

# Dialogue as a source of positive emotions during cross-border post-acquisition socio-cultural integration

Riikka Harikkala-Laihinen, Mélanie Hassett, Johanna Raitis and  
Niina Nummela

*Turku School of Economics, Turku, Finland*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to analyse how dialogue can be used to promote post-acquisition socio-cultural integration. Specifically, it addresses questions regarding when and how companies can utilise dialogue to generate positivity regarding socio-cultural integration.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A single case study approach was adopted owing to its suitability for creating in-depth understanding in the context of socio-cultural integration. Primary data were collected via interviews, an employee satisfaction survey, and participant observation. Secondary data were obtained from the case company's internal materials, such as strategies, integration workflows, and employee magazines. Analysis methods included descriptive statistics and thematic qualitative analysis.

**Findings** – The findings suggest that dialogue can be used to create positivity regarding socio-cultural integration throughout the stages of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing by actively engaging employees in voicing, listening, respecting, and suspending. It is proposed that cultural conflict during post-acquisition socio-cultural integration can be overcome through the generation of positivity; dialogue enables the collective management of emotions during post-acquisition integration by offering a platform for creating positivity and social cohesion; and due to its collaborative and engaging nature, dialogue provides an especially effective means of communication for overcoming cross-cultural conflict.

**Originality/value** – To the authors' knowledge, this is the first attempt to showcase dialogue as a specific means of communication for creating positivity during cross-border socio-cultural integration. This study reached beyond comparative cultural research to offer views on positivity, emotion during socio-cultural integration, and dialogue as means for overcoming cross-cultural conflict.

**Keywords** Mergers and acquisitions, Dialogue, Positivity, Cross-cultural conflict, Socio-cultural integration  
**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

While mergers and acquisitions (M&A)[1] have become increasingly popular as a method of achieving organisational growth and development (World Investment Report, 2016), the acquisition success rate has remained mediocre at best (e.g. Cartwright and Schoenberg, 2006; Schoenberg, 2006; Graebner et al., 2017). The growing body of literature on post-acquisition integration focusing on the human side of M&A argues that failure is largely due to socio-cultural challenges, such as resistance to change and acculturation stress (e.g. Very et al., 1996; Birkinshaw et al., 2000; Stahl and Voigt, 2008; Sarala et al., 2016). Yet, despite cultural differences and clashes having been identified as major challenges to post-acquisition integration, the research results remain conflicting (e.g. Stahl et al., 2005; Stahl and Voigt, 2008; Weber et al., 2011). In fact, it has been argued that pre-acquisition cultural differences would have little value in predicting post-acquisition integration outcomes. Instead, they seem to present a “double-edged sword” or a “mixed blessing”; in other words, cultural differences may be positively or negatively associated with M&A performance (e.g. Stahl and Voigt, 2008).

Culture plays a key role especially during post-acquisition integration. Socio-cultural integration connotes changes made to the organisational structure and culture following an acquisition. It is the most complex and time-consuming aspect of integration (Shrivastava, 1986), yet it is critical for success (e.g. Birkinshaw et al., 2000). Due to the organisational changes involved, cross-border M&A may be extremely stressful (e.g. Ager, 2011), provoking a wide range of emotions. Current M&A research acknowledges the nuanced role that positive and negative emotions play in how organisational changes are perceived and experienced, as they help employees understand what is happening in the organisation (Kiefer, 2002; Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005). Thus, emotions should not simply be overcome but be understood to better comprehend changes such as M&A (Kiefer, 2002; Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005; Clarke and Salleh, 2011).

Although much of the work on emotions during M&A has focused on negative emotions, it has been found that M&A also elicit positive emotions (e.g. Kusstatscher, 2006; Raitis et al., 2017). The recent interest in positive organisational scholarship among international business scholars has encouraged researchers to rethink previously taken-for-granted views on cultural distance and foreignness (Stahl et al., 2016). Positivity has been found to lead to higher performance at the organisational and individual levels (Cameron, 2017). In fact, researchers claim that positivity regarding change is critical for successful socio-cultural integration (Birkinshaw et al., 2000). Here, positivity is defined as positive emotions regarding the socio-cultural integration process.

Communication can elicit (positive or negative) emotions during M&A. The present study explored the influence of one form of communication – namely, dialogue – during post-acquisition socio-cultural integration. Dialogue refers to interactive communication with a distinctly collaborative aim (Bavelas et al., 1997). The objective of dialogue is to create an atmosphere where thought, attention, and assumptions can be collectively explored, and where meaning flows freely. It differs from consensus building in that it allows individuals to create shared meanings rather than focus on finding a logical solution to a specific problem.

The purpose of dialogue is to enable individuals to learn how to think together (Isaacs, 1993). Thus, dialogue is different from the more competitive modes of communication, such as discussion and debate, which centre on advocating one's viewpoint to "win an argument" (Oliver and Jacobs, 2007). This paper suggests that the promotion of interactive communication – in this case, dialogue – may help in overcoming socio-cultural challenges during integration, due to the emotional comfort it can provide amid stressful organisational change.

The purpose of the present study was to analyse how dialogue can be used to promote post-acquisition socio-cultural integration by evoking positive emotions regarding change. More specifically, the study addressed questions regarding when and how companies can utilise dialogue to create positivity regarding socio-cultural integration. This paper presents the conceptual framework of the study and provides an illustrative example of how dialogue can be used to create positivity and thereby promote socio-cultural integration during a cross-border acquisition. The empirical evidence used in the study was based on a single case study of a Finnish-German acquisition, which was followed in real time over two years.

This study took several steps to advance existing knowledge. Whereas cross-cultural research often focuses on comparing different cultural or geographical contexts, the world is becoming increasingly international, therefore highlighting the interconnected and dynamic nature of cross-cultural encounters. The literature review carried out by Tjosvold et al. (2014) suggests that open-minded communication and mutually beneficial relationships are critical for overcoming cross-cultural conflicts. However, at the same time, cultural differences can act as barriers to open-minded communication and relationship building. Therefore, more research is necessary to uncover how to promote open-minded communication during conflict (Tjosvold et al., 2014). Cross-border M&A continue to provide a fruitful context for studying intercultural conflict and increasing the understanding of the great force of culture in human contact, as well as in terms of open-minded communication, such as dialogue.

Although cultural differences have been frequently studied in the socio-cultural integration context, the understanding of how companies can overcome difficulties related to differences remains limited (Rottig, 2011). Previous literature on emotions that arise during socio-cultural integration seems to conclude that emotions are primarily experienced in the acquired company, that they are triggered by personal circumstances, and are mainly negative, and thus, they are likely to cause poor organisational outcomes (Graebner et al., 2017). However, it has been suggested that a focus on positivity could be a very fruitful addition to the socio-cultural integration research (Stahl et al., 2013). Therefore, special attention is being paid to promoting positivity as a means to ease socio-cultural integration.

This paper offers a specific way for managers to promote socialisation through interactive engagement. While, for example, Larsson and Lubatkin (2001) highlight the importance of socialisation rituals and social controls, their work does not particularly focus on the forms of socialisation that can occur during M&A. Yalabik (2013) suggests that during M&A, socialisation – learning to perform one's task in a new organisational setting – can be achieved through communication and training. Here, the focus is on dialogue. As previous studies have also failed to suggest how collective emotions can be

managed during M&A (Huy, 2012), by focusing on dialogue and positivity, this paper offers managers a perspective on how emotions can be managed and positivity fostered during socio-cultural integration.

Furthermore, although the literature highlights the importance of communication (e.g. Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991; Weber and Tarba, 2010; Angwin, 2016), less is known about how communication practices shape the dynamics of post-M&A integration. Indeed, rather little is known about the specific communication practices and tools, such as dialogue, used in post-acquisition integration (Graebner et al., 2017). Consequently, the effectiveness of communication in dealing with conflict during socio-cultural integration necessitates further research (Weber and Drori, 2011; Angwin et al., 2016). The present study focused on how the communication practice of dialogue influences employee experiences during socio-cultural integration.

## Literature review

### *Dialogue: from communication to interaction*

Communication is a key concern during socio-cultural integration (e.g. Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991; Kustatscher and Cooper, 2005; Angwin et al., 2016). Moreover, the literature on organisational socialisation suggests that social cohesion is achieved primarily through interaction (Morrison, 2002; Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006). Accordingly, it has been found that communication that is participative, reflective, and positive best enhances socio-cultural integration (Clayton, 2010). Thus, interaction, for example, in the form of dialogue, may be more beneficial than top-down communication for achieving social cohesion.

Dialogue is a unique form of communication that emphasises interaction. The word originates from the Greek words *dia* and *logos*, signifying a flow of meaning (Senge, 1990; Isaacs, 1999; Bohm, 2003). Dialogue involves embracing diverse viewpoints and understanding that no viewpoint is more or less legitimate than any other (Oliver and Jacobs, 2007). If group members are willing to suspend their own judgments and embrace others' viewpoints, the group can advance from discussion to dialogue (Schein, 1993). When parties successfully engage in dialogue, they move towards the possibility of converging their beliefs and values (Oliver and Jacobs, 2007) and building a shared culture (Schein, 1993; Bohm, 2003). In practice, dialogue can be described as collaborative communication utilising verbal and non-verbal means. To become dialogue, social interaction must, therefore, be a two-way activity. Alternating monologues have no place in dialogue. It is an interactive process; during dialogue, the speaker as well as the listener(s) perform an active role in being attentive and interested (Bavelas et al., 1997).

In general, effective communication in international business necessitates an understanding of the influence of the socio-cultural context (Adair et al., 2016). In cross-border acquisitions, sensitivity in communication is decisive, as integration is based on subjective, individual interpretations and experiences (Risberg, 2001). However, in intercultural situations, reaching a state of shared inquiry and understanding is more complex and time consuming (Schein, 1993).

Therefore, the quality of the interaction determines the effectiveness of the dialogue (Isaacs, 1999). Quality in this context is defined as the perception of clarity, responsiveness, and comfortability in the interaction (Liu et al., 2010), with emphasis on the emotional element of comfortability. Interaction that is perceived as clear, engaging, and comfortable, such as dialogue, enables companies to improve the outcomes of the interaction (cf. Liu et al., 2010) and thereby ease socio-cultural integration.

### *Socio-cultural integration following cross-border M&A*

According to recent research, the influence of cultural differences in cross-border M&A is mediated by socio-cultural integration. Arguably, interpersonal relationships that are experienced as positive, trust in the acquisition partner, and the successful creation of a shared identity can render cultural differences, if not insignificant, at least less damaging (cf. Stahl and Voigt, 2008; Stahl et al., 2011; Hajro, 2015). Thus, the effectiveness of human resource practices, like communication, in dealing with potential conflict situations provides a fruitful avenue for research (Weber and Drori, 2011). As there is no agreement on the causal linkages between cultural differences and M&A outcomes (e.g. Stahl and Voigt, 2008; Sarala, 2010; Weber et al., 2011), this paper suggests moving beyond this question of causality, important though it is, towards more pragmatic understanding. Therefore, in this study, cultural differences were considered as part of the socio-cultural integration context.

Ultimately, socio-cultural integration is aimed at creating a shared identity among acquisition partners following the acquisition. In this delicate process, even subtle cultural differences between seemingly compatible cultures can pose a threat (Hajro, 2015), because individuals are emotionally attached to the culture with which they identify (Bastien, 1987) and thus protect their culture as a part of their group identity. Whereas national cultures often include fundamental differences, more apparent and immediate differences are found at an organisational level (Sarala and Vaara, 2010). At the organisational level, integration problems often arise from differences in the norms and values of the acquisition partners (Stahl et al., 2013). Such differences may lead to cultural conflict, which increases misunderstandings and thus complicates integration (Rottig et al., 2013). Therefore, adaptation to others' cultural norms may be crucial for overcoming cross-cultural issues (Adair et al., 2001). Accordingly, socio-cultural integration may take years to complete (e.g. Cartwright and Cooper, 1993; Birkinshaw et al., 2000; Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005).

In their recent case study, Rottig et al. (2017) identify several success factors for effectively managing socio-cultural integration. Recognising and announcing shared values, cultural compatibility, and common identity ease commitment and unification. Similarly, management's involvement, vision, and example can be used to form a joint identity and discourage "us vs them" thinking. In addition, personal interaction as well as constant internal communication can be used to form a positive future image to encourage integration.

Indeed, positive emotions during M&A have been found to emerge more often in connection with a focus on human- rather than task-related matters during the integration process (Bansal, 2015). This paper shows how deciding to focus on generating positivity and unity, instead of focusing on overcoming cultural differences, can provide a creative solution

to the struggle to find intercultural harmony. Through this small but significant change in perspective, the escalation of cross-cultural conflict during socio-cultural integration can arguably be thwarted and a more mutually beneficial relationship can be created. Therefore, the key question during socio-cultural integration may not be how to neutralise negativity but how to create positivity.

### *Emotion in socio-cultural integration*

In recent years, M&A researchers have studied emotions from diverse viewpoints, such as acquisition outcomes (Gunkel et al., 2015), culture (Clarke and Salleh, 2011; Reus, 2012), identity (Ager, 2011), employee behaviour (Sinkovics et al., 2011), rationalisation (Vince, 2006), change (Kiefer, 2002), and coping (Fugate et al., 2002). According to Fredrickson (2013, p. 3), “emotions are brief, multisystem responses to some change in the way people interpret – or appraise – their current circumstances”. Emotions arise from an appraisal of the environment (Lazarus, 1993; Fredrickson, 2001) and are linked to personal values and goals; in order to become emotional, a situation must be considered important for the self (Lazarus, 1991; Fredrickson, 2001). As a result of the appraisal, several responses arise. These include, but are not limited to, subjective experience, facial expressions, and physiological signs (Fredrickson, 2001). In the present study, the subjective experience was emphasised. It can be roughly categorised into positive (happiness, pride, relief, and love), negative (anger, anxiety, fright, guilt, shame, sadness, disgust, envy, and jealousy), and mixed (hope, gratitude, and compassion) emotions (Lazarus, 1993).

During M&A, emotions arise in response to perceived challenges in upholding certain values or pursuing certain objectives. Such challenges and consequent emotions may arise before the acquisition occurs, and usually peak during the announcement or formal integration. Emotional reactions can also significantly outlast formal integration (Sinkovics et al., 2011). Negative emotions can increase employee identification with the pre-acquisition organisation, whereas positive emotions may lead to a stronger social identity in the new organisation (Kusstascher and Cooper, 2005). This is one reason why emotions are central to M&A: negative emotions are likely to hinder post-acquisition integration, whereas positive emotions may advance it.

So far, the focus has been on individual emotions. However, during socio-cultural integration, group emotions may be of even greater interest. Group emotions arise as a result of membership in a particular social group. They are the individual responses of group members triggered by events that have perceived relevance to the group. Group emotions may become collective emotions if many members of the group experience similar emotional responses to an event (Goldenberg et al., 2014). Group emotions can arise either in or from groups. Group-shared emotions necessitate co-presence (e.g. at a rock concert), whereas group-based emotions do not (e.g. national pride). If positivity regarding the deal has not been fostered, especially group-based emotions related to the pre-acquisition organisational identity and culture can cause group members to exhibit protective behaviours during M&A (Menges and Kilduff, 2015).

In addition, employees tend to mirror the behaviours and emotions of top managers (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002), and managers, whether they are staying or leaving following an

acquisition, set the mood and the tone of the post-acquisition integration phase (Krug and Hegarty, 2001). Thus, the management of the socio-cultural integration may have a significant emotional impact. Inter-organisational learning and understanding are essential for successful socio-cultural integration (cf. Schweiger and Goulet, 2005). Such learning – and cross-cultural sensitivity – necessitates dialogue and is critical for organisational transformation. Dialogue fosters mutual trust and valid communication (i.e. a shared understanding of what is being said), which are the basic elements of all effective group actions (Schein, 1993). Thus, dialogue enables, and may facilitate, the formation of a shared understanding. Accordingly, dialogue can be used to achieve successful socio-cultural integration.

### *Dialogue as a source of positivity during cultural change*

Dialogue during socio-cultural integration is essentially dialogue during cultural change. During socio-cultural integration, a shared understanding helps to create a cohesive organisational culture and enables a successful acquisition. Creating positive attitudes among employees from both the acquiring and acquired companies is essential for achieving organisational culture convergence. Thus, managers strive for employee satisfaction as an end in itself (Birkinshaw et al., 2000). This is why the comfort element of the quality of communication (Liu et al., 2010) is essential to dialogue. Interestingly, however, what is labelled as emotionally good or bad, positive or negative, is not straightforward. The level of arousal (Watson and Tellegen, 1985) and the cultural background of the individual (Scherer, 1997; Mesquita and Karasawa, 2002) affect what the individual experiences as pleasant or unpleasant.

What is referred to as dialogue here closely resembles what can otherwise be called constructive controversy (Tjosvold, 2008) or open-minded discussion (Tjosvold et al., 2014). Constructive controversy refers to situations where, due to aligned goals, differing opinions and views are used to create new solutions and commit to new positions. Four sets of skills are necessary for benefitting from controversy. Developing and expressing opinions is based on previous experience and available information. Questioning one's own opinions and hearing those of others enables an exchange of perspectives that motivates an active search for a better understanding of the problem at hand. Integrating such understanding allows for devising more useful solutions, which can be agreed upon and implemented more easily (Tjosvold, 2008). In utilising interpersonal communication skills, individuals can fall into the open-minded discussion cycle of expressing, understanding, integrating, and agreeing (Tjosvold et al., 2014). This is what occurs in dialogue through voicing, listening, respecting, and suspending (Isaacs, 1999). Figure 1 displays how the dialogue process unfolds, influenced by three different information-processing motivations.

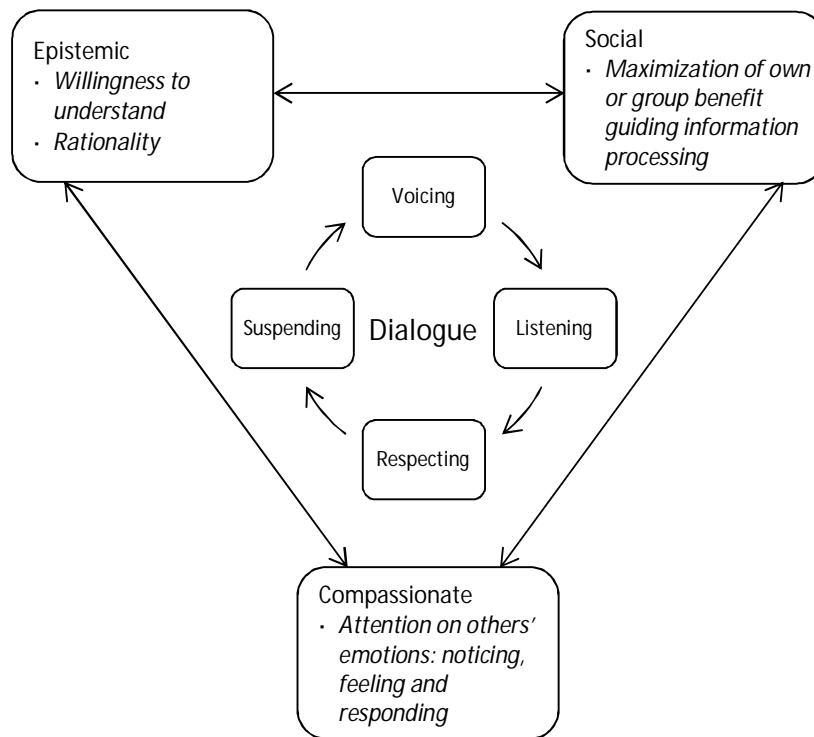


Figure 1 Framework of dialogue (cf. Isaacs, 1999; Choi, 2014)

In Figure 1, the core of dialogue is depicted as the interconnected actions of voicing, listening, respecting, and suspending. Through voicing, participants present their true selves and their true emotions. In listening, participants take an active role in trying to empathise with the speaker. Respecting refers to the awareness that everyone is entitled to their position and no one may be able to fully understand another's position. Thus, respecting creates space for everything that is voiced. In suspending, emphasis is placed on not forming judgments about others and their viewpoints (Isaacs, 1999).

Authentic dialogue is based on epistemic, social, and compassionate information-processing motivation. Thus, true dialogue considers both reason and emotions (Choi, 2014). Epistemic information processing refers to the inclination to exert oneself towards achieving a thorough understanding (DeDreu et al., 2008). This refers to the rationality of the group decision (Choi, 2014). Social information-processing motivation refers to the kind of information that is processed (Steinel et al., 2010) and how the individual wishes the group outcomes to be distributed between the self and the group (Choi, 2014). Pro-self motivation is related to increasing one's own benefits, whereas pro-social motivations encourage pursuing group goals (Steinel et al., 2010). Compassion refers to being moved by others' suffering and wanting to help (Lazarus, 1993). Compassionate motivation refers to the willingness to elicit empathic responses (Choi, 2014). The compassionate motivation for information processing highlights the connection between emotion and dialogue.

Dialogue must also be managed. Facilitation refers to the enactment of authority in empowering or constraining participants during dialogue (Kristiansen, 2013). Facilitating



dialogue entails a responsibility to encourage participants to balance their need to speak with a need to listen and understand. Successful facilitators are able to encourage participants to visualise their own thinking. Facilitators may also need to steer the dialogue if the group seems to be falling into debate (Burson, 2002). Facilitation is not always an easy task. For example, there is a fine line between dialogue becoming thwarted by emotion or depleted without it (Ballantyne, 2004).

Nevertheless, managing emotions during dialogue enables active participation and engagement. This necessitates an awareness of one's own as well as others' emotions (Clarke, 2010). Thus, facilitators also have the important task of promoting a compassionate information-processing motivation and helping participants become aware of their own and others' emotions. Creating an atmosphere where positive emotions arise is especially important, since positivity increases receptiveness to new ideas (Fredrickson, 2000). Facilitating such an environment can occur, for example, through asking positive questions and portraying a positive future (Whitney and Fredrickson, 2015).

In order for dialogue to successfully create positivity, it must be linked to the process of cultural change. Such group change occurs in three steps: unfreezing the existing mode, moving towards the wished-for mode, and refreezing the achieved mode (Lewin, 1947). Unfreezing refers to letting go of past culture, for example, through accustomed norms of behaviour. Moving refers to adopting and internalising new cultural norms to replace the unfrozen ones. Finally, refreezing refers to anchoring the new norms as the existing cultural frame of mind. In a socio-cultural integration context, during unfreezing, the desired post-acquisition (i.e. integrated) cultural end state is visualised and the existing pre-acquisition cultural mindset being unfrozen to enable cultural change. This allows for moving towards the desired post-acquisition socio-cultural end state and then refreezing the desired post-acquisition culture as the new status quo (cf. Lewin, 1947; Marks and Mirvis, 2011). Dialogue can be used to ease post-M&A socio-cultural integration throughout the cultural change process (Figure 2).

This can occur throughout the process, but dialogue plays a slightly different role in each step. In unfreezing, dialogue can be used to form a shared understanding of what the desired cultural end state should be. This stems from an agreement on what is desirable in each pre-M&A culture (Cartwright and Cooper, 1993). To arrive at a truly shared understanding, members from different levels or departments of both the acquiring and acquired companies must be included in the process. However, as strategy is primarily a management concern (cf. Schweiger et al., 1993), employees are not heard in large numbers.

During moving, dialogue centres on bringing the desired cultural end state to fruition and achieving social cohesion. As individuals are highly attached to cultures (Bastien, 1987), and changes that are personally relevant create the strongest emotions (Lazarus, 1991; Fredrickson, 2001), dialogue regarding what the new culture means for employees personally and how they can take part in making it a reality helps to create positivity. During this step, it is suggested that all employees be allowed and encouraged to take part in the dialogue. This is in accordance with the importance of creating positive attitudes towards integration among all employees on both sides (Birkinshaw et al., 2000). This step

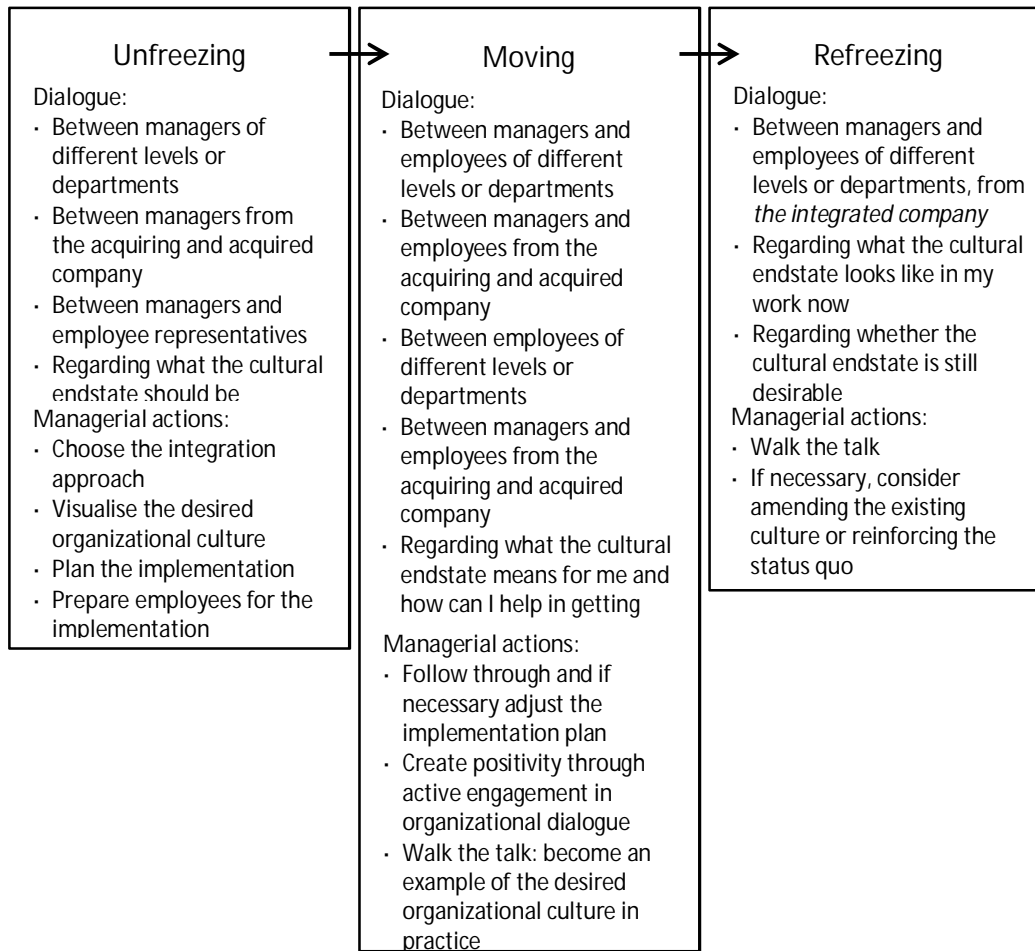


Figure 2 Dialogue during socio-cultural integration

may take years to complete (Cartwright and Cooper, 1993; Birkinshaw et al., 2000).

Although refreezing centres on stabilizing the achieved cohesion, dialogue can continue to ease the process by reminding employees of how the adopted culture can be seen in daily work. In addition, such dialogue can aid in detecting if the achieved end state is still desirable. Although organisational cultures are relatively stable, sometimes minor adjustments are appropriate (Schein, 2010). Furthermore, to truly ease the integration, dialogue necessitates managerial support. Thus, the managerial actions taken to incorporate and allow for dialogue at each stage are important. As suggested above, managers are the ultimate decision-makers regarding strategic choices. In addition, managers can actively promote dialogue to create positivity and thus further the cultural change process. It is also important that managers walk the talk – that they become examples of how the promised new culture will appear in practice (cf. Schweiger et al., 1993).

Figure 3 presents the analytical framework of the study. Based on the literature review, this paper argues that although the cultural change process itself can be used as an effective tool for socio-cultural integration (cf. Lewin, 1947; Evans and Pucik, 2005;

Marks and Mirvis, 2011), through adopting dialogue as a means of increasing positivity, the socio-cultural integration process can unfold more smoothly and swiftly, as some of the potential issues of cross-cultural conflict are overcome through the harmony of dialogue. In Figure 3, cultural change refers to the stages of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing (Lewin, 1947). Dialogue and positivity are placed within the frame of cultural change to highlight their occurrence during, and role in, smoothing the process. The outcome of cultural change is socio-cultural integration.

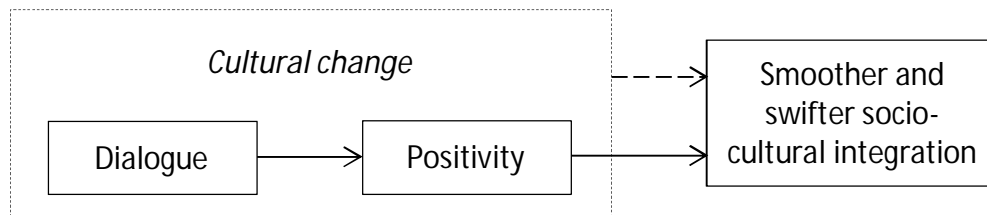


Figure 3 Analytical framework of the study

In the following, the paper offers an illustration of how dialogue has played a role during socio-cultural integration in the case company. Dialogue emerged in the case company as a means for creating a unified organisational culture driven by an integration strategy focused on creating new, shared company values. Given the recognition that emotions play a significant role in socio-cultural integration, the analysis will devote special attention to employees' emotional responses. However, before presenting the case, the methodological choices that guided the study will be discussed.

## Methodology

### *Research approach*

The study concerned when and how companies can utilise dialogue to create positivity regarding socio-cultural integration. Addressing this question required a rich and contextualised description of the phenomenon, which a case study would provide (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995). The case study approach is especially suitable in the M&A context, as it allows for the use of theory and conceptual insight in guiding the research and data analysis (Meyer, 2001). Particularly in the field of socio-cultural integration, qualitative research methods, such as the case study, can be useful for uncovering the dynamics of the process (Rottig et al., 2017). Therefore, qualitative single case studies have been used to gain deeper insight into the subtleties of socio-cultural integration in cross-border settings (e.g. Rottig et al., 2017; Drori et al., 2011; Moore, 2013). Understanding the socio-cultural integration process requires hands-on examination, but the strategic nature of M&A makes them very sensitive, and only seldom are researchers able to follow them in real time and at a close distance. This study benefited from unique contact with the top management and broad access to relevant data over two years.

According to Siggelkow (2007), case research may be used for illustration as well as for an additional, but not sole, justification for one's arguments. The case study method was employed in this study to illustrate and make sense of how dialogue can be used to promote post-acquisition socio-cultural integration. A single case was chosen to offer a rich description and strong contextualisation that together would enable understanding (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; cf. Stake, 1995; Siggelkow, 2007). Furthermore, case studies can be used to understand the particulars of a case rather than to generate universal explanations. This approach acknowledges the uniqueness of cases and emphasises subjects' tendency to ascribe meaning to their own behaviours. The case study at hand was framed as interpretive sensemaking, which does not emphasise causal explanations but focuses on strong contextualisation (Welch et al., 2011).

Cases may be selected because they represent a critical, extreme, or unique case or because they are representative – that is, typical cases (Yin, 2003). In this study, a case that was particularly helpful, rather than statistically typical, was chosen to illustrate the interplay between the key concepts (cf. Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). Furthermore, the strategic selection of a particularly helpful, or critical, case would allow for making assertions and naturalistic generalisations (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Ruddin, 2006). Besides being particularly helpful, to be considered suitable, the case also needed to be international and include socio-cultural integration. In addition, it was necessary for the case to be fairly recent in order to avoid retrospective bias during the data collection, but not too recent, as there needed to be sufficient data available. The selected case fulfilled all these criteria. The selected case was Finnish Alpha's friendly acquisition of German Beta – not the companies or the resulting Alpha Group themselves. These are pseudonyms intended to protect the anonymity of the companies.

Alpha is a Finnish family-owned company in the manufacturing industry. It was established in the mid-1900s and has since grown into a significant European provider. Alpha develops, manufactures, and markets user-friendly, energy-saving products, which are technological forerunners in their field. In 2013, Alpha acquired German Beta, a company in the same industry, thus forming Alpha Group. At the time of the acquisition, Alpha employed approximately 800 employees and Beta 600. The acquisition was a friendly deal, and due to their relatively similar size, Alpha adopted an integration approach that can be described as symbiotic (cf. Haspeslagh and Jemison, 1991) or collaborative (cf. Cartwright and Cooper, 1993). After the companies merged, Alpha wished to create a joint culture based on shared values. Its own organisational culture had been values based for years, whereas the organisational culture at Beta had not previously emphasised values. Hence, Alpha Group decided to introduce new joint values as the basis of its socio-cultural integration, using the old Alpha values as a starting point.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Primary data were collected from face-to-face interviews, a company-wide employee survey, and participant observation during a company workshop and company meetings. In addition, secondary data were obtained through company internal materials including

the pre- and post-acquisition strategies, integration workflows, workshop facilitator guide, and employee magazines. The case was followed retrospectively between late 2013 and 2014 and in real time during 2015 and 2016. Data triangulation and follow-ups over two years provided a holistic overview of the integration. Table I summarises the different data used in this research.

Table 1 Different types of data used in this study

Type of data	Data collection method	Data usage
Primary data	14 semi-structured interviews with top management	Obtaining an understanding of the companies, M&A, value renewal, and creation of a new joint culture
Primary data	3 questions in the employee satisfaction survey in the entire Alpha Group in spring 2015 (n=681)	Obtaining data regarding employee responses; the emotions that were triggered by the M&A, value renewal, and integration
Primary data	Participant observation in a value workshop in Finland	Obtaining an understanding of employee engagement in value renewal
Primary data	Company meetings	Obtaining an understanding of the current state of integration as well as the reasoning behind integration actions; Discussing emergent findings
Secondary data	Internal organisational material related to the value workshops; facilitators guide, pamphlets	Obtaining an understanding of the value renewal strategy and intended actions
Secondary data	Internal material from value workshops organised in Finland; employee mind-maps and other written data	Obtaining an understanding of how employees were engaged in the value renewal as well as how employees responded to individual values
Secondary data	Employee magazines	Obtaining an understanding of internal communication at Alpha Group
Secondary data	Other internal organisational material; company strategy, integration workflows, key figures	Obtaining an understanding of the context in which the M&A and value renewal took place

Altogether, 14 interviews were conducted for this research during 2015 and 2016. The interviewees were the top management of Alpha Group (ten members of the board of directors), two employee representatives (one in Finland and one in Germany), one HR director, and the integration manager (a member of the owning family). English is the new corporate language of Alpha Group, but the Finnish and German interviewees were given the opportunity to participate in their native language, if they wished. Altogether, two interviews were conducted in German, five interviews were conducted in Finnish, and seven interviews were conducted in English. Most of the interviews were conducted face to face in a conference room either in Finland or Germany, but due to busy schedules and travel commitments, three interviews were conducted via Skype. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed mainly by the research team, but a native German speaker was asked to transcribe the German interview tapes. The German transcriber also expressed his opinion regarding the interpretation of culturally embedded information within the interviews, thereby increasing the quality of the interpretation.

Data were also gathered through a company-wide survey, which Alpha Group conducts annually to evaluate employee satisfaction. The body of the survey cannot be revealed here, as it was constructed with the help of an external consultant. However, three open-ended questions were added to this survey for the purpose of this research in 2015:

- (1) What emotions do the value workshops and the value process at Alpha Group evoke in you?
- (2) We kindly ask you to go back in time to when you first heard about the Alpha-Beta acquisition. What emotions did the news evoke when the deal was announced and what emotions does it evoke now?
- (3) The acquisition was followed by an integration phase. Now that nearly 1.5 years have elapsed since the deal was completed, what emotions does the Alpha-Beta post-acquisition integration phase evoke in you? And why?

The survey allowed unique access to the entire Alpha Group personnel. The response rate of the survey was over 80 per cent, which is exceptional. However, the three additional questions were answered by some 700 employees, representing approximately 50 per cent of Alpha Group employees. Surprisingly, most respondents replied to the questions with relatively lengthy answers, indicating that the respondents felt that the questions were relevant and important.

The survey was translated into the native language of all Alpha Group locations and the answers were subsequently translated into English. After producing the translation, the answers were manually coded by all four members of the research team separately. Then researcher triangulation was applied to improve the reliability of the findings (Denzin, 1970). The coding was based on emotions and followed the well-established classification of Lazarus (1993). The final coding into n/a (empty), neutral ("I don't know", no emotional content), positive, negative, and mixed (positive and negative content) was developed in a numeric form by converging the individual coding. The numeric coding allowed for the use of elementary quantitative analysis, whose purpose was mainly to give the research team a rough overview of the employees' perceptions regarding the acquisition (Table II).

Table 2 Quantitative overview of the findings

	%				
	Positive	Mixed	Negative	Neutral	N/A
Emotions regarding value workshops	48	22	5	13	12
<i>Alpha Finland</i>	43	17	10	14	16
<i>Beta Germany</i>	43	38	4	10	5
Emotions when first heard about the acquisition	47	9	24	4	16
<i>Alpha Finland</i>	51	9	16	7	17
<i>Beta Germany</i>	47	12	25	3	13
Emotions regarding the integration	30	20	16	11	23
<i>Alpha Finland</i>	9	22	23	12	34
<i>Beta Germany</i>	45	23	14	6	12

The role of the quantitative analysis was supportive, in that it allowed for a generic structure on which to build the more in-depth qualitative analysis. Following the quantitative overview, the data categorised as positive, negative, or mixed (i.e. the data with emotional content) were re-analysed qualitatively to identify specific emotions and emotion triggers – issues about which many employees expressed (strong) emotions. This analysis was conducted with the help of NVivo10 software to improve trustworthiness (Sinkovics et al., 2008). Table III presents two examples of the qualitative analysis process, from the original response to question three to the first (valence) and second (emotion) order codes. Specific emotion triggers will be discussed in the findings.

Table 3 Qualitative analysis process

Original response	1 <sup>st</sup> order category: valence	2 <sup>nd</sup> order category: emotion <sup>*</sup>
Uncertainty. The long-term impacts of the deal on the work situation are unclear.	Negative	Anxiety
More than ever before, I feel that I'm part of a fantastic company. An open and good cooperation exists between the departments that I know.	Positive	Happiness

<sup>\*</sup>Based on Lazarus' (1993) categorization

The qualitative part was duplicated for the interview analysis, which was an iterative process where the interviews were coded according to both themes that arose from theory and from the data. In addition, Alpha Group offered locally organised value workshops for all employees in early 2015. Two members of the research team took part in one of the value workshops in Finland in February 2015. During the workshop, the researchers received printed materials related to the new values and the value workshop. Additionally, during the value workshop, employees considered different aspects of the new values in written form. The researchers received all such employee-made documents from the value workshop. Furthermore, the development of this research project was discussed with Alpha Group on several occasions. During project meetings, the research team gained valuable insight into the socio-cultural integration process.

## Findings

### *Socio-cultural integration at Alpha Group*

When Alpha Group was formed in 2013, the integration plan was based on different projects, one of which was named Cultural Integration and HR. This project had two goals: one company and structure with two strong brands and common values within two-to-three years. In 2015, Alpha Group completed the planned integration and formed a new strategy focused on a set of tasks and goals designed to strengthen the company as an international player through the objectives of the cultural integration project. This strategic

focus is planned to last until the end of 2017. The Cultural Integration and HR project and its continuance in the new strategy were the focus of this study.

Alpha Group's aim was to integrate the previously separate organisational cultures of Alpha and Beta through extensive work towards building new company values. During the integration, Alpha Group wished to unify the value mindsets of its employees while simultaneously maintaining the product brand names of the original companies. The value-renewal work that was to drive the socio-cultural integration began in 2014 with two separate intercultural teams consisting of members from both Alpha and Beta. One group included HR managers and employee representatives, the other the Alpha Group management team. These task forces drew up statements regarding personal and company values. These statements could be organised into four categories, through which four core values were identified. The values of valour, justice, efficacy, and honesty[2] were introduced to key personnel at a strategy kick-off meeting in December 2014.

Alpha Group stated that "values create the basis for our collective business culture". Thus, the new values had to be disseminated. Each value was given a brief description and value workshops were organised in early 2015 to introduce the values to every employee. Another purpose of the workshops was also to initiate discussion and find common ground as to what these values meant for employees and how the values could be incorporated into daily work. The value workshops were open to every employee of Alpha Group and attendance was high among both blue- and white-collar workers.

In addition to the workshops, Alpha Group pursued various other means of promoting the new company values. They were introduced as a recurring topic in the personnel magazine through a set of specifically designed comics showing the everyday application of the values. They also became a component of every company presentation, especially the company-wide presentations given by the CEO. The values would be taken up similarly during smaller internal meetings. In addition, the values became a part of recruitment as well as yearly personnel development discussions. Furthermore, the unification work was visible in the repeated wish to erase the names Alpha and Beta from usage in order to promote the existence of Alpha Group. In order to engage employees in the value-renewal process, Alpha Group (with the aid of the research team) added qualitative questions regarding the M&A to its annual employee satisfaction survey both in 2015 and 2016.

### *The emergence of dialogue at Alpha Group*

At Alpha Group, top management chose the collaborative integration strategy (cf. Haspeslagh and Jemison, 1991; Cartwright and Cooper, 1993). Unfreezing the current culture was done through dialogue within workgroups whose purpose was to identify the new joint company values. After the shared values were identified, the implementation plan focusing on the value workshops was formed. This depicts the moving stage. During integration, the value workshops allowed the employees to engage in interactive dialogue with each other and with company management. This enabled the employees to make the



process their own and to consider what the changes meant for them personally. This step was considered essential in gaining employee trust and building positivity towards the integration. Based on the feedback from the value workshops and the employee satisfaction survey, Alpha Group management also continued to devise with new ways of promoting the shared values and culture. Based on the above, Figure 2 was redrawn to portray the integration at Alpha Group (Figure 4).

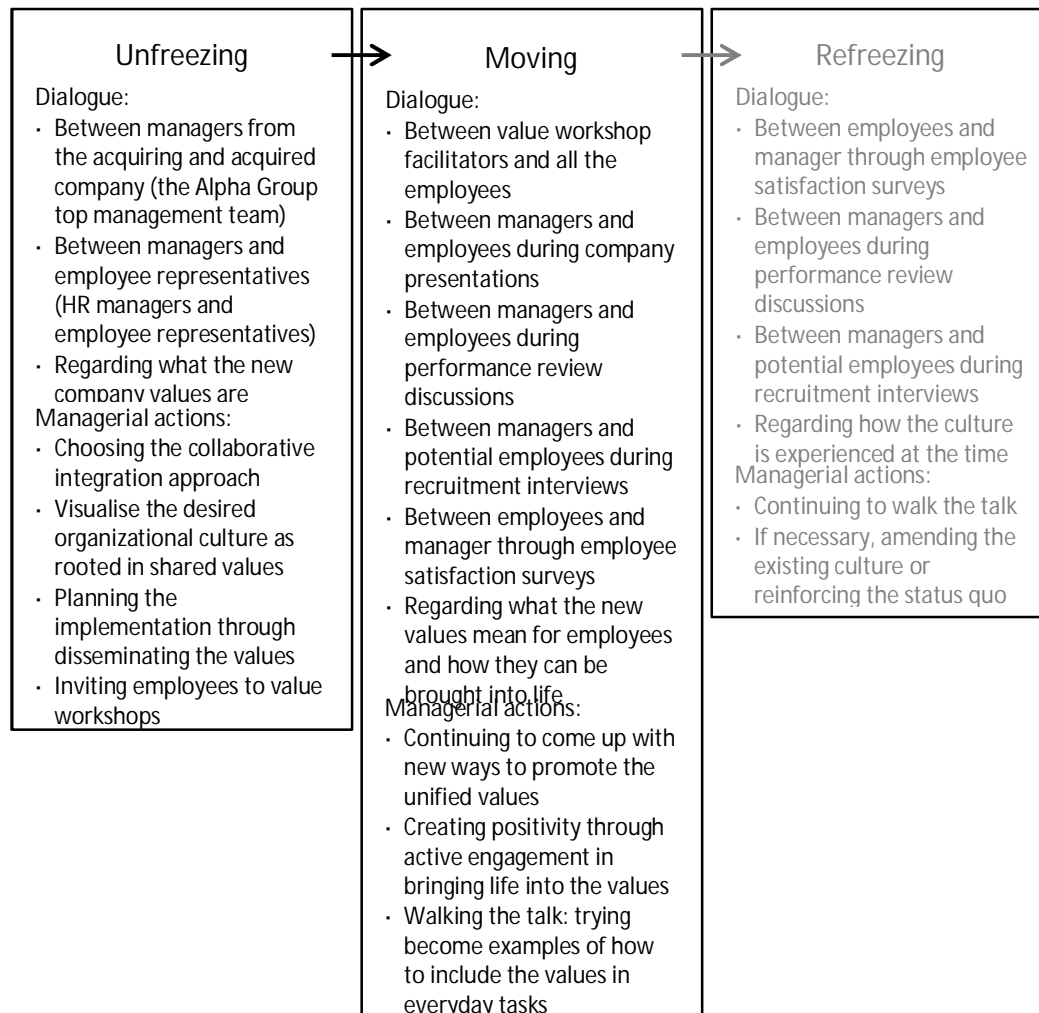


Figure 4 Integration at Alpha Group

This, however, was how far Alpha Group had progressed in 2016. The integration efforts continued and employee experiences of the integration were mixed. One crucial aspect in which Alpha Group seemed to be lagging was walking the talk – that is, managerial examples of embracing the values in everyday work. Whereas former Alpha managers ardently took on their integration-related responsibilities (including the integration manager's relocation to Germany, which was greatly appreciated), many line workers, especially from the former Beta, reported that the values were not apparent in the actions of

their immediate supervisors. In addition, although the employees reported many positive emotions, most also recounted negative experiences. Thus, Alpha Group had not yet reached the refreezing stage.

Nevertheless, it is particularly noteworthy that the value workshops were especially well received by employees. This supports the argument that dialogue can be used to create positivity and enhance socio-cultural integration, as the value workshops are the best example of truly interactive communication in the data. Thus, Figure 1 was redrawn to portray the value workshops as an example of dialogue (Figure 5). Based on the employee responses, the rational motivation for information processing during the workshops was the understanding that the new values would lead towards improving the company, for example, by increasing the quality of the work. Improvements in the work atmosphere and a pro-group attitude connote pro-social motivation. Based on the responses, most employees experienced pro-social motivation, although the pro-self motivation of improved career development opportunities, for example, was mentioned. Based on the employees' reported positive attitudes towards meeting different people and hearing different viewpoints during the workshops, compassionate motivation was also present.

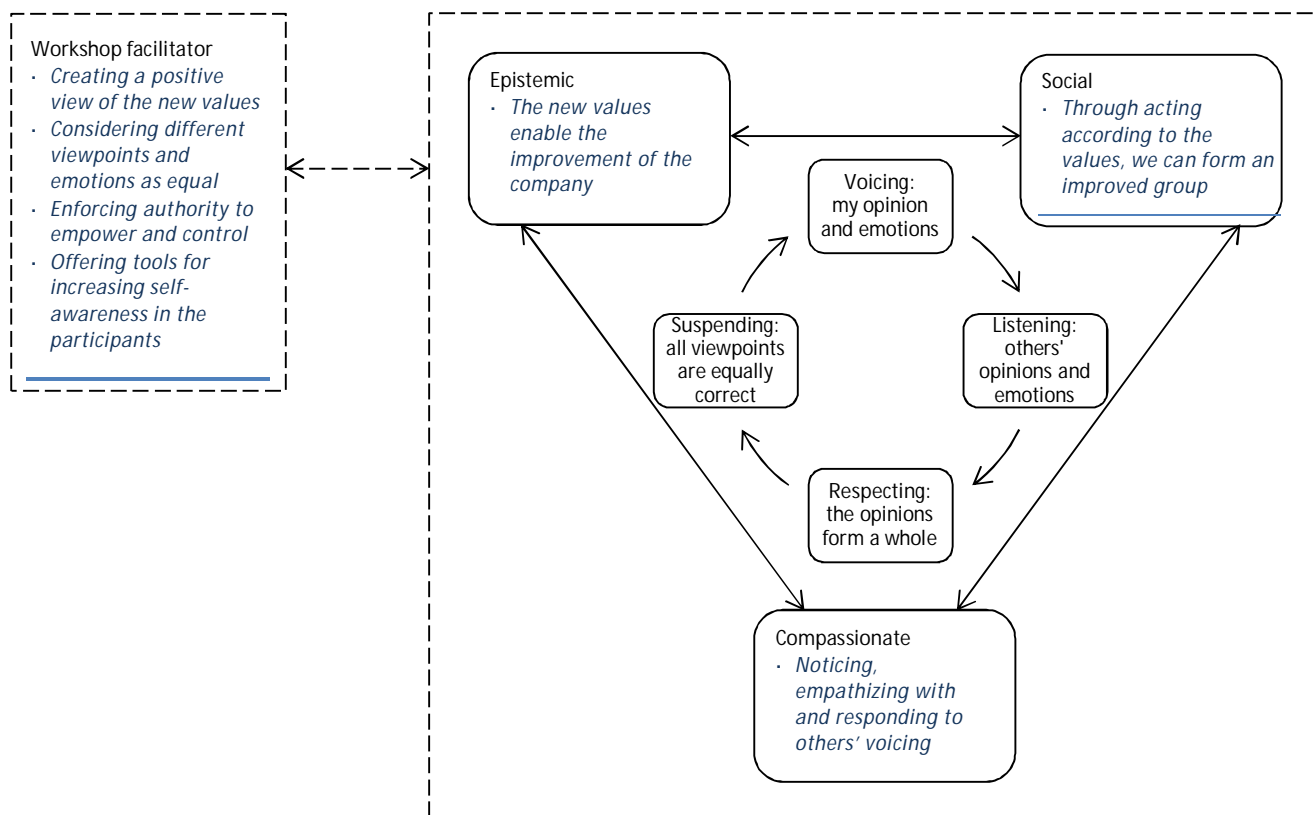


Figure 5 Value workshops as an example of dialogue

The workshop dialogue was formally facilitated by a local in-group facilitator. Several facilitators were trained for this purpose by Alpha Group to ensure the smooth running of the workshops. Facilitators had the task of introducing the new values in a positive light, encouraging participants to voice their opinions and listen to others' perspectives, keeping the dialogue focused on the topic, and offering aids for increasing awareness and understanding, such as group tasks aimed at discovering underlying thoughts regarding the values. Instead of one-to-one or one-to-many communication, the value workshops offered employees the chance to engage in many-to-many communication. Thus, despite the well-established importance of communication during M&A, this paper argues that particularly communication that is interactive and engaging in nature – in this case, dialogue – can advance socio-cultural integration and bring about social cohesion.

### *Employee emotions*

The integration raised several positive, negative, and mixed emotions (Table II), which are here considered based on the qualitative analysis in NVivo. In effect, this means that missing and neutral responses (Table II) are not presented here, as they contained no emotional information.

In general, the value workshops were very well received; 70 per cent of respondents' emotions regarding the workshops were positive. The workshops created positive perceptions of the value-renewal process and of the company as a whole. They were seen as a step towards increased cooperation and unity, and as encouraging the practical application of the values. However, some respondents thought that the value workshops offered no practical benefit: "The value workshops did not bring me anything. After all, I must already have certain values/ideas with which I can live and work; these cannot be communicated to someone in a one-day training session". Similarly, the organisation of the workshops was criticised. This was mainly due to some dismissals that preceded the workshops: "To give notice is never simple, and there is never a right moment for it, but they really opted for the worst possible moment here".

Despite the great success of the value workshops, only 28 per cent of the emotions regarding the value-renewal process as a whole were positive. A major dilemma was perceived lack of progress, openness, honesty, and cross-departmental appreciation of colleagues. Furthermore, many employees perceived their managers as either not clearly following the values or as downright violating them: "Unfortunately, I have not been able to recognise that these values are also being lived up to by our superiors" and "the superiors have to change – it seems as if everything has stayed as it was". The necessity of continuing with value renewal and living up to the values was evident.

Nevertheless, common values that gave the company direction were experienced as enhancing employee motivation to make the company a success together. In addition, employees felt more secure when the company showed appreciation for them. Employees were also proud to work for a company that had values. It was stated that "The launch and the message that has come with the values were so good that I wanted to see and develop the company and its values with an open mind". In addition, "In the value process was a

message that the personnel are cared about”.

Employees experienced Alpha Group and belonging to the group as valuable. However, the overall deal also created negative emotions. Anxiety was caused by merging with an unknown partner and by the potential reallocation of resources. A major cause of insecurity was anxiety about one's job. Employees were not secure that their work would continue and were unable to detect the desired progress. The matrix organisational structure that had been adopted was difficult to understand; that is, employees sensed inequality and experienced jealousy. Perceived losses (the loss of colleagues and the old company) also created sadness. Nevertheless, the atmosphere at Alpha Group was considered to support work and the integration was considered to have been handled in an appropriate way. Security was also experienced due to the sense of direction and personal development fostered by the integration.

However, employees also felt that the integration had failed to completely unite the two companies; cultural and practical differences were still perceived and past and present problems had not been resolved. Furthermore, employees felt that their opinions and concerns had not been adequately heard. The acquisition was seen as having the potential to make the future brighter, but future success was still seen as depending on further integration. Some decisions during the integration were also judged as poor – most notably, dismissals and the new matrix organisation structure. Likely as a consequence of the matrix structure and symbiosis-seeking integration, former Alpha employees also feared that Beta was gaining all the control.

This indicates mismatched leadership styles that influenced how well the value-renewal process was being received by employees. Alpha Group decided to pursue a matrix organisation structure, where internal teams could consist of employees from different countries. Many employees regarded this as problematic and unpleasant, as they felt that having an overseas manager lessened their ability to contact the manager as well as the manager's interest in listening to them. In addition, German Beta had previously been a somewhat hierarchical company, whereas everyone at Finnish Alpha was on first-name basis with the CEO. Therefore, some cultural adjustments to the new organisational structure were necessary and proved to be difficult to enact, especially for some Beta managers. Furthermore, the openness of communication, which had existed on a wide scale at Alpha, had to be learnt by those from Beta. In fact, some felt that the best-of-both-worlds integration approach was not being implemented in all areas and that Alpha exercised more control over certain matters. This, although natural in an acquisition, is in contrast with former Alpha employees' reports of fearing that Beta was gaining all the control.

### *Discussion*

As predicted in the literature (Clayton, 2010), Alpha Group employees appreciated communication that was participative, reflective, and positive. Especially during the value workshops, employees were able to participate in dialogue, embrace diverse viewpoints and move towards creating shared beliefs and values (cf. Oliver and Jacobs, 2007). Although the employee responses reveal that integration is a highly subjective experience (cf. Risberg,

2001), the findings indicate that good-quality interaction (as defined by Liu et al., 2010) can indeed assist with the emergence of dialogue (cf. Isaacs, 1999).

During the value workshops, employees had the chance to work towards aligned goals and commit to new solutions, despite their potentially differing opinions (cf. Tjosvold, 2008). They sought to express their own views, to understand the views of others, and to find similarities upon which to build agreement (cf. Tjosvold et al., 2014). Through voicing their opinions, listening to and respecting others' opinions, and suspending judgment, they were able to engage in dialogue (cf. Isaacs, 1999), where both reason and emotion were given room (cf. Choi, 2014). Trained facilitators were present to guide the group towards positivity, collaboration, and shared understanding (cf. Burson, 2002; Ballantyne, 2004; Whitney and Fredrickson, 2015).

Congruent with previous literature (Sarala and Vaara, 2010; Stahl et al., 2013; Hajro, 2015), although several similarities between the national and organisational cultures of Alpha and Beta could be found, it was the differences that the employees amplified. Cultural differences that made socio-cultural integration more difficult were found, for example, in the hierarchies and management styles of the pre-acquisition organisations. Adaptation to new cultural norms (Adair et al., 2001) was necessary, especially for Beta employees, for whom the new emphasis on honesty and openness was unfamiliar. As predicted in the literature (e.g. Cartwright and Cooper, 1993; Birkinshaw et al., 2000; Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005), the socio-cultural integration was not complete when this research project ended in 2016.

Although cultural differences were reported, they were less pronounced than in studies on the effects of cultural differences during socio-cultural integration might assume (cf. Stahl and Voigt, 2008). Indeed, it seems that the socio-cultural integration process was successful in creating interpersonal relationships that were experienced as positive, trust in the acquisition partner, and shared identity (cf. Stahl and Voigt, 2008; Stahl et al., 2011; Hajro, 2015). Effectiveness of communication in dealing with potentially conflict-inducing changes (Weber and Drori, 2011) was recognised at Alpha Group. In particular, Alpha Group was successful at recognising and announcing shared values that acted as the basis for unification. Management – especially Alpha management – was enthusiastically creating and promoting a compelling vision of joint future success and discouraging “us vs them” thinking. Interaction and internal communication were successfully used to paint a positive picture of the future (cf. Rottig et al., 2017).

As suggested by Bansal (2015), positivity was found mainly in relation to human-centric integration tasks. Happiness, pride, and relief were triggered by situations employees deemed as personally relevant and goal-congruent (cf. Lazarus, 1991, 1993; Fredrickson, 2001, 2013). Negative emotions, including anxiety, anger, sadness, and jealousy, were also triggered by events of perceived personal relevance. However, negative experiences stemmed from goal-incongruent appraisal (cf. Lazarus, 1991, 1993; Fredrickson, 2001). Hope was seen for a potentially beneficial joint future, if goal-incongruent events would subside (cf. Lazarus, 1991, 1993).

Congruent with Sinkovics et al. (2011), although the emotion triggers reflected the height

of emotion around the time of the announcement and formal integration, it was clear that the emotions had outlasted formal integration. Employees reporting positive emotions were more prone to viewing the integrated company in a positive light than employees who reported negative emotions (cf. Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005). This seems to confirm that positive emotions can greatly enhance socio-cultural integration (e.g. Birkinshaw et al., 2000; Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005; Raitis et al., 2017).

Positivity could also be found at Alpha Group in what Menges and Kilduff (2015) termed group-based emotions. Belonging to Alpha Group triggered both happiness and pride in employees. However, protective behaviours (Menges and Kilduff, 2015) could be detected as well in the solidarity felt with those dismissed and the sadness over the loss of the pre-acquisition organisation. Moreover, negativity was found in the managerial examples, especially among Beta employees. Yet the involvement of Alpha Group's top management was greatly appreciated. These findings seem to confirm that managers set the tone for integration (Krug and Hegarty, 2001).

During the research process, Alpha Group successfully progressed through the steps of unfreezing and moving, but did not reach the stage of refreezing (as described by Lewin, 1947; Marks and Mirvis, 2011). Dialogue aided this process by allowing top management to make successful integration plans, enabling employees to participate in creating social cohesion, and allowing Alpha Group to constantly remind employees of the positive joint future that could be built upon the new values. In this process, managers had an important role as both facilitators and examples (cf. Schweiger et al., 1993).

## Propositions and conclusion

The challenge that cultural differences pose to M&A success has been of interest to M&A scholars for decades. However, research results remain conflicting (e.g. Stahl and Voigt, 2008; Weber et al., 2011), which suggests that the influence of cultural differences on post-acquisition socio-cultural integration is complex and possibly multi-faceted (cf. Stahl and Voigt, 2008). Therefore, in the increasingly international world, where cross-cultural encounters are dynamic and interconnected, highlighting the role of open-minded communication and mutually beneficial relationships may help in overcoming cross-cultural conflict (Tjosvold et al., 2014). Cross-border M&A provide an interesting and fruitful context to study how to overcome cultural differences.

Previous research has been limited in creating an understanding of how companies can overcome difficulties related to cultural differences (Rottig, 2011). Nevertheless, an interesting suggestion in the literature is to focus on emotions during socio-cultural integration. Whereas the literature largely focuses on the negative (e.g. Graebner et al., 2017), positivity has been found to be an important contributor to (e.g. Kusstatscher, 2006; Raitis et al., 2017), and therefore a fruitful topic of research on, socio-cultural integration. Based on the Alpha Group case, it seems that positivity can indeed facilitate overcoming cross-cultural differences. Although negative emotions also arise, positivity increases identification and engagement with the new, post-acquisition organisation, thus also

mitigating the effects of negative emotions at least to some extent. Therefore, the following is proposed:

P1. Cultural conflict during post-acquisition socio-cultural integration can be overcome by creating positivity.

However, there are no guidelines on how to manage collective emotions in the literature (Huy, 2012). Although socialisation has been identified as an important facet of building social cohesion (e.g. Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001; Yalabik, 2013), the specific means through which such socialisation can be promoted are less known. Nevertheless, creating social cohesion during socio-cultural integration necessitates interaction (Morrison, 2002; Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006). Especially participative, reflective, and positive communication enhances socio-cultural integration (Clayton, 2010). Dialogue offers a means of combining interaction with positive, reflective engagement, where both reason and emotion have a place. Bridging these together, the following is proposed:

P2. Dialogue enables the collective management of emotions during post-acquisition integration by offering a platform for creating positivity and social cohesion.

Although previous studies have highlighted the importance of communication (e.g. Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991; Weber and Tarba, 2010; Angwin, 2016), the need for a deeper understanding of specific communication practices and tools used in socio-cultural integration persists (Graebner et al., 2017). The effectiveness of different communication means for dealing with conflict during socio-cultural integration, therefore, necessitates further research (Weber and Drori, 2011). Based on the findings, the following is proposed:

P3. Due to its collaborative and engaging nature, dialogue provides an especially effective means of communication for overcoming cross-cultural conflict.

Following the analytical framework (Figure 3), this research applied the theories of cultural change (Lewin, 1947) and dialogue (Isaacs, 1999) to examine socio-cultural integration following a cross-border acquisition. The study was a response to the call for more positive research on international business in general and on socio-cultural integration in particular (Stahl et al., 2013, 2016). This paper has argued that dialogue can be used to create positivity regarding socio-cultural integration throughout the stages of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing (Lewin, 1947) by actively engaging employees in voicing, listening, respecting, and suspending (Isaacs, 1999). This paper contributes to the three-stage theory of cultural change (Lewin, 1947; Evans and Pucik, 2005; Marks and Mirvis, 2011) by offering a new perspective on dialogue as a means to ease the integration process and focusing on building positivity rather than overcoming cultural conflict.

Through these findings and the aforementioned propositions, this paper also offers new insight into the ongoing debate regarding socio-cultural integration. First, this paper reaches beyond the conventional comparative cross-cultural setting in its examination of how to overcome cross-cultural issues during socio-cultural integration, rather than

focusing on the issues themselves. Second, the paper follows the increasingly popular positive organisational scholarship school of thought in highlighting the importance and effects of positivity during socio-cultural integration. Third, the paper contributes to the discussion on emotions during socio-cultural integration in its identification of several key emotion triggers, enabling scholars to look past mere emotion labels. Finally, the paper contributes to the discussion on communication during socio-cultural integration by suggesting how dialogue can be used to overcome conflict, increase positivity, and thereby promote socio-cultural integration.

In offering such insight, the findings presented in this paper also have important managerial implications. First, the findings confirm previous arguments that interactive forms of communication are most beneficial for socio-cultural integration. This enables practitioners to better plan and implement future integration processes. Second, the findings indicate that dialogue can be an especially functional means of achieving swift and smooth integration, as it not only entails interaction but also offers a way to manage collective emotions. This is important because the creation of positivity, which has been found to ease socio-cultural integration, seems to be most successful when employees are engaged in the integration process. Therefore, this paper suggests that constructive management during post-M&A socio-cultural integration centres on creating positivity rather than neutralising negativity. Third, the findings indicate that positive engagement, for example, through dialogue, can overcome cross-cultural challenges, as it increases identification with the post-acquisition organisational culture.

Finally, the framework of dialogue during socio-cultural integration (Figure 2) enables practitioners to manage the whole integration process more efficiently. For example, workshops relating to key areas of integration, such as the value workshops in the case company, can be used to increase employees' understanding of, and positivity towards, socio-cultural integration – or, indeed, any change the organisation may be undergoing. However, in order for dialogue to promote change throughout the organisation, every employee must have the opportunity to engage in it. Nevertheless, dialogue can also be used on a smaller scale to facilitate other organisational functions, such as strategy building.

This research also has its limitations. First, the findings are based on a single case study. Hence, they are context-embedded and should, therefore, be interpreted with caution. On the one hand, the single case structure reduces the generalisability of the findings; on the other hand, it creates in-depth understanding of the focal case. Therefore, although the single case approach provided fertile ground for this study, future research involving more cases is encouraged to move past naturalistic generalisations. Moreover, although the research team had an exceptional opportunity to follow an ongoing integration and the creation of a new joint culture in real time, this also represents a limitation, as the results are not yet conclusive. As Alpha Group has yet to reach the stage of refreezing, it is impossible to determine the final outcome of dialogue as a promoter of positivity during socio-cultural integration. Therefore, future research with a longitudinal design is necessary to understand the final stage of refreezing.

The research team tried to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings in many ways.



The multilingual approach increased the reliability of the data considerably. The survey data were collected in the mother tongue of the respondents and every interviewee could choose either their native language or English – whichever language they were most comfortable with. The research was also carefully documented, and the data were always coded and analysed by two-to-four members of the team. Hence, researcher triangulation is considered to be a major strength of this study. In addition, through detailing the data collection and analysis processes, the research team provided means for researchers to continue the work in the future.

The quality of this work stems from the third generation of qualitative research in international business. In this study, quality was ensured through intimate contact with the participants and the case context, capturing multiple perspectives, making sure the representations of the findings were factually correct, continuously discussing the emergent findings and next steps with the case company management to ensure understanding, and closely tying the discussion to state-of-the-art literature in the field. The findings are highly contextual, as they should be; after all, the single case study is valuable due to the depth of insight it offers (Welch and Piekkari, 2017).

The propositions made here point towards areas of special interest where future research could make a significant contribution. However, the myriad of experienced emotions indicates that there is still room for research that would deepen the overall understanding of emotions in the context of cross-border M&A. For example, earlier research focused mainly on negative emotions, whereas this study promoted positivity, and identified a significant number of positive emotions among the employees both in the acquiring and acquired companies. Furthermore, as prior studies were primarily cross-sectional in nature, it would be very interesting to see how dialogue and emotions evolve over time. A longitudinal approach over the integration phase would allow for determining whether emotions develop from positive to negative or vice versa, and how the dialogue evolves over time. Such findings would also have clear managerial implications. A cross-border merger or acquisition is always a significant investment, and yet many of them fail to meet the objectives set for the deal. The top management of the acquiring firm would benefit significantly from knowing how to support the human side of the integration, to achieve the expected synergy effects. Supporting this can take multiple forms, including in-house training, mentoring of key employees, and dialogue, as presented here.

### *Notes*

1. The literature on mergers and acquisitions often groups these concepts under the common term M&A, and in many studies, the words merger and acquisition are used interchangeably (e.g. Anderson et al., 2001; Child et al., 2001; Lees, 2003; Kusstatscher and Cooper, 2005). While this paper follows this convention, in this research, “M&A” refers to acquisitions.
2. In order to protect Alpha Group’s anonymity, this paper offers a synonym for each of the four values.

## References

- Adair, W., Buchan, N., Chen, X.-P. and Liu, D. (2016), "A model of communication context and measure of context dependence", *Academy of Management Discoveries*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 198-217.
- Adair, W., Okumura, T. and Brett, J. (2001), "Negotiation behavior when cultures collide: The United States and Japan", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 3, pp. 371-385.
- Ager, D. (2011), "The emotional impact and behavioral consequences of post-M&A integration: an ethnographic case study in the software industry", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 199-230.
- Anderson, H., Havila, V. and Salmi, A. (2001), "Can you buy a business relationship? On the importance of customer and supplier relationships in acquisitions", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 30 No. 7, pp. 575-586.
- Angwin, D., Mellahi, K., Gomes, E. and Peter, E. (2016), "How communication approaches impact mergers and acquisitions outcomes", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 27 No. 20, pp. 2370-2397.
- Ashkanasy, N. and Daus, C. (2002), "Emotions in the workplace: the new challenge for managers", *Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 76-86.
- Ballantyne, D. (2004), "Dialogue and its role in the development of relationship specific knowledge", *The Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, Vol. 19 No. 2, pp. 114-123.
- Bansal, A. (2015), "Understanding the integration mechanisms practiced during organizational change: evidence from five M&A transactions", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 28 No. 6, pp. 929-947.
- Bastien, D. (1987), "Common patterns of behavior and communication in corporate mergers and acquisitions", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 17-33.
- Bavelas, J., Hutchinson, S., Kenwood, C. and Matheson, D. (1997), "Using face-to-face dialogue as a standard for other communication systems", *Canadian Journal of Communication*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 5-24.
- Birkinshaw, J., Bresman, H. and Håkanson, L. (2000), "Managing the post-acquisition integration process: how the human integration and task integration processes interact to foster value creation", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 395-425.
- Bohm, D. (2003), *On Dialogue*, Routledge, Milton Park (First published 1996).
- Burson, M. (2002), "Finding clarity in the midst of conflict: facilitating dialogue and skillful discussion using a model from the Quaker tradition", *Group Facilitation*, Vol. 4, pp. 23-29.
- Cameron, K. (2017), "Cross-cultural research and positive organizational scholarship", *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 13-32.
- Cartwright, S. and Cooper, C. (1993), "The role of culture compatibility in successful organizational marriage", *The Academy of Management Executive*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 57-70.
- Cartwright, S. and Schoenberg, R. (2006), "Thirty years of mergers and acquisitions research: recent advances and future opportunities", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 17 No. S1, pp. S1-S5.
- Child, J., Faulkner, D. and Pitkethly, R. (2001), *The Management of International Acquisitions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, NY.
- Choi, T. (2014), "Rational and compassionate information processing: a conceptual framework for authentic dialogue", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 74 No. 6, pp. 726-735.

Clarke, N. (2010), "Emotional intelligence and learning in teams", *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 125-145.

Clarke, N. and Salleh, N.M. (2011), "Emotions and their management during a merger in Brunei", *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 291-304.

Clayton, B. (2010), "Understanding the unpredictable: beyond traditional research on mergers and acquisitions", *Emergence: Complexity and Organization*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 1-19.

Cooper-Thomas, H. and Anderson, N. (2006), "Organizational socialization: a new theoretical model and recommendations for future research and HRM practices in organizations", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 492-516.

De Dreu, C., Nijstad, B. and van Knippenberg, D. (2008), "Motivated information processing in group judgment and decision making", *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 22-49.

Denzin, N. (1970), "Introduction", in Denzin, N. (Ed.), *Sociological Methods: A Sourcebook*, Aldine Publishing Company, Chicago, IL, pp. 471-475.

Drori, I., Wrzesniewski, A. and Ellis, S. (2011), "Cultural clashes in a 'merger of equals': the case of high-tech start-ups", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 50 No. 5, pp. 625-649.

Dyer, W. and Wilkins, A. (1991), "Better stories, not better constructs, to generate better theory: a rejoinder to Eisenhardt", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 613-619.

Eisenhardt, K. and Graebner, M. (2007), "Theory building from cases: opportunities and challenges", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 25-32.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989), "Building theories from case study research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 532-550.

Evans, P. and Pucik, V. (2005), "People and cultural aspects of mergers and acquisitions: what are the lessons...and the challenges", in Stahl, G. and Mendenhall, M. (Eds), *Mergers and Acquisitions: Managing Culture and Human Resources*, Stanford Business Books, pp. 412-422.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2001), *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again*, Cambridge University Press.

Fredrickson, B. (2000), "Cultivating positive emotions to optimize health and well-being", *Prevention & Treatment*, Vol. 3 No. 1.

Fredrickson, B. (2001), "The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 56 No. 3, pp. 218-226.

Fredrickson, B. (2013), "Positive emotions broaden and build", in Devine, P. and Plant, A. (Eds), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 47, Academic Press, Burlington, pp. 1-53.

Fugate, M., Kinicki, A. and Scheck, C. (2002), "Coping with an organizational merger over four stages", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 55 No. 4, pp. 905-928.

Goldenberg, A., Saguy, T. and Halperin, E. (2014), "How group-based emotions are shaped by collective emotions: evidence for emotional transfer and emotional burden", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 107 No. 4, pp. 581-596.

Graebner, M., Heimeriks, K., Huy, Q. and Vaara, E. (2017), "The process of postmerger integration: a review and agenda for future research", *Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 1-32.

Gunkel, M., Schlaegel, C., Rossteutscher, T. and Wolff, B. (2015), "The human aspect of cross-border acquisition outcomes: the role of management practices, employee emotions, and national

culture", *International Business Review*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 394-408.

Hajro, A. (2015), "Cultural influences and the mediating role of socio-cultural integration processes on the performance of cross-border mergers and acquisitions", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 192-215.

Haspeslagh, P. and Jemison, D. (1991), *Managing Acquisitions: Creating Value Through Corporate Renewal*, The Free Press, New York, NY.

Huy, Q. (2012), "Emotions in strategic organization: opportunities for impactful research", *Strategic Organization*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 240-247.

Isaacs, W. (1993), "Dialogue, collective thinking, and organizational learning", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 24-39.

Isaacs, W. (1999), *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, Currency, New York, NY.

Kiefer, T. (2002), "Understanding the emotional experience of organizational change: evidence from a merger", *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 39-61.

Kristiansen, M. (2013), "Dynamics between organisational change processes and facilitating dissensus in context inquiring dialogues", *International Journal of Action Research*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 95-123.

Krug, J. and Hegarty, W.H. (2001), "Predicting who stays and leaves after an acquisition: a study of top managers in multinational firms", *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 185-196.

Kusstatscher, V. (2006), "Cultivating positive emotions in mergers and acquisitions", *Advances in Mergers and Acquisitions*, Vol. 5, pp. 91-103.

Kusstatscher, V. and Cooper, C. (2005), *Managing Emotions in Mergers and Acquisitions*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.

Larsson, R. and Lubatkin, M. (2001), "Achieving acculturation in mergers and acquisitions: an international case survey", *Human Relations*, Vol. 54 No. 12, pp. 1573-1607.

Lazarus, R. (1991), "Cognition and motivation in emotion", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 46 No. 6, pp. 352-367.

Lazarus, R. (1993), "From psychological stress to the emotions: a history of changing outlooks", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 44, pp. 1-21.

Lees, S. (2003), *Global Acquisitions: Strategic Integration and the Human Factor*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills and NY.

Lewin, K. (1947), "Frontiers in group dynamics: concept, method and reality in social science; social equilibria and social change", *Human Relations*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 5-41.

Liu, L., Chua, C. and Stahl, G. (2010), "Quality of communication experience: definition, measurement, and implications for intercultural negotiations", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 95 No. 3, pp. 469-487.

Marks, M.L. and Mirvis, P.H. (2011), "A framework for the human resources role in managing culture in mergers and acquisitions", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 50 No. 6, pp. 859-877.

Menges, J.I. and Kilduff, M. (2015), "Group emotions: cutting the Gordian knots concerning terms, levels of analysis, and processes", *Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 845-928.

Mesquita, B. and Karasawa, M. (2002), "Different emotional lives", *Cognition and Emotion*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 127-141.

Meyer, C. (2001), "A case in case study methodology", *Field Methods*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 329-352.

Moore, F. (2013), "Ambivalent perspectives: an ethnographic case study of ambivalence in

postacquisition integration", *Thunderbird International Business Review*, Vol. 55 No. 4, pp. 453-467.

Morrison, E. (2002), "Newcomers' relationships: the role of social network ties during socialization", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 45 No. 6, pp. 1149-1160.

Oliver, D. and Jacobs, C. (2007), "Developing guiding principles: an organizational learning perspective", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 20 No. 6, pp. 813-828.

Raitis, J., Harikkala-Laihinien, R., Hassett, M. and Nummela, N. (2017), "Finding positivity during a major organizational change: in search of triggers of employees' positive perceptions and feelings", in Zerbe, W., Härtel, C., Ashkanasy, N. and Petitta, L. (Eds), *Emotions and Identity (Research on Emotions in Organizations Vol. 13)*, Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 3-16.

Reus, T. (2012), "Culture's consequences for emotional attending during cross-border acquisition implementation", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 342-351.

Risberg, A. (2001), "Employee experiences of acquisition processes", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 58-84.

Rottig, D. (2011), "The role of social capital in cross-cultural M&As: a multinational corporation perspective", *European Journal of International Management*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 413-431.

Rottig, D., Reus, T. and Tarba, S. (2013), "The impact of culture on mergers and acquisitions: a third of a century of research", in Cooper, C. and Finkelstein, S. (Eds), *Advances in Mergers and Acquisitions*, Vol. 12, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 135-172.

Rottig, D., Schappert, J. and Starkman, E. (2017), "Successfully managing the sociocultural integration process in international acquisitions: a qualitative analysis of Canon's acquisition of Océ", *Thunderbird International Business Review*, Vol. 59 No. 2, pp. 187-208.

Ruddin, L. (2006), "You can generalize stupid! Social scientists, Bent Flyvbjerg, and case study methodology", *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 797-812.

Sarala, R., Junni, P., Cooper, C. and Tarba, S. (2016), "A sociocultural perspective on knowledge transfer in mergers and acquisitions", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 42 No. 5, pp. 1230-1249.

Sarala, R.M. (2010), "The impact of cultural differences and acculturation factors on post-acquisition conflict", *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 38-56.

Sarala, R.M. and Vaara, E. (2010), "Cultural differences, convergence, and crossvergence as explanations of knowledge transfer in international acquisition", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 8, pp. 1365-1390.

Schein, E. (1993), "On dialogue, culture, and organizational learning", *Organizational Dynamics*, Vol. 22 No. 2, pp. 40-51.

Schein, E. (2010), *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 4th ed., Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Scherer, K. (1997), "The role of culture in emotion-antecedent appraisal", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 73 No. 5, pp. 902-922.

Schoenberg, R. (2006), "Measuring the performance of corporate acquisition: an empirical comparison of alternative metrics", *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 361-370.

Schweiger, D. and DeNisi, A. (1991), "Communication with employees following a merger: a longitudinal field experiment", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 34 No. 1, pp. 110-135.

Schweiger, D., Csiszar, E. and Napier, N. (1993), "Implementing international mergers and acquisitions", *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 53-70.

- Schweiger, D.M. and Goulet, P.K. (2005), "Facilitating acquisition integration through deep-level cultural learning interventions: a longitudinal field experiment", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 26 No. 10, pp. 1477-1499.
- Senge, P. (1990), *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, Doubleday, New York, NY.
- Shrivastava, P. (1986), "Postmerger integration", *The Journal of Business Strategy*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 65-76.
- Siggelkow, N. (2007), "Persuasion with case studies", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 20-24.
- Sinkovics, R., Penz, E. and Ghauri, P. (2008), "Enhancing the trustworthiness of qualitative research in international business", *Management International Review*, Vol. 48 No. 6, pp. 689-714.
- Sinkovics, R., Zagelmeyer, S. and Kusstatscher, V. (2011), "Between merger and syndrome: the intermediary role of emotions in four cross-border M&As", *International Business Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 27-47.
- Stahl, G. and Voigt, A. (2008), "Do cultural differences matter in mergers and acquisitions? A tentative model and examination", *Organization Science*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 160-176.
- Stahl, G., Angwin, D., Very, P., Gomes, E., Weber, Y., Tarba, S., Noorderhaven, N., Benyamini, H., Bouckenoghe, D., Chreim, S. and Durand, M. (2013), "Sociocultural integration in mergers and acquisitions: unresolved paradoxes and directions for future research", *Thunderbird International Business Review*, Vol. 55 No. 4, pp. 333-356.
- Stahl, G.K., Larsson, R., Kremershof, I. and Sitkin, S.B. (2011), "Trust dynamics in acquisitions: a case survey", *Human Resource Management*, Vol. 50 No. 5, pp. 575-603.
- Stahl, G.K., Mendenhall, M.E. and Weber, Y. (2005), "Research on sociocultural integration in mergers and acquisitions", in Stahl, G. and Mendenhall, M. (Eds), *Mergers and Acquisitions: Managing Culture and Human Resources*, Stanford Business Books, pp. 401-411.
- Stahl, G.K., Tung, R.L., Kostova, T. and Zellmer-Bruhn, M. (2016), "Widening the lens: rethinking distance, diversity, and foreignness in international business research through positive organizational scholarship", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 47 No. 6, pp. 621-630.
- Stake, R.E. (1995), *The Art of the Case Study Research*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Steinel, W., Utz, S. and Koning, L. (2010), "The good, the bad and the ugly thing to do when sharing information: revealing, concealing and lying depend on social motivation, distribution and importance of information", *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 113 No. 2, pp. 85-96.
- Tjosvold, D. (2008), "Constructive controversy for management education: developing committed, open-minded researchers", *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 73-85.
- Tjosvold, D., Wong, A.S.H. and Chen, N.Y.F. (2014), "Constructively managing conflicts in organizations", *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 1, pp. 545-568.
- Very, P., Lubatkin, M. and Calori, R. (1996), "A cross-national assessment of acculturative stress in recent European mergers", *International Studies of Management and Organization*, Vol. 26

No. 1, pp. 59-86.

Vince, R. (2006), "Being taken over: managers' emotions and rationalizations during a company takeover", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 43 No. 2, pp. 343-365.

Watson, D. and Tellegen, A. (1985), "Toward a consensual structure of mood", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 98 No. 2, pp. 219-235.

Weber, Y. and Drori, I. (2011), "Integrating organizational and human behavior perspectives on mergers and acquisitions: looking inside the black box", *International Studies of Management & Organization*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 76-95.

Weber, Y. and Tarba, S. (2010), "Human resource practices and performance of mergers and acquisitions in Israel", *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 203-211.

Weber, Y., Tarba, S.Y. and Reichel, A. (2011), "A model of the influence of culture on integration approaches and international mergers and acquisitions performance", *International Studies of Management & Organization*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 9-24.

Welch, C. and Piekkari, R. (2017), "How should we (not) judge the 'quality' of qualitative research? A re-assessment of current evaluative criteria in international business", *Journal of World Business*, Vol. 52 No. 5, pp. 714-725.

Welch, C., Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, E. and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki, E. (2011), "Theorising from case studies: towards a pluralist future for international business research", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 42, pp. 740-762.

Whitney, D. and Fredrickson, B. (2015), "Appreciative inquiry meets positive psychology", *AI Practitioner*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 18-26.

World Investment Report (2016), "Investor nationality: policy challenges", UNCTAD, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, Geneva.

Yalabik, Z. (2013), "Mergers and acquisitions: does organizational socialization matter?", *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 16 No. 5, pp. 519-537.

Yin, R. (2003), "Case study research – design and methods", *Applied Social Research Methods Series*, 3rd ed., Vol. 5, Sage Publications.

### *Corresponding author*

Riikka Harikkala-Laihininen can be contacted at: [riikka.harikkala-laihininen@utu.fi](mailto:riikka.harikkala-laihininen@utu.fi)