and data on the topic, the author found organisations which either had employees in two different countries, or ortherwise did close cooperation with organisation in another country. The study did not limit the fields on which the organisations or employees operated.

For adding cohesion and making it easier to compare cultural factors, it was chosen to delimitate the sampling to co-operation and communication between Finnish and Russian persons. Finland and Russia were selected as the target cultures because of their relatively distinct cultural differences, which can be noticed in literature of national culture differences.

Interviews were held to in total 10 employees. The interviewed persons were born and raised either in Finland or Russia, and at work they virtually communicated with persons from the other culture. In case the person worked with colleagues from many nationalities they were asked to think about communication where Finns and Russians were present.

The interviewed persons were white-collar workers and held different positions and roles in their home organizations. Their working positions varied from CEO to managerial levels (operations manager, product manager, project manager), to IT specialists and marketing specialists. Collectively, in their jobs the interviewed persons were responsible for the following fields: brand management, product portfolio coordination, development of the organization, business advising with specialty in Finnish-Russian trade, project and communication management in cross-border projects, customer project implementation and project supervising, product development and software development, marketing communications, reporting news articles and creating social media content.

The interviewed persons worked in 5 different organizations. All interviewed persons worked in teams of 2 persons or more, which consisted of employees of Finnish and Russian background. It was agreed with the interviewees that their names as well as the names of their organizations shall not be published in the thesis.

4.2 Interview questions

The interview questions were chosen to be in line with the main research questions. The questions' objective was to seek information on the interviewed persons' experiences and ways of communicating in their work environment. The main interview questions were divided into sub-questions per topic, aiming to find answers related to the main topics of the study. Before the actual interviews, the questions were re-organized into an order which would allow the interview to have what the author experienced as a 'natural flow'.

Depending on the interview, the questions may have been asked in different order because of the human factor. If during the interview it was felt that by the author that the interviewed person's answers were drifting in a direction on which another question felt more fitting, the order of questions was changed.

The interviewed persons were explained that in this study the wording "team communication" was used to refer to any communication where two or more people were present. Also, it was explained that in the mixture of face-to-face and virtual communication, the study was especially interested in the kind of communication where mediators, such as computer technology, was present. Interviewees were asked to especially think of their communication where persons from another culture were present.

How do employees communicate in virtual and intercultural environment?
To gather information about the persons' work environment, the interviewees were asked to describe their virtual team communication as well as communication habits with following questions:

Please tell me about the virtual team communication in your work environment.
- *What channels do you use for communication (online call, email, video meetings, chats…)?*
- *How frequently do you communicate with each other?*
- *What language do you use in communication?*

Has your team established structured code of communication (e.g. what channels to use, whom to contact in questions, or how detailed the sent messages should be, etc)?

It was found interesting to add questions about meeting persons face-to-face, as well as virtual team socializing. Theory about cross-cultural communication emphasized importance of socializing with distributed team members, as it would potentially result in improved efficiency in communication. Besides this, the ability to meet distantly working

team members face-to-face was found beneficial for quality of communication in the litera-
ture.

Have you met people you work with face-to-face? / How often do you meet the persons
you work with face-to-face?
In your point of view, how important is it to socialize, e.g. to chat about non-work related
topics with virtual team members from other cultures?

What communicational challenges may employees face?
For collecting some of the most important data regarding the thesis topic, the following
questions were asked:

When thinking of the virtual work communication between you and your colleagues, are
there any challenges?
Are there any examples of misunderstandings you'd like to share?
In your working environment, what is done, or, what could be done, to prevent misunder-
standings?

Would you agree with the statements below?
"I often face misunderstanding in virtual communication"
        Why yes/why not?
"I often face misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication"
        Why yes/why not?
At any point of your career, have you received any training for cultural differences be-
tween you and your colleagues' national cultures?
At any point of your career, have you received any training for virtual communication?

With these questions, the study aimed to pinpointing the factors contributing to misunder-
standings, causes of challenges, and how employees experience the challenges in work
communication. The study also wanted to see if the employees had received training in
communication and if it was common for organizations to provide training about communi-
cation for their employees.

Characteristics of effective workplace communication
In addition to the above, this study is interested in the characteristics of effective work
communication and finding factors contributing to successes in communication. The study
aimed at collecting techniques and insights on factors which had helped the interviewed

team members to make their team communication 'good'. Similarly, the interview asked about solutions for preventing misunderstandings.

When thinking of the virtual work communication between you and your colleagues, what is working well? Could you share some examples?
In your opinion what is effective work communication like? What does it mean to you?

In the literature of virtual and cross-cultural communication, it was pointed out that understanding differences in national cultures was important factor in preventing culture-related misunderstandings. Interested in this, question regarding adaptation to others' communication styles were asked.

What advice would you give others working in similar circumstances on how to make intercultural and virtual work communication effective?
Do you feel that you change or adapt your way of working, when you are working together with colleagues from another culture? If yes, in what way? Could you share some examples?
Do you see any differences in communication habits when comparing Finnish and Russian workplaces?
Do you find any differences in the ways virtual communication (emails, video calls etc) is used in Russian and Finnish organizations/work places?
Are there any differences, related to communication, which Finnish and Russian employees should be aware of in cooperation?
How could misunderstandings be prevented in cross-cultural communication? What could employees do?
Are there any differences in socializing habits when comparing the ways Finnish and Russian employees socialize at work?
What are your thoughts about face-to-face meetings? Do you see differences in ways Finns and Russians relate to them?

Two persons were interviewed with partly different question set because of their distinguished understanding in cultural differences between Finnish and Russian national cultures. The above mentioned questions are a combination of both of the used question sets. The interview questions in full can be found in appendixes 1 and 2.

5 The findings and results

The findings and results of this thesis are presented in three sub-chapters based on the main research questions:

How do employees communicate in virtual and intercultural work environment?
What communicational challenges may employees face?
Characteristics of effective workplace communication

The objective of the thesis is to find factors which could help in enabling effective and successful communication in virtual and cross-cultural work environment. First, the employee insight on how communication is carried out and experienced in intercultural and virtual workplaces, is introduced in chapter 5.1. That is followed by chapter 5.2, in which the study looks into communicational challenges the co-workers had experienced, and what has caused these challenges.

In chapter 5.3 the interviewed persons' thoughts on effective work communication and its characteristics are in focus. On basis of the findings in chapters 5.1 and 5.2, the study introduces insights on how cross-cultural and virtual work communication could be made effective. The study also gathered a review point onto which virtual teams, virtual workplaces, and persons may reflect their communicational habits to. The purpose of the review point is to help in identifying elements of virtual team communication, which, once checked for improvements, have potential in leading the virtual and cross-cultural teams towards more effective and successful virtual communication. This theme is discussed in chapter 5.4.

For some of the interviewed persons, it was difficult to analyze communication as a subject, because it is integrated in multiple daily activities and not often thought as a process of its own. It was brought up that lack of communication was more often noticed, and reflecting to that, communication should be frequent enough for the work communication to be 'good'.

Communication was assessed as an important element for business, as it was used in building and maintaining relationships with others. It was recognized that whenever organizations were co-operating with one another, the co-operation was in the hands of the employees in those organizations. Thus, inter-personal communication was always in a big role in business.

5.1 How do employees communicate in virtual and intercultural work environment?

The interviewed persons were required to cooperate with each other frequently, especially in small organizations. The majority of the interviewed persons (80%) communicated virtually with their foreign colleagues on daily basis, while the rest of the interviewed persons exchanged messages on weekly or monthly basis.

The most often used language in communication between the interviewed team members (of Finnish and Russian nationalities) was English. In some occasions, the proficiency in English language was not on the same level among team members, which was then resolved by choosing a spokesperson who knew English comparatively better. The spokesperson shared sub-team's updates in meetings, and translated instructions and questions to other team members if needed.

In bilingual workplaces, the language which was used in communication often depended on the team members and their personal strengths. Occasionally the team used a mixture of several languages in communication; Finnish, English, and Russian, assuming all team members knew all 3 languages.

To help information sharing, it was common to schedule weekly or semi-weekly meetings with the team members. These meetings were usually held as conference calls with shared screen or video connection complementing the audio conversation. Other common structures for communication were meetings which were scheduled according to home organizations' action plans. For example, when an organization followed an annual plan, virtual team's meetings were usually scheduled in relation to the annual plan as well. Teams specified the content of upcoming events in their virtual meetings, and then followed up the teams' progress in relation to the plan's items.

In IT product development, the structure of working in 2-week cycles, 'sprints', was used, and virtual communication followed it accordingly. At the beginning of a sprint, team members had a start meeting to plan the distribution of new assignments and to communicate what was relevant for the new 2-week working period. At the end of the sprint, second meeting was held to check with the development of the distributed tasks, to assess the work, to give feedback, and to discuss where the work should proceed next.

The interviewed persons had found the sprints framework a good way for monitoring work's progress. It also created a sense of security; in case of miscommunication, the

work with misunderstood specifications could go on unnoticed for two weeks maximum. Often the communication cycles were complemented with mid-sprint meetings, instant messaging via chat, and email exchange when necessary. If there was a need to explain something more in detail, an audio call was scheduled.

Some organizations had also shared general communication related guide lines with their employees. These instructions were regarding e.g. response times in organization's internal and external emailing, and instructions for finding the right channel for communication. For example, in some organizations it was preferred to send technical questions via email as opposed to via messenger. Besides this, some team members had received instructions regarding work distribution, e.g. questions related to topic X should be addressed to person X.

Many interviewed persons explained that communication in their virtual teams was open and transparent. Persons were encouraged to ask questions if anything was unclear, which was found as a positive factor for solving underlying misunderstandings in early stages. It was stated by several persons that good atmosphere in virtual communication, as well as being able to communicate with colleagues in informal language, were factors that were experienced profitable for the overall communication.

The channels used in virtual team communication on daily basis were email, and instant messenger for online chatting. When needed, the persons communicated with each other via audio-, video-, and conference calls. Besides the daily communication, information and message exchange was supported by scheduled weekly or semi-weekly meetings. In addition to these tools, some teams used project management tools for following up work progress, as well as bundling project related information together.

The communication channel was chosen based on the team's communicational needs, which depended on the task on hand. One factor contributing to choosing of the message mediator was related to time; if persons needed to receive one's attention right away, they used chat (instant messenger) or audio calls. Messages that didn't require instantaneous answers were distributed via email or internal project/task management platforms.

Email was found good for administrative communication in organization, for sharing formal information, and for communicating with external parties, e.g. clients. For interactive team work, email was evaluated to be to slow form of message exchange. Instead, teams used messengers for interactive instantaneous team communication, as well as for getting quick updates on work on progress, and in coordinating work between colleagues. For

chat to function well it was found essential that persons should be online whenever they were at work; this was a visible que that the person was at one's reach.

Video calls and conference calls were most often used for scheduled meetings, e.g. to share updates with team members on weekly basis, or in the beginning and end of a project. Conference calls were found good for reaching many people at once, as they mimicked real-life meetings. The downsides of video and conference calls were related to technical challenges on e.g. audio connections or difficulties in the use of software. The technical problems were experienced hard to resolve while persons were in an ongoing meeting.

Web-cameras were used in conference calls whenever they were available in meeting rooms or personal laptops. In one-on-one conversations or in small groups, use of web camera depended on the team members; some preferred to see each other's faces when talking, while some didn't feel that seeing the other would have brought any extra value.

Interview data suggests that best results in virtual communication were found when multiple communication channels were used together to match team's communicational needs; e.g. in a conference call one person shared their screen to enable everyone to look at the tickets at project management tool together. This was also found as a solution to a problem of people speaking about different topics at a meeting, without realizing it.

The two expert interviews brought new perspective to the data of how employees communicated, when comparing Russian and Finnish habits. The interviewed expert reminded that people in different cultures had adapted different ways of using everyday tools, such as email. In communication between Russian business partners, email was used similarly to messenger; the messages usually consisted of one or two sentences and were frequently sent between the communicating persons. In comparison, in communication between Finnish business partners, the emails usually consisted of multiple thoughts which were gathered onto a longer message or list, before sending. Regarding this, Finnish persons also sent fewer messages.

These differences in the use of everyday communication tools may come across as 'odd' to the counter partner, which could result in them questioning the other's professionality. On the other hand, each communicating partner thinks their own way of communicating is 'normal'.

On global stage, it should be noticed that not every place is on the same level of technical development as virtual communication is rather new. An interviewed expert stated that when communicating with their Russian business partner, who was located in a medium sized city in Russia, a suggestion of a Skype call was a surprise to the Russian partner. Although Skype was used as a tool, it was mostly used amongst friends for non-official chatting and not in a business sense, nor in workplaces.

In Finland, big and mid-size companies have adapted the use of virtual tools, e.g. video conferencing, in enterprise's 'normal' ways of communication. However, this was not the case yet in every city in Russia. The interviewed expert explained that the biggest cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, could be comparable to Finland and big European cities when it comes to technical equipment and use of virtual communication tools in business environment. However, in other Russian cities the use of virtual communication tools may not yet naturally exist. Thus it shouldn't be assumed that everyone had access to microphone and conferencing software.

5.1.1 Virtual socializing and face-to-face meetings

In the literature of virtual and intercultural communication, socializing with team members was found as an important factor for trust building. The interviewed persons were asked about how often they met face-to-face as well as about their virtual socializing habits, where chatting about non-work-related topics was brought up as an example.

The frequency of face-to-face meetings varied among teams. Some team members met each other in the beginning of the long-term cooperation, after which the communication was handled virtually. Other teams met face-to-face 1 to 3 times a year, whereas some recalled the need to meet more than 3 times a year.

The need for meeting with one's virtual colleagues in person, varied. For example, one interviewed persons met with their distantly located colleagues more than 3 times a year, but nevertheless felt that face-to-face meetings happened "quite little" and "too rarely". The need for meetings might also be related to work responsibilities; in roles with much responsibility, e.g. where strategic decisions or decisions impacting other teams' work were made, support through co-located meetings could be needed more often.

The importance of face-to-face meetings was heavily emphasized in the interview data. Physical meetings were found as the most important way of socializing. The most remarkable chances for socializing took place after working hours when visiting remote team

members. When the persons were in 'neutral environment' and clearly off working hours, personal matters were discussed.

Increasing the number of face-to-face meetings had been discussed in some organizations, but often it was a question of resources. In large virtual teams, it was found impossible for everyone to meet their co-workers in person. Replacing physical meetings with virtual connections also resulted in remarkable savings for the organization.

Some interviewed persons stated it would be nice to meet with their distant colleagues more often, while some didn't recall the need for meeting more frequently, as long as they had met their remote colleagues in person at some point of the cooperation. Below is an answer to a question whether the interviewed person felt face-to-face meetings were important:

> *"I don't know, it of course brings people closer in some way, even the opinions may be very different from your opinions. Perhaps it makes the other person seem more human and humane, as you have at least seen them and they are other than 'someone you've maybe sometimes talked to on the phone'."*

It was explained that when co-workers had met each other face-to-face and had had the chance for holding 'natural' conversations without mediators, the good spirit was quite easily sustained in virtual cooperation. The interviewed persons assessed that if social communication between the co-workers was solely built on virtual tools, virtual socializing would hardly take place at all.

It was also assessed that socializing in virtual work environment developed slowly compared to face-to-face socializing. Reasons for this laid in not knowing what the communicating persons had in common, nor how their messages would be reacted to. It was also stated that e.g. Skype and emails were not found as the right channels for socializing at work, according to the interview data.

Some challenges in socializing could be pointed out. When distributed team members met in person, some were more active chatters than the others, and some didn't say anything at all. One cause limiting the chances to bond and socialize with team members was language skills on personal level.

The most common answer to question *"Do you think it's important to have non-work-related communication as a part of your virtual communication?"* was: *"I don't know"*. Many of interviewed persons found it unnecessary to talk about topics that were not work-related, whereas some stated it would be nice to have ways of socializing with their coworkers as the breakroom conversations didn't often take place in their current, virtual work.

What repeatedly came up in the interviews was that work related communication and socializing, e.g. chatting about personal life, were clearly separated conversation topics, when at work. Most of the interviewed persons referred to the possible culture gap in communication habits on this matter. It was felt that especially in the Russian working culture, business was business, and chatting about personal topics was left aside from it. The interviewed experts confirmed this presumption; the experts found cultural differences in ways how Finnish and Russian persons socialized in their own culture.

When experts were asked about differences in communication between Finland and Russian cultures, they explained there is more of face-to-face communication in work places in Russia compared to Finland. To summarize differences in socializing habits, it was found by the interviewed experts that in Russian culture, social chatting was usually held on tea breaks whereas in Finnish culture it was usually OK to chat about non-work related topics while working:

> *"Yes, I think it's more unfamiliar to the Russian culture for someone to ask how you're doing. In Russia, those kinds of conversations are maybe more held during tea breaks."*

> *"Personal discussions and questions are kept separate. It could also be the same channel for that, for example Skype, but it needs to be not amongst business talk but separate from that."*

When the interviewed experts were asked to compare Finnish and Russian ways of socializing at work place, Russian culture was described to have comparatively more willingness to share about their families, kids, and hobbies with one another. In contrary, Finnish persons shared less about their personal lives with co-workers. When looking at this more closely, from the Russian point of view it may be that Finnish persons seemed somewhat reserved when it came to talking about personal matters. In contrary, Russian style of social chatting was found more lively, active, and humoristic compared to Finnish

socializing habits. However, big differences were in when this socializing took place; during breaks or among work.

It shouldn't be disregarded that personal variables affect in ways people relate to sharing personal matters at virtual workplaces. How openly persons share about themselves or socialize in general, can't be generalized to the level of individuals. Societies however can be compared to one another.

Additionally, it was stated in the interviews that not all matters were solvable in virtual communication. For example, in cross-organizational business cooperation it was worthy to have face-to-face meetings and meet the possible business partners in person. Physical meetings helped to create bonds between the co-operating parties, which again helped in building mutual trust and eases the virtual communication in the future.

5.2   Challenges in communication

To gather relevant data for the thesis, the interviewed persons were asked to reflect to two statements; "I often face misunderstanding in virtual communication" and "I often face misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. The chart below explains the data on how the interviewed persons answered these questions about misunderstandings.

"I often face misunderstandings in _____ communication"
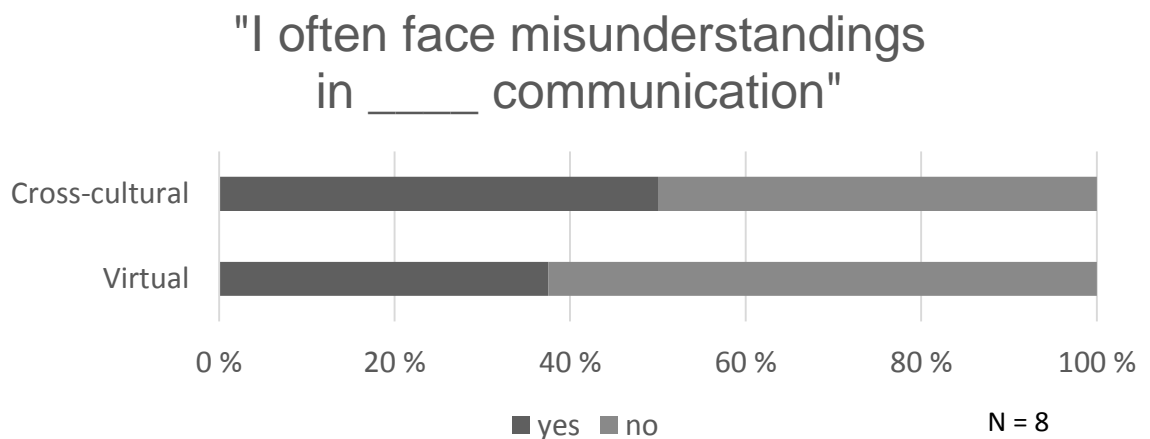
50% of the interviewed persons stated they often faced misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication, and 37,5% (three out of eight persons) felt like they often faced challenges in virtual communication. These misunderstandings could either have taken place in their personal work or be misunderstandings they had spotted among their colleagues. Although misunderstandings were not the sole challenge in communication, it can be thought that misunderstandings reflected the state of how communication worked in the teams, in general.

The data on this question was dispersed; persons who didn't experience misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication however felt that they did face misunderstandings in virtual communication, and vice versa. There were two persons in total who felt that they didn't experience misunderstandings in either of the categories. Looking at these persons' profiles more closely, it shows that both were clearly experts one of the fields; either in culture (with more than 20 years of experience) or in work management and IT.

It could be argued that the remarkable experience in either of the fields had helped these persons to develop an eye for preventing miscommunication before they occurred, as well as helped the persons to develop communication techniques to fit the best with their message exchange habits. The above mentioned person, working in IT field, explained that facing misunderstandings in virtual communities wasn't a problem since at times it was felt that more work misunderstandings at work were experienced in face-to-face communication. When working with IT, it can be also stated that virtual tools had been well adapted as 'normal' communication tools within the field of work.

In many cases, it was challenging for the interviewees to point out if the misunderstandings were caused by cultural differences or by communication through a virtual mediator. Both factors have possibly had an impact in the cause of misunderstanding, as the comments and arguments to these questions were overlapping to some extent.

The interviewed persons were asked to think of possible challenges they had faced their work communication, and to describe these challenges. To bring structure to the answers, the challenges found in the interviews can be roughly partitioned into three different themes which all, individually and combined, had an impact in challenges in communication:

- language skills
- cultural differences - misunderstanding 'the other'
- technical challenges - tools related challenges

Each interviewed person emphasized language as one of their main reasons for communicational challenges at work. To majority of the interviewees, the language used in communication was English, which was none of the interviewed persons' mother tongue. Even when the technical knowledge of the language was at good level, difficulties arose with understanding each other's accents and in different ways of pronunciation in speaking.

According to an interviewed expert, employees in both Finland and Russia often had insecurities about their language proficiency. When communicating in their non-native language, persons felt insecure about their capabilities of expressing themselves professionally in writing, which then resulted in delays in sending messages. For example, persons felt that an email they wrote in English didn't meet the standards of what communication in their level in the organization should be like. Another thought around the same topic was that responding messages took relatively long time because people thought more carefully of ways to express themselves in a foreign language, in order to get message across well and to prevent misunderstandings from arising.

The concept of small talk was not native in either Finnish or Russian culture, but it was involved when the colleagues spoke English with one another. One Finnish interviewee mentioned cases when small talk had not taken place naturally in the beginning of a video conference. The purpose of the "how is the weather" inquiry was misunderstood in Russia as formal question, and was answered with "why do you ask?" This example describes how differently co-operating persons may interpret the context of question, when the cultural, tactical knowledge was not shared to interpret the information in the message.

An interviewed, bilingual person, explained that Russian as a language was very delicate with nuances of words. These nuances didn't always translate in English, which meant that messages could have been understood better in general, if one knew the cultural context behind the message. One person shared their thoughts about misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication with the following comment:

> *"Especially when I think of my Finnish colleagues, they might not always understand the point of the message. But it is not severe, if there was a scale for this question I would rate it in the middle of the scale."*

It should be noticed that individual workloads affect communication. When persons are overburdened with work, they might lose capability to react on messages in time which reflects to message receiving persons' work performance. The lack of sharing information or absence of important pieces of information can generate problems. Receiving missing pieces of information too late can have the same result.

Similarly, an interviewed person shared their insight about how personal factors affect communication. For example, it is easier to communicate about a topic that one was naturally motivated about.

> *"It's easier to talk about topics and tasks both are excited to do. But when there's something not so nice it's tough to even talk about the topic."*

One commonly shared thought about misunderstandings was the difficulty in detecting early if the message got understood correct on the message receiving end. It was mentioned by the interviewees that feedback on the realization of the message often got left behind.

From managerial perspective, the cultural variables brought a challenge in getting reassurance if the manager's message was understood. This was because in cultures with relatively strong power distance the manager was not to be confronted or questioned. This resulted in not getting any answers, when the manager asked if everything was clear. Same affected in getting feedback when manager asked for the subsidiaries' opinion; the manager's leadership style in low power distance societies differed from the autocratic and non-including norm, which the subsidiaries were used to.

One example was shared about cultural differences in interpreting messages. An interviewed person noticed that whenever their home organization announced a new way of working, Russian colleagues took the message literally, whereas Finnish colleagues saw the same announcement as a recommended way of working which people could be flexible with, if needed. To clarify this kind of variations in interpretations, it needed to be additionally communicated to intercultural teams if the new way of operating was flexible or definite.

An interviewed expert explained that in cross-cultural communication misunderstandings easily arose when people used the same words but meant different things. Also, it was rather common that ideas that person in one culture found obvious, were new and surprising to the person from another culture. One of the experts had worked as a translator in negotiations, and explained that occasionally meetings needed to be put on break in order to have time to explain background information of a concept to a member of the negotiations, since concept as such didn't exist in the other culture.

Additionally, the experts explained that there are cultural differences between Finnish and Russian norms, for example in the time that is required for making decisions. Finns appeared as partners who needed time for thinking over ideas, whereas Russian partners were more often ready for immediate action. This went both ways; if in the Russian partner felt that getting an answer from possible business partner took 'too long,' they were often willing to move on relatively quickly.

Often the time needed for internal communication was also misunderstood in cross-cultural cooperation, if the cooperating parties were not members of the same organization. Difference in the structure of these organizations affected the pace of communication; while Russia has a distinguished hierarchical structure in organizations, organizational structures in Finland are usually comparatively flatter.

> *"In Russia, it may take time to get to talk to the manager, and there's a chance that not everything you say is dealt with. From what I've seen and experienced is that in Finland it is much easier talking to the manager, it's not that hierarchical. In Finland people understand that manager is just a person with a certain role, in Russia a manager is seen almost as the next person from God."*

These culture-related differences impacted communication. An interviewed expert explained that it was often required to explain both parties that differences in 'normal' approaches, regarding e.g. differences in time used when making decisions, didn't necessarily mean the other party's lack of interest, nor an abnormal urgency.

When thinking about virtual communication, it was surprisingly common for persons to chat with each other for a little while before recognizing they were talking about different topics. This happened especially in conversations via messenger and conference calls.

> *"Especially in video connections and on phone it's sometimes challenging to understand what the other is saying. That's an obvious challenge. And sometimes it might be that in the beginning of the conversation you don't understand the context the other person talks about. That also comes with the language barrier."*
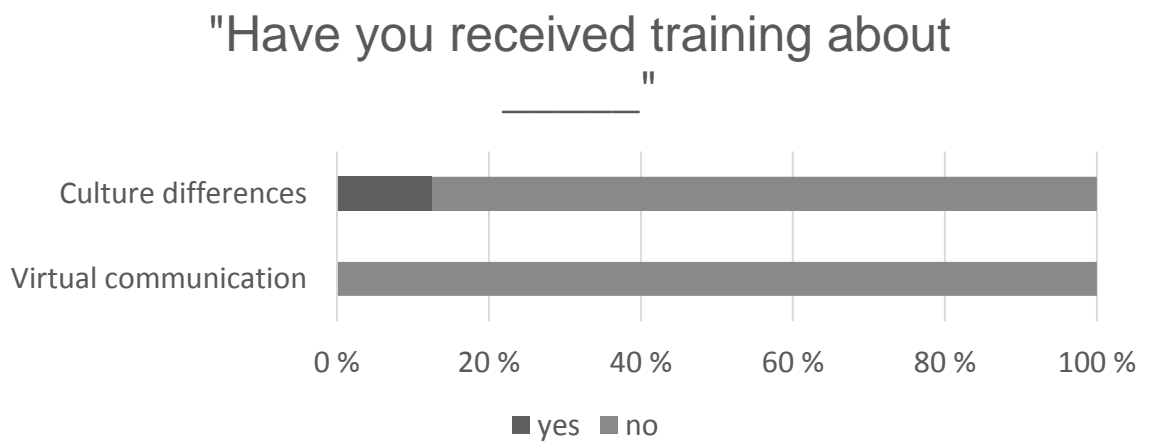
From the comment above it can be seen that when communicational obstacles overlap, understanding the message becomes more difficult. In this case the obstacles were to understand the others' speech via video or audio connection, while the topic of discussion was not stated in the beginning of the conversation. To prevent miscommunication, it would thus be good to mention the topic of conversation in the beginning of chat, to make sure everyone is on the same page.

Virtual connections had their own challenges which were often related to technical difficulties, such as fails on audio transmit (persons sounding like robots), asynchronous picture

and audio transmit in conference calls, and hiccups in internet connection. Especially when the meeting was ongoing, the technical challenges were found difficult to solve.

Challenges also occurred if the team hadn't collectively chosen which communication channels they were to use in team communication. In one case multiple messenger options were available to employees, which resulted in some of the team members using Skype for online chatting while others used Lync. Consequently, the status of different tool users appeared as 'offline' to others, even though everyone was at work and likely to be available.

One possible factor relating to misunderstandings can be found in the chart below.

"Have you received training about _____"

	yes	no
Culture differences		
Virtual communication		

0 % 20 % 40 % 60 % 80 % 100 %

■ yes ■ no

The interviewed persons were asked if at any point of their career they had participated in training related to cultural differences or communicating in virtual environment. This question was addressed to eight persons, and only one of them answered 'yes'. This person had had training about cross-cultural communication, but it should be mentioned that the person had also worked as a trainer in the field. 87% of the interviewed persons hadn't received any training related to cultural differences, and none of the persons had received training related to virtual communication.

5.3   Characteristics of effective workplace communication

The interviewed persons were asked to share their views and experiences in good workplace communication. Besides this, it was asked what thoughts term 'effective work communication' brought to their mind. To summarize the key answers, the interviewees described effective workplace communication as something that made time management easier, helped co-workers to understand what was relevant for the work, and prevented

problems from arising. Key points for good workplace communication were to have the right persons communicating with one another, getting the point across in conversations, and making sure the messages were understood.

A thought about effective work communication was that it should be proactive; ideally persons would receive information from team members without separately asking for it. For this to work optimally, it should be clear to team members what the goal of the team was, and what information team members needed in order to proceed with the work.

To help the team members share relevant information, it was required that team members knew about everyone's role in the team. When people were able to pick up information that was relevant to others, and shared it, communication became more efficient.

Multiple interviewed persons described the goal of communication as 'to get the relevant message passed to the other party in a way that the message was understood as such, and didn't change its format in the process.' It was highlighted that message should transmit to the receiver as 'right' as possible. Since it is now known that communicating in a cross-cultural and virtual environment may impact message, it should be taken into account that some elements of a message may not transmit to the receiver, and the content of the message could be altered because of different presumptions based on which interpretation is made.

Currently, the most recommended action to make sure the message was understood by the receiver was simply to ask the other person if they understood the message. It was highlighted in the interview answers, that maintaining atmosphere which allowed and encouraged team members to ask questions, was beneficial for the team communication. Similarly, open atmosphere allowed persons to unfold differences in conceptions and to ask the other person directly for clarification if needed.

In virtual work environment, communication was experienced as 'good' when it was in informal language, relaxed, proactive and dialogue-like. This means that messages went back and forth between communicating persons and all parties took initiative in sharing information. It was emphasized that the communication should be two-ways; not only one person sending messages and telling things. Virtual conversation should allow and encourage dialogue where comments and questions were allowed.

When the co-operating persons felt like they knew one another, the mental barrier of contacting others for questions was experienced smaller. It was felt especially beneficial when

team members felt like they knew each other well enough to predict situations where misunderstandings were likely to happen.

> *"It is essential to realize which part of the message did not transmit to the receiver. If you can sense that it is a good sign because then you can think of how to present the message better. -- And then again when you hear (on Skype) that the person does not quite understand, it's a good sign since you can address that problem right away. "*

Good work communication was described with words 'direct', 'streamlined', 'open', and 'clear'. Being blunt and straight-forward with informative messages was found as a factor that was helpful for virtual communication, as it made it comparatively easy for the message receiver to catch the point of the message. However, while straight-forwardness and bluntness were mentioned as strengths in effectiveness of communication, the same factor was mentioned as a challenge in bonding.

According to the interview data, intercultural cooperation was built on trust; trusting one's co-workers and business partners was thus fundamental. The following means were mentioned as beneficial for trust building:

Keeping promises. An interviewed expert highlighted the importance of standing behind one's own words even in minor cases, such as replying to an email in agreed time, if said so. In case a person promised to do something but didn't act upon their words, it could easily violate trust. Severe lack of trust could lead to projects going down between cooperating parties, or in unwillingness to start new cooperation. Additionally it was mentioned that when in business cooperation trust is violated, it is difficult to re-gain remotely.

Meeting face-to-face. Physical meetings were found important for trust building, and even more so in Russian business culture. Meeting one's coworkers face-to-face helped in forming bonds between co-operating persons, which has been proven to help with communication later in on cooperation.

Socializing. Socializing face-to-face and virtually was found helpful for trust building as well as getting to know one's colleagues. Once informal conversations had taken place between the co-workers, it was relatively easier to contact one another when questions arose.

When the interviewed experts were asked to give any advice related to communication or cultural differences, they advised to accept co-workers from different cultures the way they were. This was because the cultural differences, meaning differences in ways people were brought up, were connected with the ways people feel in different situations as well as their conceptions.

One mean for preventing misunderstandings was to recognize that differences in cultural pre-assumptions existed. Accordingly, it was needed to take actions towards diminishing the risk of misunderstandings on general level.

> *"I would highlight the aspect of knowing the other person's culture, it will help without a doubt. And it's good to be able to meet the people face-to-face at some point because that way you can form a picture of what the person is like, about their personality, and to have a conversation with them on neutral circumstances."*

On the technical side, one common theme in the answers was that it is important to use the right tools to support one's message. As one interviewed person explains:

> *"If the message is not easy to explain, you can explain some parts verbally and for the remaining you can use different means to show e.g. what is the desired outcome and visual looks."*

Often, mimicking face-to-face meetings in virtual environment was a good start; if in a meeting room one would use whiteboard to explain their thoughts, similar solution could be applied into virtual meetings via screen sharing and using the screen as a whiteboard.

Several interviewed persons said they prevented communicational misunderstandings by use of media richness, meaning they used multiple tools to share and visualize their ideas. In the comment above, the 'different means' refer to e.g. screen sharing, audio calls or audio clips, online-chatting, picture, and video sharing. When the ideas weren't explained the best in words, it should be thought how the message sender could bring their point more effectively to the attention of others.

Some teams had benefitted from the use of a project management platform. As all team members had access to the platform, it enabled everyone to be up-to-date on projects' progress. The platform also allowed proactive information sharing, as information didn't need to be separately sent to team members.

For the message transmitting to work optimally, the infrastructure should support the communicational needs of the virtual team. Regarding this, it was important that team members knew what tools were available for them, as well as how to use the tools to get the best possible support for virtual message exchange. It was also found essential that the communicational tools worked without problems.

It was mentioned that people should be educated about how to use their meeting room equipment, e.g. cameras, microphones, and software, in order not to waste time on technical set-ups while a meeting was on. Some stated that they faced technical challenges in meetings because their home organization hadn't invested in equipment, or that different technical solutions for holding virtual meetings effectively hadn't yet been checked into.

It was experienced important for virtual teamwork that the person, who needed to be contacted for questions, was online and available. This made it easier for co-workers to reach out for quick check-ups as well as getting reassurements that information was understood correctly. Receiving a reply via synchronous communication was important, as receiving the information late could potentially result into re-doing the work.

A certain level of language proficiency in the language team had chosen to use in communication was required from team members. In case not everyone spoke the shared language fluently, one solution was to pick a team spokesperson who had the needed language skills and could step out in situations where additional communication was needed, e.g. when details were missing, team members didn't understand instructions, or when there were other chance for misunderstandings. Doing so, the team members had been able to stop misunderstandings from continuing for longer time.

Besides having good language skills, it was found important especially in IT field that the communicating persons shared the technical understanding required for the project and thus understood what was needed for project implementation. In other words, if the communicating persons didn't fully understand the topic they were involved in, it could result in ineffective message exchange as well as the project becoming more sensitive for misunderstandings. The latter example emphasizes the point of having the right persons communicating with one another. Besides speaking literally same language, the persons should have general understanding of the topic or concept they were communicating about.

One interviewed person pointed out that work communication often included meetings just for the habit of having meetings. Although it was earlier in this thesis stated that lack of communication was an issue, it should also be realized that having many but inefficient meetings was not optimal for communication either.

To make communication more effective, meetings could more often use an agenda, according to this interviewed person. Besides making the meeting more focused, the agenda would help the attendants evaluate the importance of their participation, in case participation to the meeting was optional. Also, the agenda enabled to persons form thoughts around the topic beforehand, which helped especially second or third language speakers to share their input in more streamlined way in the meeting.

5.4 Review point for enabling effective workplace communication

The purpose of this review point is to provide virtual teams with elements which, once checked, have potential in leading the virtual and cross-cultural teams towards more effective and successful virtual communication experience. The elements of this review point were found on the basis of the interview data.

Effectiveness in virtual and cross-cultural team communication can be enabled by several factors. Firstly, it should be evaluated if the team's communication infrastructure supports the needs of the team:

> *Are needed tools for communication available and accessible to everyone?*
> *Do team members know how to use the available tools optimally?*

A prerequisite for the team to communicate fluently is that all team members have access to needed tools, e.g. microphone, conferencing software and internet. To get the maximum usefulness out of the tools, training about their functionalities should be provided. When the team members know how the tools work, it should be easier to resolve some of the possible technical hiccups in e.g. conference calls.

Knowledge on the tools available for communication will help team members assessing the possibilities in information sharing. It was found that at times, for the virtual communication to be efficient, multiple virtual tools were used in an overlapping manner to enable transfer to all possible ques to the message receivers.

> *Do the team members know the purpose of the team?*

Do the team members know all members of the team?

For the team to work in relation to its goal, the purpose of the team should be clearly communicated to its members. Knowing one's colleagues by name, as well as knowing their work responsibilities was found helpful for finding right persons to contact in questions. It was noticed that tasks were often left undone when they weren't clearly named for a team member to conduct. Knowing the work distributions helps team members to provide their peers with relevant information related to the task on hand.

Does the team have an established communication plan? Are team members on the same page about tools used for communication, and other communication related practicalities?

Team members should agree on what tools to use for communication, and how communication was to be organized within the team. When team had agreed on communication related guide lines, e.g. related to response times in organization's internal emailing, the expectations of all team members were more easily met. It was also found essential that all persons who were at work should be online in instant messaging tools; this acted as a visible que that the person was at one's reach.

Some ideas for preventing misunderstandings were to keep a regular frequency in communication. In ideal situation, there would be proactive communication from both communicating sides, as opposed to only contacting each other when the persons had something to ask.

Is the team aware of the culture differences influencing communication?
Do the team members know how differences in presumptions may influence
message interpretation?

Especially in multicultural virtual teams, it is important to understand that the culture related social knowledge impacts message interpretation as persons' presumptions may differ on multiple levels. Acknowledging these differences should make it easier for team members to predict when information should be provided more explicitly, as well as to understand that at times re-explaining ideas was needed. Also, adapting to other communication styles should become smoother with the understanding of these differences within cultural contexts.

Does the team culture encourage asking questions?

When the virtual team shared a culture which allowed and encouraged asking questions, teams could access missing information relatively faster. Getting replies sooner as well as the ability to ask for help resulted in finishing tasks in comparatively shorter time. It was assessed by the interviewed persons that when the language used in communication was informal, relaxed, proactive and dialogue-like, the general atmosphere of virtual team's communication was 'good'.

6   Discussion

The results of this study indicated that continuous co-operation at work wasn't often thought about as team work. It was surprisingly common that co-operation started without setting separate goals for the team, and without planning the team communication further. When persons created communication frameworks on the go, it was possible that these frameworks weren't commonly shared and persons referred to their own ideologies instead of creating some together on team level.

The co-workers from different cultures may unknowingly suffer from misunderstandings which are related to culture differences. To diminish this, it is recommendable to bring awareness about the (cultural) differences in values and ways of working into the knowledge of the employees. Once the differences are recognized it should be relatively easier to spot situations where misunderstandings could take place.

It should be recognized that communicational needs are culture related. Virtual communication should enable and support the interpersonal communication that would naturally occur if persons were co-located. However, it cannot change the cultural norms that people act upon, such as remove culture related ways of performance in communication. For example, if the persons come from culture with big power distance, which also can be seen in steep organizational hierarchy and preference of autocratic leadership style, then social mingling in virtual communication channels shouldn't be expected in cross-hierarchical levels. That is because the socializing would not be expected to happen in natural environment either.

To make workplace communication effective, it is recommendable for teams to together discuss about communication habits. This type of metacommunication helps in creating a common ground for communication and brings awareness about different viewpoints, caused by e.g. culture differences, to the knowledge of team members.

Additionally, a review point for virtual teams was provided in chapter 5.3.1. The review point collected elements which had potential in improving team communication experience, once these elements were checked.

The most common challenges in communication were related to language barriers, technical challenges, and culture differences. Key points for good workplace communication were to have the right persons communicating with one another, getting the point across in conversations, and making sure the messages were understood.

It was noticed that some misunderstandings could be tackled before they even took place, by enhancing mutual understanding between team members. Beneficial for the overall communication was when the teams had an atmosphere in which asking questions was allowed and encouraged.

Moving from face-to-face communication to digital platforms, while trying to minimize miscommunication requires skills. Not all face-to-face communication can be replaced by virtual communication and it is important to bring the traditional way of communication back to picture especially if misunderstandings or miscommunication has already taken place and trust has been violated by the error.

Virtual communication is relatively new way of communication. Several interviewed persons, who regularly communicate via virtual mediators in their work, felt that there was still much to learn about virtual communication and that *"it might take practice before it started to feel "ordinary".*

Communicational structures should be planned according to the employees' communicational needs while culture is taken into consideration. What is beneficial for the overall communication is for the organization to have an atmosphere in which asking questions is allowed and encouraged.

In building trust between co-operating parties, face-to-face communication is hard to be beaten. However, communication can be handled via virtual communication tools very effectively once the cooperating persons have the right channels for communication available, combined with knowledge on how to use them. For the communication to be effective, certain techniques are helpful, e.g. making sure the other understood your idea as you meant it, and keeping a regular pace in between contacting one another.

It was confirmed by these interviews that getting to know one's colleagues made it easier for these co-workers to start conversations later on in virtual environment. Looking at the big picture, it can be stated that it has a positive impact in overall communication between virtual team members when reaching out for answers is made easy; both mentally (atmosphere encourages asking questions) and by having suitable equipment for virtual communication.

Although some literature around virtual communication has been published, the reader should pay attention to the variable of culture; frameworks for virtual communication, pub-

lished by authors in different national culture than the reader, may not match the ways people in other cultures communicate.

When assessing the trustworthiness of his thesis, it was noticed that the wording of some questions could have been different. For example, when interviewed persons were asked: '*What kind of role does communication have in your work?'* the question appeared to be difficult to answer, and often the interviewed persons asked for clarification on what was meant with the question. In some cases, the interviewees also understood the questions differently to what the interviewed had in mind, which resulted in different types of answers, but also richened the data the author received from the interviews. However, more coherent answers could have made the data more comparable.

The lack of training in fields of cultural differences or virtual communication may have affected the data on question in statements *"I often face misunderstandings in virtual communication / cross-cultural communication."* Especially cultural differences can be very challenging for the person to point out if they hadn't had background information on what these culture differences were.

Also, it was thought that if the interviewer has been felt as an out-group member, it is uncertain if the persons provided truthful answers regarding challenges in work communication.

Some of the interviewed persons were born in Russia but had lived in Finland for several years. Thus it can be questioned if these persons' cultural points of view were Russian, or combination of Russian and Finnish cultural contexts. As this thesis didn't aim to compare Finnish and Russian employees to one another, but to collectively collect experiences in intercultural work communication, the possibly mixed cultural backgrounds of these persons were not taken into account.

While conducting this bachelor thesis, the author gained even deeper understanding of cultural differences between national cultures. If the thesis was to be done again, the author would prefer less variables in the study. It was found challenging to form reliable conclusions, as the current variables were cultural differences between team members, the possible factor of organizational culture, industry, organizational hierarchy, and the construction of the team. Also the number of interviewed persons should be increased in order to generalize the results.

The results of this study emphasized constructing communicational plan among the team members as a solution for making virtual team communication effective. However, it would be interesting to see if this advice would be the same when the co-operating cultures were scored comparatively low in Uncertainty Avoidance Index, in the Hofstede model of national cultures. Thus, repeating this study with different variables in the scope of national cultures could bring interesting comparison in the results.

7 References

Bergiel, B.;Bergiel, E.;& Balsmeier, P. 2008. Nature of virtual teams; a summary of their advantages and disadvantages. (M. R. News, Toim.) Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Brewer, P. E. 2015. International Virtual Teams. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Chia, A. 2016, September 5th. Huffington Post. Retrieved from How Remote Work Will be the Future of Innovation: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alvin-chia/how-remote-work-will-be-t_b_9863892.html

Guirdham, M. 2011. Communicating across cultures at work (3rd edition.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Hofstede, G.;Hofstede, G. J.;& Minkov, M. 2010. Cultures and Organisations: Software of the mind: intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival. McGraw-Hill.

Khashchanskaya, E.;& Novik, O. 2010. Improving information flow in virtual teams in a global company. Helsinki.

Lumsden, J. 2008. Handbook of Research on User Interface Design and Evaluation for Mobile Technology (1st.). IGI Global.

Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. 2017. Merriam-Webster Dictionary https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/communication. Accessed 2nd April 2017

Moksén, H. 2014. Comminucating complex technical information in virtual reams of multi-cultural global organisation. Helsinki: Haaga-Helia UAS.

Samovar, L. A.;Porter, R. E.;McDaniel, E. R.;& Roy, C. S. 2015. Communication Between Cultures. Boston: Cengage Learning.

Taylor, S. J.;Bogdan, R.;& DeVault, M. 2015. Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Semi-structured interview questions

1. What is your role in the organization and how does your role connect to communication?

2. In your opinion, what is effective work communication like? What does it mean to you?

3. Please tell me about the virtual team communication in your work environment.

- What channels do you use for communication (online call, email, video meetings, chats…)?
- How frequently do you communicate with each other?
- What language do you use in communication?

4. How often do you meet the persons you work with face-to-face?

5. Has your team established structured code of communication, (e.g. what channels to use, whom to contact in questions, or how detailed the sent messages should be, etc)?

6. In your point of view, how important is it to socialize, e.g. to chat about non-work related topics with virtual team members from other cultures?

7. When thinking of the virtual work communication between you and your colleagues, what is working well? Could you share some examples with me?

8. When thinking of the virtual work communication between you and your colleagues, are there any challenges?

In your working environment, what is done, or, what could be done, to prevent misunderstandings?

9. Would you agree with the statements:

"I often face misunderstanding in virtual communication" Why yes/why not?

"I often face misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication" Why yes/why not?

Any examples of misunderstandings you'd like to share?

10. Do you feel that you or your colleagues change your way of working, when you are working together with colleagues from another culture?

In what way? Could you share some examples?

11. At any point of your career, have you received any training for cultural differences between you and your colleagues national cultures?

12. At any point of your career, have you received any training for virtual communication?

13. What advice would you give others working in similar circumstances on how to make intercultural and virtual work communication effective?

Appendix 2. Expert interview questions

1. Please tell me about yourself.

        -Nationality

        -What do you do for living

        -What kind of role does communication have in your work?

2. In your opinion, what is effective work communication like? What does it mean to you?

3. Do you see any differences in communication habits when comparing Finnish and Russian workplaces?

4. Do you find any differences in the ways virtual communication (emails, video calls etc) is used in Russian and Finnish organizations/work places?

5. Are there any differences, related to communication, which Finnish and Russian employees should be aware of in cooperation?

6. According to you, what is the most challenging aspect of communication between Finnish and Russian organizations?

Any examples of misunderstandings you'd like to share?

7. How could misunderstandings be prevented in cross-cultural communication? What could employees do?

8. What are your thoughts about face-to-face meetings? Do you see differences in ways Finns and Russians relate to them?

9. Are there any differences in socializing habits when comparing the ways Finnish and Russian employees socialize at work?

10. What is your opinion on the following statement:

"Employees often face misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication"

11. What would be your practical advices on how to make intercultural and virtual work communication effective?