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MAKING SENSE OF
SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL TEAMS

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To my beloved father, Jorma Einola, *in memoriam*

ABSTRACT

Global teams tend to underperform. Teamwork often frustrates members compromising the results as well as employee motivation. In practice, bad results are often camouflaged, and both management and team members lack insight into what is really driving teams and why they do not reach their goals. The underlying metaphor our economic model is built on is the "machine" where people instead of active agents with true influence are implicitly seen as resources, executors of processes and walking *curriculum vitaes* to be aligned in precise ways to achieve often arbitrary goals and to meet unrealistic expectations.

This study takes a critical stand towards this mainstream view and applies reflexive methodology, the lens of sensemaking as well as the metaphor and the narrative as rhetorical devices to study how and why global teams form and evolve the way they do over time. The insights of this study are based on an experimental methodology studying many teams from a close range, and reveal how different structurally identical well-performing global teams executing the same tasks can be.

Teams when studied from within, are dynamic phenomena rather than static sums of their parts. Alternative team metaphors, such as the "chain gang", "dysfunctional family", "sandbox", "scouts" and "master cooks", for instance, emerge. The very different team dynamics are in part explained by how successful team members are at social sensemaking – establishing shared understandings around such basic concepts as "leadership", "good communication" and "team goals". Individual team members and their capability and willingness to engage in self-reflection and their decisions to act or not to act on what may first appear mundane events, can have huge influence over what their teams become. Sustainably successful teams work both on the task and the team itself and consider the team as a constant work-in-progress and not a fixed entity.

This study proposes innovative ways of looking at and studying global teams. People, team members, can be considered active agents, capable human beings on whose sensemaking paths depend on what these teams become and how they evolve over time.

Keywords: Global teams, sensemaking, metaphor, process study

TIIVISTELMÄ

Tämä tutkimus on lähtenyt tarkastelemaan kysymystä, miten tehtäväkeskeiset hyviä tuloksia aikaansaavat monikulttuuriset, virtuaaliset työryhmät muotoutuvat. Perinteinen alan tutkimus osoittaa, että tiimityö on haastavaa, mikä heijastuu huonoina tuloksina, sekä tiimiläisten tyytymättömyytenä tiimiin ja omaan osaansa työryhmässä. Tämä osittain etnografinen ja osittain case-tyyppinen pitkittäinen tutkimus osoittaa narratiivisen analyysiin ja metaforiin tukeutuen, että hyvää tulosta tuottavat tiimit ovat hyvin erilaisia kun työryhmiä tarkastellaan niiden sisäisen dynamiikan näkökulmasta tiimien muodostuessa ja kehittyessä ajan myötä. Tiettyä reseptiä menestyksekkäälle tiimille ei ole, vaan menestys on jatkuvan tiimille omintakeisen vuorovaikutustyön tulos. Tiimit eivät ole staattisia osiensa summia jotka ohjautuvat itse määränpäähänsä, vaan jatkuvasti muuttuvia organismeja joiden kehitykseen yksittäisillä tiiminjäsenillä on merkittävä vaikutus.

Tutkimus toisaalta kyseenalaistaa ja toisaalta monipuolistaa globaalien virtuaalitiimien laajalti "kone"-metaforaan perustuvaa positivistista tutkimusta jonka perusolettamus on, että ihmiset ovat resursseja joiden osaaminen ja kompetenssi voidaan tarkoin ennalta määrättyjen prosessien kautta valjastaa tuottamaan tulosta. Kun tiimien muodostumista ja kehitystä tarkastellaan sisältäpäin, voi kuitenkin huomata että ratkoessaan samoja ongelmia ulkoapäin lähes identtiset menestyksekkäät tiimit eroavat toisistaan merkittävästi ja näennäinen menestys voi olla ainakin osittain lumetta. Vain harvat ryhmät tiimiytyvät samaan hiileen puhaltaviksi ryhmäidentiteetin omaaviksi yhteisöiksi kun taas useimmat menestyksekkäätkin tiimit muotoutuvat vain vaivoin toisiaan sietäviksi alisuorittaviksi ihmisryppäiksi, ryhmiksi.

Tutkimuksen kontribuutiot liittyvät innovatiiviseen filosofiseen otteeseen ja luovaan metodologiseen lähestymistapaan jotka mahdollistavat "kone"-metaforan hylkäämisien ja monikulttuuristen virtuaalitiimien tutkimisen uudenlaisesta, prosessuaalisesta näkökulmasta joka tarkastelee tiimejä jatkuvasti kehittyvinä ja elämää pursuavina ilmiöinä. Kaikkein menestyksekkäimmät tiimit keskittyvät paitsi työtehtäviinsä myös tiimiytymiseen ja työryhmän jatkuvaan kehitykseen, eli siihen, että kaikki tiimin jäsenet ovat mukana kykyjensä mukaan ja pitävät työryhmää oikeana tiiminä, sellaisena jonka jäsenenä on hyvä olla. Huonommin tiimiytyvät joskin ulkoisesti menestyvät ryhmät potevat monenlaisia ongelmia; luottamuspulaa, ahdistusta, työmäärän epätasaista jakautumista jäsenten kesken, uupumusta, epätietoisuutta, jopa vihaa. Tiimin jäsenten välinen myönteinen vuorovaikutus on tarpeellinen yhteisymmärryksen muodostumiseksi sekä sellaisten menestyksekkään tiimin tunnusmerkkien kuten luottamuksen, hyvän johtajuuden, ja tehokkaan kommunikaation luomiseksi.

Avainsanat: globaalit virtuaalitiimit, vuorovaikutus, pitkittäistutkimus

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank our some 250 students who accepted to not only participate in a demanding course this work draws on, but to also be sort of "lab rats" to study teamwork. Many of these students are portrayed in the pages that follow. Some have helped refine the stories I tell for a greater truth-value and many have provided me with all kinds of juicy details questionnaires just cannot capture.

I am grateful to Turku School of Economics, Liikesivitysrahasto and KAUTE foundation for providing me with the financial resources without which I would not have been able to write this dissertation.

Finally, a heartfelt thanks to my mother Kati Sinervo for endless babysitting and other assistance to help us survive our oftentimes rather chaotic daily life. She also drew the pictures representing the five teams in this study based on my archaic sketches that just were not good enough no matter how hard I tried. I almost feel like apologizing to my children for quitting a stable job and becoming a PhD *student* at a mature age. These years have been demanding, and I am sorry for forgetting my keys so many times and having been worried and grumpy too often with my nose glued to a book on the playground bench. Yet, I am suppressing such thoughts of eternal maternal guilt. Amaya, Lilia and Mateo… learn to have courage and whenever possible, challenge this absurd world and break barriers that so often are imaginary or unnecessary.

In Turku, July 31, 2017

Katja Einola

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

1   OPENING THE DOOR

"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."

— Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina

1.1   Prologue

I spent 10 years working at Ericsson (*Telefonaktiebolaget L. M. Ericsson*), a world-leading networking and telecommunications equipment and services provider, managing various projects and programs, based first in Canada and then in Sweden. The last four years, I was mainly "fighting fires" and preventing escalations from reaching senior management related to mishaps and catastrophes created or sustained by collaborative projects ending up in customer system outages, legal claims by partners, delayed R&D projects, failures in the logistics system, environmental hazards, etc. In an environment where processes were sophisticated and fine-tuned with well-trained and reasonably motivated experts working together, a priori on what were thought to be well-planned projects delivering world-class products and services, and financial resources and management's commitment secured, how was it possible for things to go so wrong so often? Differences between cultures in functional areas (sales, R&D, product management, etc.) and nationalities (Russians, Swedes, Chinese, etc.) were the most typical explanation for failure when it was not simply assumed "this is the way things are around here." With a blend of amusement and frustration, I noticed time after time how no one ever (me included!) took responsibility for the issues encountered. Most often, people blamed someone else (or at least, "not me"), organizational dysfunction or other surmountable contextual factors (for instance, the customers!) for any fault. Why was getting things done together so difficult when everything was so well planned? After I left the job, I started to think about why leading teams and working in diverse team setups, apart from being extremely rewarding and stimulating, was also so difficult, and if I could do something about it, apart from becoming an accredited project manager, reading project management manuals ("bibles"), following corporate processes, and piling up on my bedside table other "cookbooks" sold at airports on how to "make" teams successful. The academics might have the answer, I thought.

1.2 The academic take

It is increasingly commonplace for work in business firms of all sizes in many knowledge-intensive sectors to be organized over digital means of communication and in teams crossing cultural boundaries and building bridges over distance. The global team, defined, for instance, as "*groups of people who work together to achieve a joint output with the members located in different countries*" (Maznevski & Chudoba 2000), has become the basic organizational unit, a mini-carrier of globalization on which the success of internationally active companies ultimately depends. In academic literature, global teams are often characterized as a panacea – a strategic and tactical tool for both flexibility and change, an instrument to explore new opportunities and exploit existing capabilities to "win" in the global marketplace, to distribute workloads across time zones and organizational units, to foster innovation, and to save costs. They are described in the mainstream literature as *"a powerful vehicle for overcoming the challenges inherent in making the world interconnected and bringing the best leaders and employees together, transcending organizational, national and cultural boundaries, providing flexibility, integration of globally dispersed skills and capabilities, connectivity across geographical and temporal boundaries . . ."* to name but a few supposed advantages (e.g., DeVries 1996; Gibbs & Boyraz 2015; Hitt, Keats & Demarie 1998). Somewhat exaggeratedly, organizations have been said to have progressively shifted all together from traditional collocated teams to global virtual teams (Webster & Wong 2008).

My experiences with global teams as a continuous struggle are not unique. Evidently, to coordinate workgroups spanning many boundaries represents unsuspected complexities that few practitioners and academics take seriously or fully understand. As I shall discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, externalizing reasons for chronic failures and underperformance, and reducing them to shortcomings in combinations of single variables, such as "communication," "trust" (Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998), "cross-cultural issues" (Bird & Mendenhall 2016; Stahl et al. 2010), "virtual work environment" (Zigurs 2003), or "leadership" (Zander, Mockaitits & Butler 2012), or trying to find concrete "steps" to team success (cf. Katzenbach & Smith 2005) do not seem to be enough to solve the problem of "making teams successful." Here, I thought that changing viewpoints could be helpful.

1.3 On aims of the study

Challenging some of the assumptions both a routinized project manager and an academic researcher might hold dear (like the assumption that teams churning

seemingly good output are actually well-performing "happy families," a category one does not need to worry about), the focus of this dissertation was to try to better understand global teams that are capable of delivering quality output time after time. *What do well-performing global teams look like from within as human organizations? How do these teams form and evolve?* The idea is twofold: to learn precious lessons from teams that do well under pressure, and to question what I consider a simplistic understanding of what constitutes a well-performing team in the first place.

During my doctoral adventure, I have sometimes received what seemed at first puzzling questions from reviewers, such as, "Why study what makes well-performing teams different from each other – does it matter, *as long they perform well*?" Or, "Why not study why these teams perform well, *despite* their differences?" These are both valid questions reflecting different viewpoints, value systems, and philosophical positions. In my view, both these comments reflect thinking along the lines of the *homo economicus* paradigm, which makes the whole world turn around business performance, presumed good greed, and benefits of free markets. Yet, even the father of these thoughts, Adam Smith, carried through his entire career an accompanying interest not only in increasing wealth but also in improving what he called *morality* (which could be described as the force that guides the *invisible hand*), a matter seldom discussed in the economics courses in business schools alongside the punch lines from the *Wealth of Nations*. Also, even if we stay strictly within the economic imperative, and to at least partially address the concerns of my reviewers, I assert that many teams their managers consider well-performing, actually are not, or at least they could be doing much better. Further, a team that is performing today can become a troubled one at any point in time, and people working in unpleasant team conditions might find their motivation and well-being compromised, matters that are also likely to eventually impact economic output and employee loyalty. Also, "good performance" is no more a stable or unproblematic condition in teamwork than it is in firms in general. As for me, once a project manager with an obsession to control everything, it was eye opening and humbling to see how different the teams producing good output, or what I thought to be the well-performing teams, looked like from within when trying to really understand what was going on in them. How is it possible that I had not noticed that before?

The French 20th century philosopher Paul Ricoeur, inspired by the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, speaks of *homo capax*, a naturally fragile human being who is yet capable of independent thinking and transformative action, and embracing a plurality of perspectives in the globalizing world (Kristensson-Uggla 2010). I find it intellectually challenging and even economically unsustainable to keep considering resources, human and natural, just short-term inputs to increment economic output. I maintain that even though task

performance is important for organizations to thrive, so are human dimensions of our work life and sociocultural aspects of human existence in general. While academic studies with the purpose of helping to understand variables leading to increased performance and making teams and firms more effective are no doubt useful and necessary, other studies offering new perspectives and critical viewpoints can bring fresh air to animate discussions that otherwise may stagnate, and further, make the divide between what management scholars study and how the world of practitioners unfolds wider.

There is no clear gap derived from previous scholarship that I set out to answer. Instead, I am following the *logic of problematization* (Alvesson & Sandberg 2011), a methodology for identifying and challenging assumptions underlying existing literature, and based on that, formulating research questions that are likely to lead to more influential theories. According to Davis (1971), truly interesting research denies some of the assumption ground of its audience. In his view, one of the ways to conduct insightful research is to first identify what seem to be similar (or nearly identical) but are actually opposite phenomena, and then persist further with the ontological nature of the question raised. Teams considered "good" but are not necessarily that good after all, is one such proposition. If we could somehow tell a budding "well-performing and well-balanced" team from a "poorly performing" one, or identify a "well-performing yet poorly balanced" team before things go from good to bad to ugly, maybe we could do something about it before the grapes turn completely sour.

1.4   Clarifying concepts

In general, research on global teams, at least in the academic field of international business, has been slow to keep up with the pace at which the environments they operate in develop in practice, and we still lack theoretical understanding in many dimensions. This is due to many factors: rapid changes in technology that enable such work modes; the changing nature of global operations; collaboration and organizational forms in general; developments in business models that become increasingly fluid and difficult to capture; increasing familiarity with work in such organizations (Jonsen, Maznevski & Davison 2012); and the entry of digital natives into the workplace (Mäntymäki & Riemer 2014). Modern work groups, even when located on the same site, are often fluid, culturally diverse, and amorphous in many ways, and more often than not, work over virtual means of communication that allow flexibility for people to choose when and where they work – in the office, at home, on-the-go, or when travelling.

One key issue to put under the magnifying glass is the way global teams are defined. Global teams are usually defined in terms of their *structural* characteristics, for instance as "*temporary, culturally diverse, geographically dispersed, and electronically communicating work group[s]*" (Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998). In more traditional literature, a team has been defined more in terms of its *purpose*, for instance, as "*a distinctive class of group, which is more task oriented than other groups and which has a set of obvious rules and rewards for its members*" (Adair 1986). I propose to combine these definitions and to add a component acknowledging the social and fluctuating nature of these teams by saying that global teams are "*fluid, amorphous, and at least to some degree, culturally diverse, geographically dispersed, and electronically communicating groups working together towards common goals with members sharing meanings and aspirations*". However, as I shall discuss in the coming pages, this represents an ideal of what global teams should be like, as in practice, teams often fall short of this ideal as members' views on team goals, rules, and aspirations are likely to be as varied as the team membership.

A common theme in global team literature is how to distinguish a "global (virtual) team" from a "traditional" one; another is how virtual and culturally diverse and dispersed does the team need to be to qualify as a global (virtual) team (cf. Zigurs 2003). For practitioners, this definitional discussion is less of an issue. They tackle the everyday reality that the way work is done has changed (and is still changing) radically in the past decades. Thus, the way the phenomenon of teamwork crossing boundaries of time, place, and institutional contexts is named, defined, studied, and thought of needs to be relaxed and broadened accordingly.

As a starting point, let us consider that global teams do not represent a static phenomenon, but many variations exist on a continuum between the collocated multinational team and the purely virtual operating form (Kirkman et al. 2004). Also, the phenomenon should be seen as a matter of degree, instead of forcing a clear-cut and artificial distinction between a traditional collocated team and a virtual team with members located in various places and countries. In fact, the same team sometimes works face-to-face, and other times, it is dispersed with different subgroups and constellations forming on the go. For the sake of convenience and while accepting the definitional plurality, fluidity, and diversity of the everyday phenomena that fits in the stream of literature on teamwork crossing boundaries by relying on virtual means of communication, this research refers to them as "global teams," a sufficiently broad and simple

term to capture the essence of what is going to be explored and discussed in my study.[1]

1.5   Between search and discovery

The main objective of any research is to confront theory with the empirical world (Dubois & Gadde 2002). As a result of a personal learning process, the purpose of this research gradually *became* not to test theory and close gaps identified in previous research, but to develop new perspectives by a systematic and purposeful interplay between search and discovery. I base myself on a reflexive methodology (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009) that rejects the notion that the relationship between empirical data and "anything outside it" is unequivocal, and builds on the notion that all references to empirical data are the result of interpretation, which necessitates turning to systematic reflection on various levels to endow the interpretation with a quality that makes empirical research of value. What I had access to in terms of empirical material (i.e., reflective essays, team interviews, and written communications) was, indeed, already interpreted data. I then further interpreted this data, often via discussions with my colleagues or team participants, in an effort to make patterns of meaning or theoretical insights in the making gradually surface from the interplay between data and theoretical frameworks.

The reflexive methodology is closely linked to an abductive approach conceptualized by Dubois and Gadde (2002; 2014): *systematic combining* to describe a non-linear, non-positivist approach to case study and theorization, in contrast to the mainstream deductive and inductive perspectives on case research. In this approach, theory and the empirical world are confronted in a more or less continuous yet systematic manner throughout the research process. The process of completing a jigsaw puzzle is a common metaphor for conducting this type of research. Here, the case is considered a "tool"; in the beginning, very few pieces fit and the big picture is elusive, while patterns become clearer with every effort, and learning takes place in the interplay between purposeful search and discovery.

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[1] Contemporary teams and teamwork are studied under a wide variety of terms, such as "global teams," "multicultural teams," "multicultural *and* multinational teams," "virtual teams," "global virtual teams," "geographically dispersed teams," and just "teams." In this study, I refer to "global teams" (or in my empirical part, at times, simply "teams" for better readability) to underline that the teams *in this study* vary in their degree of virtuality over time and from team to team, but their membership is invariably culturally mixed, and at least to some extent, geographically distributed. Additionally, the focus here is not on the virtual aspects of teamwork, but on how teams form and evolve in the modern context of internationally active organizations and mobile workers, where virtual work and a multicultural workforce are often more common. This in contrast to more traditional teamwork where people, at least to some extent, of shared cultural backgrounds are collocated and perform collective tasks, such as a fire brigade, a hospital emergency room, or a factory shop.

My research builds on an interpretive approach intertwined with hermeneutical philosophy. Interpretive research adopts an ontology that assumes a constant state of change and a world that is socially constructed in which no objective social reality exists. In a "becoming ontology," an organization is conceptualized as an emergent process rather than a stable phenomenon (Chia 2003), and the basic epistemological stance is to understand how social reality is created (Morgan & Smircich 1980). According to Gadamer (1989), in hermeneutics, understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself, an ontologically strong position with implications for the research method, because it favors using methods that can gauge changes in perceptions. The *hermeneutic circle of tradition* characterizes all human existence and differs from the negative concept of circularity that results in axioms that cannot be defined, similar to the traditional scientific method. In my study, the hermeneutic circle is understood as constituting constant mediation between the whole and the parts as well as pre-understandings and understandings to add to interpretative richness (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). The way team members think and feel about their team changes over time to gradually form a team as a structure, and the researcher, partly as an insider-outsider and partly as an observer, follows this process as it unfolds. This allows for a flow of time and a flux of meaning, thereby developing concepts in the outline.

The hermeneutical tradition this study relies closest to is the Ricoeurian poetic hermeneutics, which considers that metaphor and narrative constitute two aspects of *poetics* expressing a productive, integrative, linguistic fantasy linked in different, interrelated ways (Ricoeur 2003, 2010). Metaphor and plot constitute an act of "productive fantasy," a "semantic innovation," which through a "schematic process," generate a new unity of the whole within the realm of the language (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 124). Thus, what this meant for my research is that I started to systematically uncover underlying and shifting meanings and understandings in how team members reflected on their team life, and gradually built an integrated understanding of the team itself as an emerging organization. The team stories I narrate all have idiosyncratic characteristics with twists and turns often triggered by seemingly trivial events and team members' decisions to act or not on matters critical to team life, which reflect the teams' ability or inability to build shared understandings over time on matters critical to the teams' *becoming*. Both metaphors and narratives are used as products of disciplined imagination (Weick 1989), serving as representational devices when constructing mid-range theory on complex organizational phenomena. The stories that are told and their underlying themes are loosely linked with the theoretical lens of sensemaking (Weick 1995), with the intention that the reader together with the writer will build an understanding

of how groups of people thrown together form into the type of team constituted by the metaphor used to describe it.

The methodology I base my research on is a "designed reality" type of experimental research design that can be likened to a "reality show" with elements from experiments, ethnographic research, and more traditional case study research. In this setup, a large number (48) of geographically dispersed teams of four to six participants and composed of advanced graduate level and MBA international strategy course participants, many of whom had extensive business experience, was observed under semi-experimental conditions for the full lifecycle of the team. The participants represented over 20 different nationalities based in Finland, Estonia, Russia, and Latvia, and their ages ranged from 22 to 46. From this sample, I chose five theoretically interesting teams based on gathered data from weekly individual reflective essays (over 1,000 in total), group reflections, observations, and team interviews.

Successful project teams – and here I mean teams that both assess themselves as such and that are considered successful by some pre-determined objective criteria – are rare in organizations and are, therefore, of interest both theoretically and practically. For this reason, this study zooms in on the stories unfolding behind the scenes of apparently well-performing and structurally similar teams in terms of member diversity, task complexity, and their degree of geographic dispersion. I focused on unraveling events unfolding in teams to uncover sequences, such as hard work bearing fruit, and which gradually made a "team" emerge out of uncertainty and confusion. Also observed were heroes and villains in the making, everyday and existential drama, felt and expressed emotions and cognitions (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010), turning points, emerging shared identities, as well as looming collapses. In the end, anatomically very similar teams performing the same tasks over time created, in fact, very distinct task performance patterns and social dynamics, which were radically different "places to be" for members.

In all honesty, I did not start out with the idea of using abduction as a method, and to absorb influences from critical theory and postmodernism (cf. Alvesson & Deetz 2006) criticizing the very essence of what constitutes a "global (virtual) team." Nor was it my intention to identify new metaphors to describe them. Influenced by my roles as a practitioner, a team member, and a leader of global teams, I was eager to find normative "fixes" to difficulties my colleagues and I had encountered in business and which the academic literature on global teams seemed to take seriously as well, with distance and culture critical to team effectiveness in the global context (cf. Connaughton & Shuffler 2007). At first, I developed notions of critique towards cultural differences and the virtual work environment as "key problems to be solved." Gradually, I gathered data from different research projects related to global teams, facilitated courses requiring

international and local teamwork, talked with former colleagues and practicing managers in a variety of fields, and acquired new knowledge from the academic literature in international business, organization theory, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior, as well as from conferences, seminars and one-on-one discussions with researchers from many fields. Then, as my data analysis progressed, I started doubting the knowledge acquired from the academic research, which typically represented global teams as the automatic fix to bring together competence to attain all sorts of corporate goals in the globalized world.

The first critical realization that came from in-depth readings on global teams supported the ambiguous empirical insights. Previous research on the relationship between cultural diversity and team performance did not seem to reveal any direct relationship, and the research results were consistently confusing and equivocal. For instance, in their meta-analysis of the effects of team diversity on team outcomes, Horwitz and Horwitz (2007) found no relationship between demographic diversity and team performance, leading to the belief that other factors not directly emanating from team diversity play a key role in determining whether or not a team is successful. In the same vein, according to a meta-analysis of 108 empirical studies on the processes and performance of 10,632 multicultural teams (Stahl et al. 2010), no direct link was found between cultural diversity and team performance.

Then, I started developing a broader understanding of the most important "contextual variable" in global team research, which was the teams' habitual reliance on virtual means of communication, instead of face-to-face communication. Digital communication is becoming a way of life for those living in the parts of the world affluent enough to access technology. Thus, it can no longer be considered a simple tool to build bridges across geographic distances, an underlying assumption in most research on global teams. Kristensson-Uggla (2010, 5) talks about fundamental conditions of human reflection, and communication has been profoundly transformed due to the globalizing economy and advancements brought about by digital technology and fiber optics. The virtual work mode can be both alienating and liberating in any modern workplace. In fact, local teams and workgroups, even those located in the same office building, often habitually work as virtual teams in modern business firms. I sometimes hear about companies who instruct their workers to visit their colleagues' offices, instead of messaging or emailing their next-door neighbors. Sometimes, it is more appealing to avoid face-to-face contact, than to deal with often-tricky human relations upfront, and getting up and leaving one's workstation requires some motivation. In any case, the phenomenon can hardly be described as distinct and characteristic of global teams. Therefore, some of the issues attributed to global teams and virtual teamwork, such as

closing the gap of distance and the lack of physical presence, are actually a reflection of a wider change ongoing in our society.

The Polish-born philosopher Zygmunt Bauman is skeptical about the Internet era and social media in particular, and he warns against traps associated with alienation that can happen when a community belongs to us (we are in control of who we communicate with and when) and not us to a community (we gradually grow into our communities).[2] Similar concerns are voiced by Dreyfus (2008) who draws on studies of the isolation experienced by many internet users, and shows how the internet's privatization of experience ignores essential human capacities, such as trust, moods, risk, shared local concerns, and commitment. With modern communication technology occupying a paradoxical role as both uniting (by providing a way to close the gap of distance with virtual means of communication) and dividing (by depriving from close contact) humans, the mental distances between people can be wider than between their geographic locations, or as one of our interviewees, "Frederic," a member in the *Dysfunctional Family* team (see Chapter 10), eloquently said:

> *We can communicate across 5,000 kilometers of distance with technology in an instant, but at the same time, our points of view can be another 5,000 kilometers away from each other.*

With these insights into cultural diversity and contextual matters such as the degree of dispersion and virtuality, I found it more interesting to start looking directly into how team processes unfold in these teams to better understand their inner dynamics, while being careful not to make many assumptions or to submit my gaze to fixed theoretical approaches or hypotheses in the positivist sense. So, I started paying attention to such team processes as cooperation, communication, collaboration, team building, and decision-making, given that the team contexts were harmonized in our experimental setting to the best extent possible.

While I kept on collecting and analyzing the rapidly accumulating material, I tried to identify good theoretical frameworks that fit what I was discovering in terms of team processes key to the success of the teams under study. The theory-as-practice approach, and in particular, the routine theory by Feldman (2000) and Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) seemed interesting, but after further analytical consideration, it did not seem to be the best fit in terms of what my data was telling me. From a detailed analysis of team members' reflective essays and other observations from the field, the most intriguing finding, along with the fact that neither culture nor the use of digital technology mostly defined the teams, was that almost structurally identical and similarly good-performing

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2 De Querol, R. (2016), Zygmunt Bauman: "Social media are a trap," The Polish-born sociologist is skeptical about the possibilities for political change, *El Pais*, Jan 25, 2016. http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/01/19/inenglish/1453208692_424660.html (retrieved on April 13, 2016).

teams actually demonstrated more often than not unhealthy team socio-emotive processes. At this stage, I came across the sensemaking stream of research (Maitlis & Christianson 2014; Weick 1995).

1.6   Making sense of global teams

While I was conducting my research, experimenting, observing, and interacting with various teams, the image of being a practicing project manager "fighting fires" persisted and came back time after time. The broader sensemaking literature brought me to Maitlis and Sonenshein's (2010) work, "Sensemaking in Crisis and Change: Inspiration and Insights from Weick" (1988), which draws similarities between sensemaking in situations of change and crisis. In fact, how people enact their environments and make sense of these in situations of crisis (cf. Weick 1988, 1990, 1993) seemed to provide a fruitful theoretical lens for interpreting the inner processes of my teams. Virtual work environments where people typically work on many simultaneous projects, do not necessarily know each other, come from different organizational units, institutions, and cultural backgrounds, speak different languages, and need to coordinate actions to deliver output under pressure, are often quite constrained environments, much like organizations going through change and dealing with stressful situations. Yet, Weick's approach to sensemaking is often defined along the continuum of rational – irrational, with the focus on the cognitive aspects and actions taken. My empirical material, however, also revealed the importance of conscious decisions *not to act*, as well as emotions, both expressed and hidden. As a result of these theoretical insights and interpretations, the teams' idiosyncratic metaphorical images and narratives gradually emerged.

The prevailing input-output approach to global teamwork is consistent with the mechanistic paradigm to understanding organizations and organizing that follows the Taylorian thought of considering an organization "a machine" (Morgan 1980/1986), which when broken needs to be "oiled," "fixed," or sometimes "replaced." In fact, the outcomes and performances of these teams are typically explained by the variability of factors such as communication and trust (cf. Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998), cultural diversity, distance, virtuality (Stahl et al. 2010), and leadership (Zander et al. 2012), and are set in terms of measurable short-term economic or task-oriented performance goals against which success is measured. However, these explanations are often general and abstract – sometimes tautological, such as "bad team leadership" being characterized by "bad team effects." Excessive performance focus and glorifying the global team as a *de facto* structural solution to all kinds of

organizational goals from innovation, learning, knowledge sharing to effectiveness is naïve. Does a group of geographically and organizationally split strangers really become a team by a simple declaration and by assigning them tasks to perform together? Hardly. One may ask when, why, and how a team becomes a team – if it does so in the first place and in any sense other than by name and intent. One may also take the view that being a real global team versus a group of people working together is, in fact, a matter of degree fluctuating across time, instead of a dualism, a black-and-white dichotomy. At times, team members may act in concert and as a team, and other times, as individuals each promoting his or her own agenda.

In my research, I chose to abandon the machine metaphor and to look at these teams from an interpretative point of view (Burrell & Morgan 1979) as social organizations with people interacting, building shared understandings, and enacting the very environments they are part of (Weick 1969, 1995). Global teams can be seen in a different light when they are represented as stories unfolding. Narratives and metaphors are used as analytical devices to bring to life how different these teams are one from each other (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2000; Ricoeur 1983), even when they look similar from the outside in terms of resources, task environments, and performance outputs. When, how, and why does a team, in fact, become a well-oiled machine? When we take a look at what happens within these teams and how team members bring these micro-organizations to life more or less successfully by such mechanisms as organizing themselves around executing a task, developing common ways of working and routines, and building social sensemaking, rich insights into the true nature of these teams as beehives full of life can be gained.

Taking inspiration from Sinclair's (1992) critique of what she calls the "tyranny of team ideology," pointing out that teams are often not the idealized organizations they are portrayed as with clear descriptions of how they should behave and what they should be like, it is useful to stop for a moment and further reflect on what global teams look like when pointing the flashlight somewhere other than the effectiveness and performance imperative. Seen from within, global teams can be studied as messy, complex, and paradoxical micro-organizations, or loosely coupled systems (Weick 1969) organized around more (or less) realistic and well- (or badly) defined tasks and dependent on possibilities offered by more (or less) suitable technology heralded as an enabler of communication between people "anywhere, anytime."

In real life, often stressed, trapped, and confused individuals assigned to many teams at the same time are pulled apart by multiple demands and conflicting responsibilities. Team members with varying motivation and competence levels often do not know each other and have little chance or even interest in socializing and building the team. Yet, they are expected to "be team

buddies" and "churn output" under pressure, and more often than not, with little guidance and formal leadership. Seen in this light, it is not at all surprising that global teams do not live up to the idea offered by the mainstream "panacea" discourse. This is, of course, not to say that global teams are no good in principle – or that there are no good global teams. There are, and this is what I focus on in my research, with the intention of broadening our understanding of the true nature of these teams.

Extending Sinclair's "tyranny" metaphor, global teams can be conceptualized in a number of ways: as chain gangs (when people do not have much choice over who they work with and what the goals are); as a king's court (when a person with narcissist tendencies gathers like-minded yes-men around him); a bureaucracy (where the rules and procedures constitute the "tyranny"); or an "Italian parliament" (where team members compete and fight with each other without getting much done). We can also look at the brighter side and think of a global team as a tightly knit professional community (where everyone has a place, role, and a shared goal), a circus act (where members have fun together and are creative), or a happy family (where members have a strong sense of belongingness and a respect of hierarchies). While not intending to *deny* that global teams are, in fact, "temporary, culturally diverse, geographically dispersed and electronically communicating work groups" as originally defined by Jarvenpaa & Leidner (1998), I suggest that adding the metaphor as an imagination-stimulating rhetorical device with links to interpretation, and using it in a disciplined and relevant way, might be helpful to see the phenomenon of global teams under a different light.

Family is a common metaphor used to describe teams. Following Tolstoy's quote above from *Anna Karenina*, and having plenty of experience with witnessing bad teams being bad "each in its own way," the task I gave myself was to look inside good teams to better understand them. This dissertation tells the stories of five well-performing teams I chose to call (for some good reasons that I will explain in detail later in Chapters 8–12) the *Chain Gang,* the *Dysfunctional Family,* the *Sandbox,* the *Scouts,* and the *Master Cooks*.

1.7 On contributions

Most of all, this study is about organizing, team evolution, and how teams and their members deal with asymmetrical relationships, confusing stressful environments, and ambiguous tasks, and how interactions between people actually bring teams to life. My aim is to offer alternative understandings of global teams based on what they really look like when taking a view from within. In my study, I purposely open up and discuss in some length (see

Chapter 4) why I chose to base my work on hermeneutics and an interpretive paradigm, instead of the positivist research tradition within the functionalist paradigm that overwhelmingly dominates research on global teams. I deemed this necessary since, in my experience, academic studies in the business field tend to be locked into certain ways of conducting research within small sub-fields, whereby the researchers' studies are faithfully aligned with previous work (and each other), which rarely leads to new openings and breakthroughs or significant insights. One remedy to this is not only to engage with the empirical world more creatively, but also to go back to the roots of academia and revive an interest in philosophy as a source of inspiration for insightful research (see also Delios 2016 for a critique on the current state of international business research).

Hence, the *first* contribution of this study is applying and exploring new epistemological and methodological approaches in the somewhat fixed tradition of the research on global teams. I look into these teams from a worldview perspective that fleshes out the data and constructs to answer some of the *why* and *how* questions, instead of the more usual *what* questions (Whetten 1989), and enriches the already vast and mainly quantitative and otherwise data-driven scholarship on global teams. By crafting an innovative empirical setting and a qualitative multi-method study, I challenge existing scholarship, expand on how these teams can be studied, and help create a more pluralistic methodological base. *Second,* I show how and why it can be helpful to relax and challenge the very assumptions and implicit metaphors our economies and social systems are built on, and in theorizing, productively include elements from outside the data or from pre-understandings to better understand the underlying phenomenon from fresh angles. *Third*, I bring forward how structurally very similar teams executing the same tasks and deemed successful by task performance criteria can be drastically different from within, and indicate how team members with mutual adjustments, insightful actions, and non-actions can greatly influence the team's direction. Many teams that churn good output may host alienated, angry, confused, frustrated, bitter, and/or overworked individuals, hidden conflicts, and intolerably uneven workload distributions. Teams that do well may, in fact, be headed towards collapse or serious conflict without any external signs. On the other hand, they may also be overdoing their job, stealing time from other projects or competing priorities. *Fourth*, I bring forward that teams are full of life and consist of members with varying personal situations, motivations, changing skills, and evolving people dynamics and goals, rather than a static phenomenon of people with set functional roles and who are assigned immutable tasks to execute. A team that actively works both on its task and the team itself is likely to be more successful and creative even from a task perspective, than a team that only focuses on the task – even when time is

limited and the work context is mainly virtual, making socialization more difficult. *"Working on the team"* here means constant and subtle efforts by at least some influential team members (and with positive responses from the less influential ones) to ensure that everyone is on board, as well as member alignment of understandings on such concepts as "commitment," "leadership," "good communication," "team identity," and "shared goals and expectations." In the heat of the action, it is often small events, such as how the team reacts to people being late, lacking competence, or being passive in team discussions that matter the most and set the team on a good or a bad path.

These findings call for more attention to a more active role taking and teaming skills of individual team members, and downplays the ready-made rules on "how to make successful teams" or the managerial skills required for people in formal power positions to "lead" teams. In increasingly flat project-based organizations comprised of multitasking knowledge workers, these perspectives are helpful to think *again* about what a well-performing team is or could be, and construct ways of empowering organizations and individual team members to have real influence on how successful the team is, both as a social organization and from a task perspective. In many of today's workplaces and organizational contexts, relying on formal structures and processes alone is often not enough, and a more nimble and agile outlook on teaming should be encouraged.

Now, let us move on to the "Ship without a Captain," a company setting where the seeds for this study were sown.

2   ON A SHIP WITHOUT A CAPTAIN

"Art is not what you see
but what you make others see."
— Edgar Degas (1834–1917)

For many, scientific explanation is supposed to be characterized by objectivity and a lack of self-involvement (Ricoeur 1972). We tend to forget what Galileo, Darwin, and Kuhn have taught us; the very nature of scientific explanation is to a large extent temporary and based on subjective criteria and inspiration. Objectivity is sort of an elusive ideal, especially when it comes to the social sciences. When studying teams, I cannot (and do not want to) claim to start from an empty page or to be somehow outside of what I am studying. My work is not a replica of a reality "out there." Rather, the phenomena and the events I describe, the way I frame them, and my theorizing are the result of a careful, mindful interpretation based on the theoretical, empirical, and practical knowledge I have gained while working on this study (and before), without adhering to a narrow understanding of the correspondence theory of truth – or any other ideal in a strict sense for that matter. Since people, even the sub-species of scientists, are always "already there" embedded in and influenced (or trapped) by their sociocultural and historical environments, I propose to start with what constitutes a significant part of my own situatedness in this world. More concretely, in this chapter, I zoom in on my practical work experience in intercultural contexts and virtual work environments.

2.1   A detour through impressionist art

I spent a lot of time in the midst of my dissertation process thinking about what my empirical material was telling me and what theories would be most suitable for a harmonious and meaningful contribution to emerge. One day, I came across a documentary on a French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, whom I had never heard of before. In the introductory part this film, he was standing in front of an impressionist painting explaining that in that fuzzy and incomplete looking painting with bright, unrealistic vivid colors and decisive, visible strokes of a painter's brush, the artist actually showed more than what "there is." By

interpreting an object of interest and sharing his vision with us, a landscape in this case, the artist was offering an enriched view of reality, not a reduction of it as I would have been inclined to naturally think. This was an interesting viewpoint for me. I had always had sympathy for impressionist art, likening those works by Manet, Monet, Renoir, and Van Gogh to my own condition of being severely myopic since an early age, not quite "seeing" as clearly as I would have liked how life around me really looked. I now realized that my handicap was actually not at all similar to impressionist art and started to contemplate these paintings with an even keener and more curious eye. This matters in my study because I realized it is possible, not only in art but also in philosophy and research, to step back and forth between an objective and subjective view of the world as a gradual process of unveiling meaning – the way things are in a way that we can all agree (like the object of interpretation, the color scale, the type of brushstroke, the choice of style and perspective, etc.), and in a way that requires subjective interpretation (in that what makes a painting captivating and meaningful is the result of the artist's interpretation, creation, and skill), which is then appreciated by each viewer through their own eyes and against the background of their own particular pre-understandings and inclinations.

Van Maanen (1988/2011)[3] picks up the impressionist imagery to call a work of ethnography that aims to "startle the audience" by "telling striking stories" and by "trying to keep both the subject and object in the view" an impressionist tale (Van Maanen 2011, 101–102):

> *For the impressionists of ethnography . . . their materials are words, metaphors, phrasings, imagery, and most critically, the expansive recall of fieldwork experience. When these are put together and told in the first person as a tightly focused, vibrant, exact, but necessarily imaginary rendering of fieldwork, an impressionist tale of field results.*

In the pages to come, I will tell an impressionist tale of how I lived some project- and teamwork-related puzzles while working at Ericsson Canada and Sweden between 2000 and 2011. I retain the choice of the word "tale" also used by Van Maanen to differentiate my "tale" from the more rigorous "stories" I develop based on my experimental study design and submit to metaphorical analysis through the lens of sensemaking later in this study. Here, my aim is not to build theory or to formally analyze any field experience, but to invite the reader to live again a small part of my lived life as a practicing project leader and member. The reader will thus be left with merely an impression of the tale

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[3] In his classic book, *Tales of the Field – On Writing Ethnography*, originally published in 1988, Van Maanen introduces and illustrates three genres of ethnography – the realist tale (the most traditional one), the confessional tale, and the impressionist tale.

told as I proceed to a more formal review of academic literature on global teams in the next chapter. This being said, I will come back to this tale briefly in the final chapters of this study to draw some conclusions.

The impressionist tale I am about to tell is not chosen at random but represents life as I remember it during one of my last big particularly memorable projects at Ericsson. It encapsulates how things can go wrong in the promised land of process-based control systems, quality R&D, experienced and well-trained professionals, and 150 years of company history, preceded by a flashback to a previous project in Canada. My intention is simply to reflect on and share some of my past experiences and uncover a part of my pre-understandings I believe are beneficial to building the basis for this dissertation and for developing the empirical part of this study. I see this chapter also as a complement to the formal literature review as a source of practical wisdom to subsequently build a more informed research quandary and problem definition that would result from a literature review alone, acknowledging the existence and relevance of both theoretical and practical kinds of knowledge.[4] Lastly, I invite the reader to think about two of my research questions while reading these stories. What can well-performing global teams look like from within? What types of social processes can develop in what are considered to be well-performing teams? "Reality" might not be what we think it is when we are being simplistic and only glancing at the world through the lens of performance measures and all kinds of strategies people use to manipulate impressions. An analogy with Hans Christian Andersen's tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes," is not at all far-fetched. These impressionistic images will be helpful when moving on to the next chapter, a more formal review of existing scholarship on global teams.

2.2   Cinderella in the Fantastic World of Technology

Summer 2008. I have been assigned to a new project in Russia that has run into some problems, and I am confused and tired, unsure of what is expected of me and unaware of how I could possibly add any value to the situation, other than filling in status reports which I doubt anyone reads. I am sitting at my desk, after hours, in the empty open office landscape in one of the Ericsson buildings in Kista, Sweden, a district near Stockholm mainly occupied by IT and Telecom companies. Not the type of place found on scenic postcards. In Sweden, the office gets pretty empty after 4 pm – this is the poster country of work-life

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[4] Without going into more detail into the types of wisdom here and the research traditions around these, Aristotle believed that to become a virtuous man, in addition to *sophia*, or abstract, universal wisdom, *phronesis*, or practical wisdom was also needed.

balance, daycare services for dogs (I am not kidding), and early morning starts. I have been given the title of program manager at Business Unit Multimedia, also referred to as BUM in the corridors, as well as a significant pay raise as my new boss, a pocket-size Swedish woman in her early thirties with endless energy and little tolerance for politics and "boys games," thought my previous employer, Ericsson Canada, had been seriously underpaying me. I feel very warm and happy to be in Sweden, and the main reason is not the fatter money bag at the end of the month, but what I consider a fairer and more mature work team and the feeling of being respected for the effort and care I put into my work. Our little group was originally formed to handle problems arising in high-profile customer projects, which are not uncommon when developing a new business line like we were doing. The ongoing leap from traditional telecommunications business to platforms and solutions supporting multimedia services is a hugely important and risky one.

This is a world designed by engineers for engineers at the service of mankind (and of course, the shareholders), enabling a man in Los Angeles to make a mobile phone call to his son in London in a few seconds (a call from Lagos to Port-au-Prince might fail though due to inadequate infrastructures in many developing countries). Some refer to the system behind this miracle as the "world's biggest machine." How many have ever stopped to visualize how these calls actually happen – from the mobile phone, to a radio base station, underground, underwater cables, through switches, servers, databases recognizing the user profile of the caller, and billing systems recording call data to form the base of what the caller sees in his monthly invoice. And voice calls are not the only services delivered over these networks; there are text messages, video messages, picture messages, internet access, etc.

Here, at this company, a world leader in telecommunications equipment and services, bits and pieces of this hugely complex system are designed and deployed all over the world. A bit more concretely, the "machine" is roughly made up of hardware or what we affectionately refer to as "boxes" (huge computers, servers, and databases, radio base stations, and the like), and software that provides them with brains and the related services needed to patch it altogether and maintain it all in service. *How is this even possible*? I still secretly ask myself. Okay, I have a confession to make. Unlike most of my colleagues in my team and elsewhere, I am not an engineer (I have a rather eclectic background both academically and professionally in tourism, public relations, fashion, dance, international business, and marketing), and I am basically the least technically inclined person I know (my mother still helps me change lightbulbs). However, as a global nomad and a child of many cultures, I really like the idea of connecting people regardless of where they are on this planet. This is what this company really is about for me – if one manages to

catch some respite from lurking disasters, report writing, number crunching, constant meetings that structure one's day, and recover from endless organizational changes to see, if not the big picture, at least a glimpse of the blue sky at the end of the day.

In addition to technology, there are also people in the company, about 100 thousand of us working in many teams and line organizations in a matrix organization, and dealing with people and navigating this spider's web is where my strength is. The technology and people are interwoven in a fancy *smorgasbord* of neat processes. A detailed process is in place for everything in the company from R&D to product management to sales to project management, etc. While in the beginning of my career I was awestruck by how well everything was organized and convinced that people working here were exceptionally intelligent, organized, and competent, as time passed, I became more suspicious. There seemed to be some serious problems getting tens of thousands of people to dance to the tune of prescribed processes, while *everything* from technology, industry forces, customers, markets etc., was continuously changing. Yet, I still think or at least hope that somewhere in the company there are some people who know more and understand better than the rest of us, people with grand *Vision* and great *Wisdom*. Until an all-employee meeting some time back, I had thought quite highly of our CEO, but his recent comment on "the Chinese firms not posing a real threat to us" really puzzles me, since many of us have witnessed deals going to Huawei notably in places like Africa and Latin America for some time now. Some of my colleagues had been headhunted by the Chinese as well. Had he not noticed, or did he not want to bring it to the table with us, the rank and file, the "basic units of production"? Or did he think we were *stupid*? My mind wanders often to my friend in Montreal who got me recruited, telling me as I started my first job at Ericsson, "Do not worry if there seems to be a lack of clear direction at times. Ericsson is like the Titanic, but instead of hitting the iceberg, it manages to make a move to avoid it – last minute, time after time." Many in the North American offices expect us to be acquired soon by a giant like Cisco or Microsoft, while many in Sweden have strong feelings of national pride and often utter what I think are extremely naïve statements, such as "We've been around for 150 years, we will keep going strong into the future as well." So far, we keep sailing, although I am thinking now there may be no captain at all on this ship. And life here is relatively good for me. I belong to this big family and a powerful machine linked together by processes and projects capable of renewing itself time after time and adjusting to the changes if not perfectly, at least better than the competitors over the long run, or so it seems.

I am part of a formal line organization and a traditional locally based team composed of five Swedes and me, a Canadian/Finn, but my days are spent

working on a number of simultaneous projects with colleagues all over the world. With my local team, we meet formally once a month to discuss our projects and administrative matters and listen to "updates" from the management. We also help each other when needed and at times go for lunch together or have *fika*, an extended social pause around a cup of coffee and something good to eat. This gives us a chance to slow down and to discuss whatever topic we have at heart, usually work-related things in the sofa area near the corner where our desks are located. The other teams I am part of right now spin around customer projects in the Middle East, India, and Brazil. This means that I not only need to stretch my imagination and schedule work (and personal life) to cater to time differences of 10 hours between Sao Paulo and New Delhi, but also adjust my workweek to take into account that the weekend falls on Thursday and Friday in Saudi Arabia, Saturday being their "Monday" – the first work day of the week.

This is the kingdom of acronyms. Before coming to Stockholm, I had been part of BUGS, short for Business Unit Global Services, in Montreal, and worked among other things as a global resource manager (GRM) and project manager (PM) to support the deployment of wireless technologies such as CDMA, TDMA, GSM, GPRS, EDGE, WCDMA, MMS or multimedia messaging (so people can send pictures and video footage to each other), revenue management (so operators can send invoices to their customers), worked on FOAs,[5] RCAs,[6] and a customer project called RATTWS among others, and participated in countless SDPs and project TG meetings.[7] I have done a lot, learned a lot, made many mistakes and friends as well, and also developed a strong motivation to move on to headquarters to change air and to progress both my personal life and career here in Sweden. Canada was kind of a dead end for me, and I did not mind crossing the ocean, again, for good this time from West to East. My last team in Montreal, which I had secretly named "the king's court," was in part the cause of my departure.

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[5] FOA refers to a "first office application" or a pilot project. It is the first deployment of a new technology at a customer site after an internal R&D project has completed the acceptance phase in a test environment.

[6] RCA refers to "root cause analysis," which is done to uncover what went wrong and why when there is a failure of some sort, in the hopes of preventing a similar situation from happening in the future.

[7] Between each project phase, many companies conduct a formal "tollgate" (TG) meeting to control the process. The project may proceed if the team has successfully completed the previous phase; if not, corrective actions are taken or the project may even be cancelled or postponed. Sales decision points (SDP) have a similar function in the sales process to decide whether or not to proceed with a customer prospect.

2.3 The King's Court

The "king," the new leader of a newly formed group, had invited his subjects, three of his courtiers, and me, the last addition to his "court," to a meeting. We were going to discuss the division of roles and responsibilities within the group. This was a new high-profile team; a lot was at stake, and the job required significant travel for all of us and continuous virtual work with people located in different places. Competition, customer consolidation, and other transformations in the industry and technology (notably the ongoing convergence of telecom and data networks) were transforming the playing field, and we were facing cost reductions, one of many more rounds to come. Our team's expected contribution was to streamline sales forecasts with competence requirements and with the necessary headcount that had to be geographically distributed in a cost-efficient way, and people had to be trained in a timely manner to roll out and support new technology at customer environments. At the end of the day, our group handed out assignments to Ericsson's local companies and competence centers; thus, to some extent, we decided approximately how many engineers with profile x, y, and z were allocated to Montreal, Mexico, and Brazil, for instance. The way things were going, more people were going to be placed in places like Mexico and Brazil, and less in the US and Canada for cost reasons. Consequently, there was a lot of uncertainty in the air as many people were worried about their jobs and future prospects. Some managers were even worried about their positions weakening as their teams were reduced in size.

The king, a handsome young man in his late twenties and freshly graduated from an MBA program he had admirably completed while working full time on a demanding line manager position in charge of customer projects, was a rising star, chosen to become one of the future leaders by upper management. I call him "the king" because the other men in the group, his "court," were all handpicked by him and known to be his friends. They all came from the region covering the old Roman Empire: Lebanon, Greece, Armenia, and Romania. Usually matters of cultural differences do not catch my attention, but in this case it was as if they had expanded their poker-club brotherhood to the office, and we were on a silenced cultural and gender-induced collision course. While he maintained that he chose the most competent people for his group, some others, somewhere else, would have probably called this nepotism, favoritism, or making oneself powerful by surrounding oneself with yes-men. As I was not part of this circle, I figured I was given the honor of joining the team due to my connections in headquarters as I spoke Swedish and was more comfortable than most dealing with "Stockholm," as well as for my "blue eyes" as I remember an outsider promptly pointing out. And also, perhaps, because the tasks that were

to be assigned to me were going to be "tactical," such as ensuring that concrete projects had the needed human resources allocated to them, while they would take care of the more high-profile "strategic" tasks, like producing the blueprints for assignments of headcount numbers for different locations. I did not mind; rather than sitting in endless meetings with senior management, I liked fast-paced work dealing with concrete things and troubleshooting, and did not think of myself as belonging to a lower rank than my teammates, although I knew that for them I was part of a more administrative category.

So the meeting went well with no surprises to anyone when it came to the division of roles and responsibilities and other matters of protocol. However, I found it difficult to follow what was going on as the rest of the team had obviously already discussed the matters and had developed their own way of speaking that was difficult for an outsider to follow. What disturbed me, among other things, was the common reference to a team in Gothenburg as "bozos" for their differing views on competence build-up and a style that was perceived as "slow," and cynical remarks about a female colleague recently promoted to a director position after returning from her parental leave. Perhaps one needs to get pregnant and have boobs to get a promotion these days? These are the moments when it is best to think that a "job is just a job," instead of "this is not very professional and respectful behavior" ("professionalism" and "respect" are two core values of our company); move on and perhaps have a beer after work, or preferably two.

From that day on, I went about my own "tactical" work with different teams located in Sweden and elsewhere in the world, while *they* handled the "strategic" aspects. Occasionally, our schedules coincided and we would run into each other at airports and in the corridors, or a phone conference might be arranged. The only time a true team meeting with all of us took place, with an agenda and openly shared information, was when the head of the change program we were part of visited Montreal and we all happened to be on site. While I enjoyed the work and the interactions within my network and the job was progressing well without major hurdles, I had lost respect towards my local team members. To the point that when the king summoned me to a performance appraisal as part of his duties as my manager, I did not care to object to his criticism that I did not do enough to be part of the team. He was right, after all, on that account. Throughout the 18 months I was on that job, I remember staying in the office or otherwise logged-in from some other site for long hours, working with a large number of remote colleagues, being part of many digitally mediated disputes, long phone calls with people yelling into my ear and tough situations of all kinds. This is normal and to be expected when changing old ways of working, and when there are more customer projects than senior engineers to

allocate to them. For me, my many virtual teams represented business-as-usual, while the locally based (also quite virtual) team was the deviating one.

2.4   The Jesters, the Jokers, and the Buffoons

So, let us go back to Kista, Sweden, and to my lonely desk in the empty office. What am I supposed to make of this project? Stian, the product owner for a push-to-talk (PTT) service using new technology, the IP Multimedia Subsystem (IMS)[8] has taken an hour of his time to explain to me the problem we are facing. While I understand that after spending astronomical amounts of R&D money in developing the IMS platform, what we now need are projects delivering user applications that run on it, I have difficulty making a big picture of the problems we are facing at the Ruscom customer project in St. Petersburg. The local sales team has signed a contract with a new customer for one application running on the IMS PTT, which is really a fancy version of a walkie-talkie type of service that can be used by companies with large crews performing fieldwork and which need a simple, economic, and reliable way of instant communication, such as the police force. So far so good, nothing too complicated in principle.

However, what stands in the contract no longer matches the R&D plan or the roadmap. As anyone working in technology companies knows, R&D projects often incur delays, features are dropped from the final product, or the projects run into unexpected problems. In this case, there had been delays as well as a reduction in the features that constituted the PTT service, and somehow the Ericsson local personnel in Russia were unaware of these. Essentially, we had sold a BMW and now could only deliver a Skoda at best. Not an ideal situation when one wants to make a convincing *entrée* into a new business. I decide, once again, that I do not need to understand everything, or much for that matter, to take action. I call the local project manager, Artem, in St. Petersburg (people in Russia do not tend to finish their workday at 4 p.m., and my educated guess is that given the state of this project, Artem must still be working at 7 p.m. local time). We have a long talk and together decide on a suitable time for a conference call in two days' time. Meanwhile, he promises to send me some of the English language material he has on the project specifications and progress (I am not fluent in Russian and would have too much trouble understanding the local documents). I have one day to become more knowledgeable in PTT, the product, and the customer project in Russia.

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[8] Traditionally, mobile phones have delivered voice calls over what is called a *switched circuit network*. The IP Multimedia Subsystem (IMS) is an architectural framework providing industry standardization for delivering multimedia services, voice, and data over a packet-switched (IP) network. It is also possible to deliver voice or multimedia services over IP via other applications, such as Skype, which may be a less reliable means than the more robust IMS to provide satisfactory customer experiences.

The next day, Stian sees me in the corridors and reminds me that I need to talk to Ola, whose job it is to ensure that there are mobile phones capable of delivering the service to the users, which in this case are the Russian policemen. I smile and thank him. Sitting here in Kista, being exposed to multiple meetings, PowerPoint presentations, and product roadmaps, it is always easy to forget the obvious. The PTT service only comes alive with adapted mobile devices. I manage to catch Ola in the afternoon and patiently listen to his explanation, 70% of which is tech-talk that more or less surpasses my cognitive capabilities. However, what becomes clear is that there are no easy answers and we need to keep on working with both new and old partners to solve the problem. So far, simply put, there are no mobile phones supporting the functionality we require anywhere in the market. I ask Ola to be part of the upcoming phone call with Russia as I am sure questions will arise regarding the phones during the meeting.

Ola, Stian, and I are in the conference call; we all call from our own phones since it was not possible for us to be physically in the same location for the meeting. Also included are Artem, Alla (the account manager), Petr (system integrator responsible for the technical work at the customer site), and Vlad (a solution architect responsible for the customer solution). The conference call lasts about two hours and is more or less a run through of all the unclear or pending items between what has been done so far and what still needs to be done to take the project to a successful conclusion. From Alla I get the message that the head of the customer account in Russia is very upset with "Sweden." I sympathize with him but do not appreciate this type of use of power to put pressure on us. While moderating the meeting and speaking as little as possible, I am busily taking notes to build a list of pending issues and who I think should take care of them, which I will follow up on in the coming weeks. Alla at least seems appreciative of the attention her project is now getting from "headquarters," but I do not feel very optimistic. I think I have been around too many problems of late.

For the weeks that follow, the project seems to be progressing well. We have weekly meetings with varying groups of people in attendance, and the testing of the phones seems to be progressing. I even get to make my own PTT call with the testing devices. If I can use it, anyone can! We also manage to send some R&D engineers to Russia to help the local team, and the list of items on my "issue" collection seems to be getting shorter. I travel to Russia for a team meeting and get to know Alla, Artem, Vlad, and Petr. We have some good project-related and more informal talks, and even a dinner with a few drinks. Russians are excellent hosts.

One day, Stian sends me an email with some increasing concerns over the status of the customer radio network. For the PTT service to be reliable, the radio network needs to have been upgraded to one of the latest versions. A quick

check with Petr reveals that this is *not* the case for the entire network, only parts of it. There are no immediate plans of upgrading the network either from the customer side; this is very costly and has to be budgeted separately, and many more people need to be involved. At this point, it is useless to start finding whose fault this omission and lack of communication is, but rather what can be done about it. At the same time, it becomes obvious that while the mobile devices we have been working with function reasonably well in a test environment, they are still not of commercial grade.

In the evening, I take a close look at my "pending issues" list. While it looks admirably short now, the customer radio network is not adequate and there are currently no mobile phones for us to use. After all the hard work and money spent, the St. Pete policemen will have to do without the PTT service for now. We also have to postpone adding an application running on our IMS platform in a live customer environment to our long list of corporate achievements. Many people around me seem to accept that this outcome was somehow inevitable and want to bury the topic; others blame the "Russians," the "Swedes," the "Product Management," "Sales," or even the "Customer." The account team has the toughest job – explaining the situation to the customer without losing face, as well as opportunities for more important, future deals. In a moment of self-irony, I visualize Ola, Stian, and me as "jesters," the R&D folks in Southern Stockholm as "jokers," and my new Russian friends as "buffoons." We seem to be so heavily attached to our local realities and the heat of the moment, that even if we are aware *in principle* of all the bits and pieces needed to take a new product from the drawing board to the customer, in practice our thoughts are revolving around either a linear product management process *or* an R&D process *or* a sales process. If instead of running around the scene, I had only stopped to *think* for a good moment and asked a few simple questions in the very beginning . . .

2.5   Looking back

Fall 2016. I read in the newspaper about lay-offs and financial difficulties at Ericsson. Further technological convergence and firm consolidation, as well as slower than expected development in advanced markets, are causing trouble. The competitive landscape is tough. The once weak Huawei has continued to gain market share and Nokia's profitability is better than Ericsson's, although the company and its portfolio are smaller. I am about to finalize my dissertation and become curious about what happened to our IMS project, Stian, and other colleagues after I left. I call him up. He sounds reasonably happy and is now a manager in charge of the ecosystem and partner relations. The title alone

indicates that changes have been made. To avoid problems, tight collaboration with partners providing other parts of the solution is needed, starting with defining technology roadmaps and standards. "*Stian, were we as mad as I think we were or was it only me? Why did we run the push-to-talk project knowing (for we did know, did we not?) the chances of success were next to zero?*"

Stian is quiet for a while. Then he starts with what sounds like a religious litany. There was so much hype about the convergence of IT and Telecom 10 years ago, about the 3G and 4G solutions we developed that enabled service offerings with new revenue streams for our customers, telecom operators. Customers were lining up for our IMS and the opportunities it offered. Our management was putting pressure on us; we needed to enter new product markets as equipment sales were declining and pressure on margins was so high. However, IMS was a very immature technology at the time; thus, we did not fully understand it, particularly how it would work with our partners and with what is now called an ecosystem. Our processes and mindset were still of the R&D and product development mentality. Our sales force was busy signing contracts with customers for products we could not deliver. No one had end-to-end responsibility of what we had to deliver to ensure the PTT service would work in the customer environment. We had no power over mobile device providers to produce handsets that supported the features needed to make it work. We were trying our best to keep up with the pace, and the management team was all along happy with us – the problems seemed somewhat surprising. "*Yes, but what could have been done to avoid it – so much time and money was spent?*"

Stian feels this was a classic case of incompetent leadership. The head of our unit and his team were not up to the task. Operators were lining up at our door expecting us to deliver, but no one really understood that selling and delivering ecosystem solutions was different from the traditional product delivery model our processes were aligned around. I am not fully convinced. We knew we were releasing a product from engineering that was just not ready, did we not? The sales force, product management, and R&D – we all knew this. So, rather than blaming bad leadership from high up in the hierarchy, this was more a case of collapsed sensemaking, illusionary understandings of what we were capable of, and silo thinking in our core team. We were all guilty of negative path dependency, lack of initiative and courage, cognitive laziness, and wishful thinking.

Once again, the story has a happy ending, sort of, and despite all the turmoil, money, and time spent. Our captain-less Titanic did not sink this time either. A big Japanese customer saved us. They took over the whole solution responsibility, put pressure on mobile device makers, fixed their own network, and finally managed to release a PTT service in their home market. Thus, we

got our proof of concept for the IMS, which is today a platform many mobile services rely on. We also bought some time to find a more successful passage from the traditional firm-centric product to a solution model anchored in a wider ecosystem.

2.6 Towards happier endings

What were these tales really about? Seen from the outside, they were stories of quite well-performing global teams when it comes to meeting management expectations; however, a more varied and dynamic picture emerges as their stories are told by one voice, a team member (who in this case is also the researcher). The way I made sense of my team experiences reveals one side of the "truth," a quite thorough but admittedly narrow one. Nevertheless, the dynamics of the "king's court" team were such that I looked constantly for other career opportunities within the same company that I still liked and wanted to be part of. I ended up changing not only teams but also countries. Through the lens of sensemaking, I suggest that the "king," his "courtiers," and I were equally committed to our team's task, but whereas for him and at least two teammates closest to him personally, that commitment was tightly linked to a commitment to each other and one's own direct career ambitions. For me, it was more a commitment to the company, my moral values that differed from those of the "king," and to my colleagues outside my own team.[9] I made sense of my team as a corrupt boys club that did not respect the company's values as demonstrated by their behavior and their disrespect of women. As far as they were concerned, they were the most competent people for the job, and their tight social ties and friendships only helped the team members to trust each other and to excel. While I considered "the boys" as part of a men-only poker and golf club enjoying their exclusive status in the eyes of many local colleagues, I linked my identity to "Sweden" and to what I considered a better and more professionally managed workplace than the one in Canada. I think, though, that in our own way, we all shared a sense that the team was capable of executing its tasks. Our value base was just radically different, so situations and ways of working opened up very differently to us and influenced our personal choices. From the point of view of team performance, I still maintain that by being more objective and less influenced by friendships, alliances, and political interests, the team

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[9] The story neither begins nor ends here. Over the years, I observed how these colleagues kept on working with each other, moving from one job to another including international assignments, while their careers progressed. Here, "cultural differences" may be at play. In Middle-Eastern cultures, the concept of family is often extended to friends of the same ethnic and religious origins, a tendency perhaps strengthened in conditions of diaspora, and work is more comfortably mixed with private life than in the Nordic countries.

would have done a better job. However, the "company" seemed happy and we all got a career boost.

When it comes to sensemaking, the situation with the "jesters, jokers, and buffoons" team was different, as while the events were ongoing, I always thought our troubles came from some people not following the fantastic processes our whole work life was so safely built around. We all had such a religion-like faith in our methods and ways of working (the machine!) that we no longer questioned the path taken, and we identified with the mighty blue-chip model company that Ericsson was. It was much later, once I had already left the company, when I realized we were locked-in, blind to the obvious or unconsciously protecting our professional identities from unflattering revelations. From the point of view of enactment, if any of us in a position of influence had had the courage to speak up and state the known, that the imaginary captain had lost his compass, we would have done much less useless work and saved a lot of money – and, thus, been a better performing team. However, top management wanted to push through a rock, and who were we to question their leadership?

Regardless of what the "truth" is, had the other team members also had their voices heard, these tales would no doubt be very different. Had we had more imagination and courage, and abandoned our localized thought worlds based on too many assumptions, and instead had an open discussion, there would have probably been a more or less polite argument, and we may have reached some type of shared understanding. Building on these thoughts, listening to as many voices as there are team members, is the empirical setting I created particularly for this study; I will tell stories of five teams starting from Chapter 8 onwards. One thing is certain; truly good teams are made of more than competent people, clear goals, available resources, and well-aligned task processes. And each team is its own tale.

Now, we will leave the "Ship without a Captain" for a while and see what we can learn from theory on global teams.

3   GLOBAL TEAMS – AN OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"As the man said, 'for every complex problem there is a simple solution,' and it's wrong."

— Umberto Eco, Foucault's Pendulum

Globalization, or "the removal of barriers to free trade and the closer integration of national economies" (Stiglitz 2002), as well as technological advances eroding many of the barriers to remote working (Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998) have paved the way for increased collaboration and instant communication across distances in many people's professional lives. Overall, internet technologies have become part of the daily lives of an increasing number of people around the world. These developments have also contributed to a rise in global teams. According to Johns and Gratton (2013), with virtual work serving the interests of both employees and employers, the number of highly skilled and untethered people has risen exponentially, and within a few years, more than 1.3 billion people will work virtually – that is, through rich electronic connections from sites of their choosing. The London Global Leaders' Summit reports that more than one-third of executives expect over half of their full-time employees to be working remotely by 2020 (Institute of Leadership & Management 2015).

In the past 25 years, teams spanning multiple geographic, temporal, and cultural boundaries have become prevalent in many industries and sectors. According to Zander et al. (2012), global teams that are characterized by national, cultural, and linguistic heterogeneity and operate in a globally dispersed virtual environment are becoming an established form of organizing work in multinational organizations. Professionals often work not only as part of one global virtual team, but also on multiple simultaneous projects (O'Leary, Mortensen & Wolley 2011) and on many teams, making their daily work life quite complex due to a constant need to manage time, effort, and priorities.

However, global teams often fail to deliver. In their survey of 70 global business teams, Gupta, Govindarajan, and Wang (2008, 192) found that only 18 percent of the teams considered their performance "highly successful," and the remaining 82 percent fell short of intended outcomes. Cultural differences are often blamed for social difficulties in international teamwork, but they are also

hailed as a source of team member satisfaction and creativity (cf. Stahl et al. 2010). Most employees consider virtual communication less productive than face-to-face interactions, and nearly half admit to feeling confused and overwhelmed by collaboration technology (Ferrazzi 2014). Why is this so and what does this mean? Globalization and advances in information and communication technology leading to the "death of distance" (Cairncross 2001) were expected, along with much hype about making life simpler and shaping economies and society in *good* ways.

Mirroring these empirical findings, the academic research on global teams is heterogeneous, ambiguous, and widely spread across several publications that specialize in many different fields, such as IT, project management, international business, and accounting. Hence, it is hard to build an informed understanding on the various outcomes of global teams at an aggregate level and how team inputs and processes influence them. Indeed, when it comes to team *outcomes* only, while most research continues to examine team *effectiveness*, there is a myriad of constructs included under the umbrella of "effectiveness" only, such as business results, quality, length of time to reach a decision, creativity, productivity, etc. Furthermore, how effectiveness is measured also varies from team members' individual assessments to aggregate assessments and to objective measures (Gilson et al. 2014). Other than team effectiveness, *affective outcomes*, such as satisfaction (Chiravuri et al. 2010), team viability and turnover intentions (Ortega et al. 2010), and confidence in the team's capability (Turel & Connelly 2012) have also started to receive empirical consideration (Gilson et al. 2014).

There are no simple answers to the global team performance paradox for the simple reason that the apparent problem also represents an opportunity; hence, it is complex and difficult to grasp. One team may score high on business results but have a poor member or employee satisfaction score, or the team may be extremely creative but low on productivity. External performance measures may be more or less accurate and differ from team members' own assessments, and individual experiences may vary, for instance, when it comes to preferences for virtual or face-to-face work. It seems evident that working in teams that cross many boundaries, such as distance, cultures, organizations, and time zones, or in other words, the way work just *is* in many contemporary organizations, does not lend itself easily to simple and generic explanations. Confusion, change, and ambiguity have become the norm modern employees just need to cope with.

3.1 Definitions

Researchers refer to the phenomenon of people based in different locations working together across national and cultural boundaries in a number of ways, including "virtual," "global," "geographically distributed," "dispersed," and "multinational" and/or "multicultural" teams. The term "virtual team" is the most common one (Connaughton & Shuffler 2007).

A distinction needs to be made between a "group" and a "team" before going further, since both words are often used as synonyms. According to Katzenbach & Smith (1993/2005), a team is a "*small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.*" So, while a "team" has a shared purpose and collective work products and it works together to reach them, in a "group" members have the same goals as the organization it is nested in and work products are individual, not shared. Hence, a "group" is a qualitatively different way of organizing than a "team," whereas a "team" and a "global team" diverge on key dimensions while representing the same phenomenon – a team. These dimensions particular to a global team are a globally dispersed work environment and heterogeneity on multiple dimensions (Maloney & Zellmer-Bruhn 2006). A virtual team can be defined as a "*collection of individuals who are geographically and/or organizationally or otherwise dispersed and who collaborate via communication and information technologies in order to accomplish a specific goal*" (Zigurs 2003). Lipnack and Stamps (1997) bring in the cultural dimension by describing that "*virtual teams work across time and space as well as organizational and cultural boundaries with links strengthened by webs of communication strategies.*" Jonsen et al. (2012) define global virtual teams as "*groups of people who a) work together using communications technology more often than face-to-face, b) are distributed across space, c) are responsible for a joint outcome, and usually d) work on strategic or technically advanced tasks, as well as being e) multifunctional and/or multicultural.*"

Not all global virtual teams are alike, as they are characterized by different degrees of virtuality, dispersion, and cultural diversity. Other team structural and contextual matters, such as the length of the team's lifespan, the fact that teams can be either project-based and temporary or more stable with a more or less changing membership (Saarinen 2016), its purpose, possible subgroups within teams, the relative importance and urgency of its task, the interdependence of its members, complexities in organizational affiliations, etc., add to the complexity. Many variations of global virtual teams exist on a continuum between the collocated multinational team and the purely virtually operating form (Kirkman et al. 2004). In addition, there is no single cut-off point

when a team becomes virtual, but managers must assess the context of the team and the degree to which virtuality is present on a variety of dimensions (Zigurs 2003). In the same manner, the multicultural aspect is also rather difficult to define and measure. Sometimes people from many nationalities work on the same site, sometimes there are people from many nationalities spread across different countries, and sometimes team members, regardless of where they come from, travel frequently, so "where" the team members are is a rather temporally and spatially fluid question.

As suggested in the Introduction, I consider global teams in this study to mean *"fluid, amorphous, and at least to some degree, culturally diverse, geographically dispersed, and electronically communicating groups working together towards common goals with members sharing meanings and aspirations."* This is to take a step away from static definitions focusing on the structure of the team, such as where the team members are located and head counting them based on their national culture, and focusing more on the amorphous and fluid nature of these teams, as well as on the need of the team members to align themselves to come together by establishing shared aspirations and ways of working. To study global teams is to study a heterogeneous phenomenon, and the team context does matter enormously. There are many additional dimensions to be considered, such as whether or not the team members have a working history together, the length of the lifespan of the team, the type of tasks that may vary from simultaneous to sequential work and be more or less routinized or complex, and the level of hierarchy the team is situated in. Moreover, a person can be part of different teams, such as a management team and a task team, and the same person can have a key expert role in one team, while in another, he may have more of a supporting role, which can also change over time. For instance, the ways in which global teams work on an IT system emergency outage, an investment case for an international merger, or an international academic study vary greatly in speed, intensity, problem definition, and level of practicality/abstraction of the task.

3.2   Global teams – both challenges and opportunities

In the late 1990s when working virtually was still a relatively new form of work, the expectations on technology capable of delivering many benefits and solving all kinds of organizational problems were high in a world where everyone in the office was going to be always "on" and "interconnected." A citation from an article, "Virtual teams: Technology and the workplace of the future" (Townsend, DeMarie & Hendrickson 1998) that appeared in *The Academy of Management Executive* summarizes this sentiment:

> *Virtual teams, which are linked primarily through advanced computer and telecommunications technologies, provide a potent response to the challenges associated with today's downsized and lean organizations, and to the resulting geographical dispersion of essential employees. Virtual teams also address new workforce demographics, where the best employees may be located anywhere in the world, and where workers demand increasing technological sophistication and personal flexibility. With virtual teams, organizations can build teams with optimum membership while retaining the advantages of a flat organizational structure. Additionally, firms benefit from virtual teams through access to previously unavailable expertise, enhanced cross-functional interaction, and the use of systems that improve the quality of the virtual team's work.*

More realistically and with the benefit of hindsight, global teams and still fast developing technology that enable virtual work forms in the first place present *both* opportunities and challenges to organizations. By creating teams that cross the many boundaries distance entails, firms are believed to better meet the needs of their global customer base and gain enhanced profit margins by creating conditions for more effective and efficient organizations and processes. According to Zander et al. (2012), the virtual context has enabled teams to complete tasks more efficiently and quickly than ever before and to access the best resources and people in locations around the globe. Teams can also work "around the clock." By having team members in different time zones, speed and flexibility in response to market demands can be increased, and a closer connection to suppliers and/or customers can be accomplished (Hertel, Geister & Konradt 2005). Also, global teams can respond to sudden demands due to market changes, since teams can be formed, reorganized, and dissolved rapidly when needed (Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998), and they can bring global capabilities near the local customer and boost innovation (Gibson & Gibbs 2006). Cost reductions are also a key motivator for establishing global teams as business operations can be located anywhere in the world, and savings in travel costs and time can be significant as the use of technology reduces the need to meet face-to-face (Hertel at al. 2005; Jonsen et al. 2012).

However, global teams present important challenges as well. Zander, Zettinig and Makela (2013) suggest that the most salient challenges of global teams include goal alignment, knowledge transfer, and motivation. Lack of interpersonal trust, poor individual commitment, and role overload and ambiguity are other recurring themes (Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1998; Kanawattanachai & Yoo 2002; Penarroja et al. 2013), as well as conflict management (Chiravuri, Nazareth, & Ramamurthy 2011). Hertel et al. (2005)

include difficulties with supervising team members' activities and preventing unproductive developments in time, along with the additional costs for appropriate technology, issues of data security, and additional training programs. The lack of a physical presence and task coordination challenges can compromise teamwork and project outcomes, while a lack of communication can damage the team's performance and effectiveness (Connaughton & Shuffler 2007). Team members' different cultural backgrounds, experiences in using technology, and multiple time zones do not ease the teamwork (Zander et al. 2012), and cultural differences can create significant challenges and even barriers to effectiveness (Brett, Behfar & Kern 2009).

3.3   Team context

Across the academic literature, the "context" is often mentioned as having an impact on global team effectiveness. Indeed, contextual variables such as task complexity, team size, dispersion, and tenure have been found to have moderating effects on team dynamics (Stahl et al. 2010), without giving much insight into how and under what conditions these effects manifest themselves. Other studies have found that while context "matters" in general, this is not necessarily the case, depending on the research setting (Maloney et al. 2016). Furthermore, the team context has been operationalized and considered in research in several ways, making drawing conclusions difficult. "Context" as a concept is tremendously hard to grasp and even more difficult to operationalize and form generalizations, creating "a large and vague category of moderators that influence team outcomes" (Maznevski 2012). Thus, team research typically focuses on teams' internal dynamics and internal processes instead (Mathieu et al. 2008), leaving the "context question" marginalized. A noteworthy exception is a study by Maloney et al. (2016), which inventories literature explicitly modeling teams' external context variables and proposes further guidelines for contextual theorizing.

Existing definitions of what is meant by team context vary from author to author, but these are generally concerned with where the teams are located in a nesting structure, highlighting the dual role that teams play embedding individuals and being embedded in larger systems (Maloney et al. 2016). Team context variables can refer to a myriad of factors that are idiosyncratic for a given environment. According to Vartiainen (2006), the working contexts of virtual organizations may vary in function by location, mobility, time, temporariness, diversity, and mode of interaction. In a wider meaning, contextual factors can be classified as: a) individual specific; b) technology specific; c) team specific; d) task specific; e) company specific; f) industry

specific; and g) macroeconomic factors. *Individual factors* are related to a team member's sociocultural background, personal skills, traits, experience, and aptitude, each of which contributes to or impedes the functioning of a global team. *Technology factors* have to do with the type of communication and information technology, and the associated software that is used in teamwork, and also with the frequency and intensity the technological tools are used. *Team-specific factors* refer to matters such as the degree of geographic distribution of the members, the lifespan of the team (a new versus an already established team, a permanent or a project-based team, etc.), and the cultural and functional diversity of the team membership, as well as the team culture. *Task-specific factors* refer to the time constraints and relative importance of the task, the complexity and nature of the task, and the interdependence of work deliverables between team members. When executing highly interdependent and complex tasks, much more intense coordination is required between team members than when executing simple tasks. *Company-specific factors* are related to the company culture and strategy, as well as the company's business situation (i.e., cost savings versus business growth, mergers & acquisitions versus routine mode, response to an external threat versus an opportunity mode). *Industry-specific factors* consider wider circumstances the whole sector is going through, such as expansion versus de-growth and transformation versus static situations. *Macroeconomic factors* that impact global teams are related to general conditions, for example, economic growth versus recession that have an impact on all economic agents in general. This classification is rather broad and includes both contextual features located outside and inside the team, taking into account the nested nature of both the teams and the individuals working in them. When studies vaguely refer to the "team context" or the "team environment," as is often the case, it is then difficult to understand what is really meant by the definition in the first place. In empirical research, internal and external team contexts should be clearly distinguished, and whether a given contextually labeled construct is inside or outside the team boundary should be stated. Related to needed efforts to make the context-as-concept more visible and transparent, authors should provide a deeper treatment of external validity in their discussions of their findings for readers to make better evaluations about the generalizability of these to other settings (Maloney et al. 2016).

In much research, dispersion and culture are perceived as two (team internal) contextual factors critical to global team effectiveness (Connaughton & Shuffler 2007). Let us take a closer look at what is known about these concepts, while keeping in mind that the combined effects of dispersion and diversity are only just beginning to be understood (Maznevski 2012).

3.3.1 *Dispersion*

Most modern organizational teams can to some extent be considered virtual (cf. Kirkman, Gibson & Kim 2012), even though their membership may not be particularly multicultural or geographically dispersed, as people can connect to work and colleagues through their laptops and smartphones from anywhere, and the meaning of "distance" has collapsed to some extent. More broadly, virtuality in its dimensions of space, time, and modality is a matter of degree, and teams may be considered more or less virtual (Gibson & Gibbs 2006). Paradoxically perhaps, and strictly concerning teamwork, the research results on the impact of dispersion, distance, and virtuality on team effectiveness vary, even though technological developments are widely thought to have increased productivity and work effectiveness in general. According to Maznevski (2012), dispersion leads to virtuality that, in turn, reduces social cues for interactions, often making it more difficult to bring team members together for communication and convergent team processes. Gilson et al. (2014) in their recent literature review on virtual teams discovered that virtuality is found to both increase and decrease team effectiveness, depending on the constructs used, the research context, and the setting of the study. Further, research by Zakaria, Amelinckx and Wilemon (2004) shows that 50 percent of virtual teams would fail to meet either strategic or operational objectives due to the inability to manage the distributed workforce implementation risks. Indeed, it seems that while a distributed team configuration often complicates things, it does not necessarily have to be so as some teams manage to close the distance gap and be successful.

It is often not enough to study individuals in a local team but also as a member in many teams, adding to the complexity of understanding the impact of distance on teams and their results. People may work in traditional teams within their local sites at the same time that they work virtually through team membership at other levels and locations (Zigurs 2003). Moreover, individuals working in global teams often need to allocate their time across different teams, both global and local, as well as other regular work duties, and report to multiple managers and team leaders in matrix organizations. This can create serious challenges to team success due to issues related with work and role overload and power dynamics. Therefore, to study team dispersion is also to study multiple individual commitments and how these influence a given team, further adding to the complexity of the phenomenon.

3.3.2 Cultural diversity

For best management practices in general, diversity is typically viewed as a key ingredient for a competitive advantage in the globalized world. Trina Gordon, the CEO of the leading global headhunting firm, Boyden Group, said: "... both sexes, different races and nationalities occupying high positions in different organizations is very important. . ." and that "to increase diversity is one of the most important competitive factors associated with leadership today."[10] However, while there is increasing pro-diversity *talk* at least at executive levels and defenders of a more diverse workplace are many, the reality is often less diverse in practice. While there are many types of diversity considerations in the workplace – gender, functional, educational background, age, and ethnic diversity, for instance – cultural diversity is the diversity dimension that defines global teams the most.

Global teams are often created to develop and implement complex organizational initiatives and are deliberately composed to be multifunctional as well as multicultural (Maznevski 2012). Yet, in research, culture is traditionally constructed as something that divides individuals (cf. Hall & Hall 1989; Hofstede 1984; Trompenaars & Hamden-Turner 2011). Hence, cultural diversity is often considered a problem to be solved or a potentially negative team input, despite the promise of diverse team membership to deliver innovative and creative results. Connaughton and Shuffler's (2007) work, for instance, suggests that globally distributed teams will be effective vehicles for knowledge sharing in an organization only if individuals learn the cultural logic of others' divergent beliefs. In addition, according to Oertig and Buergi (2006), matrix organizations are hard to manage, and diversity has been found to lead to poorly performing teams. Brett et al. (2006) identified four cultural barriers in multicultural teams: conflicting decision-making norms; conflicting attitudes towards hierarchy; direct versus indirect communication; and trouble with language and accents.

Indeed, cultural diversity in itself does not automatically lead to positive – or negative – outcomes. Stahl et al. (2010) in their research on multicultural teams observe that cultural diversity affects team processes through both losses and gains associated with increased team divergence and decreased team convergence. In their meta-analysis of 108 empirical studies on the processes and performance of 10,632 teams, they found that cultural diversity leads to process losses through task conflict and decreased social integration on one side, and on other side, to process gains through increased creativity and satisfaction. A key question to be asked, then, is how can process losses related to team cultural diversity and geographic distribution be minimized and gains

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[10] Pesonen, E-S, Kauppalehti, February 13, 2013, pp. B10–12.

maximized? Maloney and Zellmer-Bruhn (2006) proposed balancing mechanisms to benefit from heterogeneity in cross-cultural teams and refer to global mindset, swift norms, fault line bridges, thought world windows, and self-verification to promote team performance. While conceptually attractive, how to operationalize these constructs seems more complicated. For instance, how exactly should a practitioner apply a global mindset to harness team diversity to increase its creativity (Mathieu et al. 2008; Zakaria et al. 2004)?

Research on teams has thus far established that cultural diversity impacts team processes in many ways, both negatively and positively, and often both dynamics are at play at the same time. This is because cultural differences have been found to have at least two theoretical paths of influence: 1) information process theory, according to which diversity increases the resources available to the team; and 2) similarity/attraction and social identity theories, according to which people who are similar are attracted to each other and identify more strongly with each other (Maznevski 2012). Hence, from this viewpoint, a diverse team may have more difficulty creating social alignment than a homogeneous team, which may inhibit the team from benefiting from its diverse resource base.

A better understanding of team leadership theory, team dynamics, and processes may hold some insights into how to solve this puzzle.

3.4   Team leadership

Is the leadership of geographically dispersed multicultural teams that rely heavily on communication technology to cooperate and communicate any different from the leadership of ordinary teams? We need to ask ourselves what these possible differences might be and to also have an understanding of their similarities. Hajro and Pudelko (2010) found that leadership is precisely what matters for global team performance, with knowledge management and cross-cultural awareness other key success factors. According to Gilson et al. (2014), research on virtual team leadership has grown precipitously in the past 10 years, with two popular areas being leaders' behaviors and traits, with a distinct focus on inspirational, transformational, and transactional leaders. Chevrier (2003) in his research on cultural strategies calls for an active approach to global team leadership based on two assumptions: a) multicultural team effectiveness is dependent on a deep understanding of the cultural issues at hand; and b) such an understanding will not occur simply through team interactions but requires deliberate efforts. In their research on emerging themes of global team leadership, Zander et al. (2012) reach similar conclusions as they identified

three emerging trends: a) leaders as boundary spanners, bridge makers, and blenders; b) leaders leveraging diversity; and c) people-oriented leadership.

Yet, according to Zigurs (2003), studies typically look at only small pieces of the whole system. Jarvenpaa and Leidner's (1998) research highlights the importance of communication and trust, while other scholars have found such variables as face-to-face interactions in the beginning of a team's life, having frequent communication, and increasing team members' awareness and visibility and their range of activities to be critical success factors (Zigurs 2003). Straightforward traditional leader actions, such as maintaining communication and coordination, establishing relationships, and managing conflict, have been found to be effective. Also of importance are skills such as asynchronous communication skills and efficiency with synchronous communication (since there are few opportunities for this), as well as technological savvy and the capability to match technology to the situation, and the ability to be engaging (Zander et al. 2012).

While it seems that strong intercultural leaders capitalize on similarities between people while building bridges over differences, it seems clear that leading global teams is a more complex enterprise than leading traditional teams. Purvanova and Bono (2009) suggest that to close the gap of distance and culture and to overcome challenges brought in by the use of information and communication technology in daily teamwork, more knowledge on virtual leadership and new leadership practices can help. Then, how can leadership practices be optimized for global teams to overcome the additional challenges associated with distribution and cultural diversity? Teams facing cultural heterogeneity and geographic dispersion seem to benefit most from people-oriented leadership styles, and global team leaders should motivate, inspire, coach, mentor, and take a personal interest in team members in order for teams to be successful (Zander et al. 2012).

What the studies on global team leadership have thus far sidelined is the fact that, in practice, many project teams lack a formal leader in the traditional "managerial" sense, and expert team members often need to take the task forward in collaboration. Even in structures with formal managers, these are often not experts on the team's output. Such managers may also be busy on a number of projects and not that involved in the team's task execution. Thus, the impulse to "lead" may reside in any team member, depending on the task at hand, project phase, personal disposition, or the workload situation of the individuals forming the team, or any other matter idiosyncratic to the team or the organization it is nested in. Also, despite many teams being assigned a project leader or manager of some sort, these individuals often lack formal power over the teammates. Consequently, their commitment and participation often has to be established, secured, and re-negotiated over time with the team

members and with other influential people inside the organization (e.g., resource managers, staffers, formal managers, or people high up in the hierarchy).

3.5 Team processes

Since researchers have found no direct link between team distribution, cultural heterogeneity, and performance, variables like processes, context, and team structural factors may play a central role in the success of global teams (Jonsen et al. 2012; Stahl et al. 2009; Zigurs 2003). The word "process" is used widely in team and leadership literature to describe a multitude of dynamic phenomena at the micro and macro levels (i.e., communication, coordination, relational, social, conflict management, change management, leadership, etc.). The Oxford Dictionary defines process as "a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end."[11] Intentionality of a process as a means to a specific end is at the heart of this definition. Processes can be used to ensure a certain structure, in which pre-agreed and standardized ways of working are followed, and also as a means to enable change. In global virtual team literature, team processes can be divided into two categories: *task processes* and *socio-emotional* (relational) *processes*. According to Powell, Piccoli and Ives (2004), task processes are those that occur as team members work together to accomplish a task or goal (i.e., communication and coordination), while socio-emotional processes refer to relationship building, cohesion, and trust as fundamental phenomena that foster team effectiveness. It is suggested that virtual teams face significant difficulty in achieving these social types of processes (Powell et al. 2004).

Processes in particular bring structure to daily work. In virtual teams, structure is partially implemented through technology via communication, information, and process structuring software tools, while team members or the formal leader invoke the remaining structure (Zigurs 2003). It is essential that process structuring strikes the right balance between flexibility and enforcement (Zigurs 2003). Jonsen et al. (2012) present a global virtual team model (see Figure 1) that shows causal relationships between structural characteristics (task, team configuration, team composition), team processes (communication, collaboration, conflict management, task management) and performance. In this model, leadership and practices act as moderators that help teams achieve high-quality processes from their given structural characteristics. These types of conceptualizations of processes as mediating mechanisms are often referred to as *input-process-outcome* (I-P-O) frameworks (Marks, Mathieu & Zaccaro 2001).

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[11] http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/american_english/process (retrieved on April 25, 2016)

Another alternative to team process modeling is based on team temporal development. The most famous one is, perhaps, Tuckman's (1965) conceptual stage model based on four team phases that reflect the team's lifecycle: *forming, storming, norming,* and *performing,* to which a fifth one, *adjourning*, was added later on to capture the team's dying-out phase (Tuckman & Jensen 1977). Similarly, Zander et al. (2013) proposed a three-phase lifecycle model for virtual teams: *the welcoming phase, the working phase,* and *the wrap-up phase*. Hertel et al. (2005) present a virtual team leadership lifecycle model in which five phases are distinguished in the management of teams with high virtuality: *preparation, launch, performance management, team development,* and *disbanding*. While conceptually attractive for their simplicity, questions have been raised about the usefulness and applicability of these models in real-life settings as their measurement and verification is challenging (Tuckman & Jensen 1977). This may be particularly true in virtual settings where tasks tend to be complex and the team and task environments are fluid and constantly changing; thus, *norming*, for instance, may take place in iterations, and the team must *form* again to adjust to changes many times, while *storming* may be continuous.
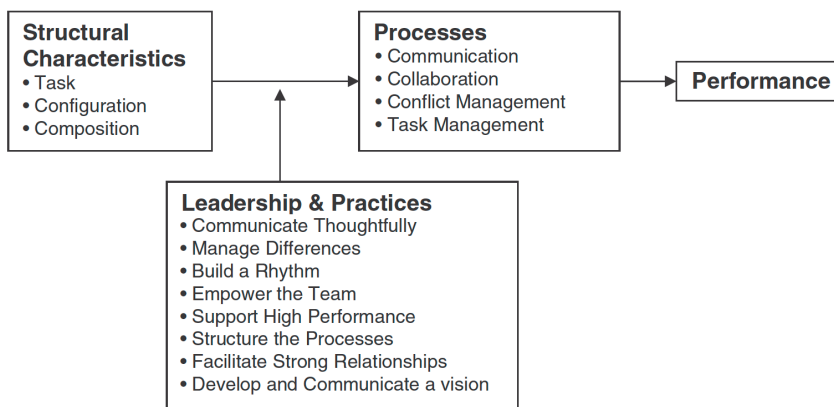
Figure 1   Global virtual team performance (in Jonsen, Maznevski & Davison 2012)

Marks et al. (2001) propose that a team process represents members' interdependent acts that convert inputs to outcomes through cognitive, verbal, and behavioral activities directed toward organizing task work to achieve collective goals. In their view, team performance is best viewed as a series of related and recurring input-process-output episodes, and they offer a taxonomy that arranges 10 basic processes into three higher-level categories: transition

(roughly referring to decision points such as planning), action, and interpersonal processes. While transition and action processes are linked directly with performance episodes, interpersonal processes occur throughout other episodes with regularity and are the kinds of factors that can "rally or derail teams at any point."

Leadership can also be viewed as a process. In what Uhl-Bien (2006) calls *relational leadership*, the phenomenon of leadership is not restricted to hierarchical positions or roles, but is considered as occurring in relational dynamics throughout the organization. Accepting leadership as a social process does not entail abolishing traditional manager-subordinate relationships, which are recognized as important for organizational functioning. It enables, however, observing the importance of other relationships on team dynamics that do not emanate from the hierarchy, and acknowledges the fact that any team member can take a leadership role and engage in leadership acts, according to situational needs. Relational leadership is a social-influence process through which emergent coordination and change are constructed and produced (Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien 2012; Uhl-Bien 2006), and in which leadership is detached from personality in order to focus on social interactions and behavioral changes within organizational life (Crevani, Lindgren & Packendorff 2010). Considering leadership as a dynamic relational process resulting from interactions between people and not the position the formal manager occupies seems to be particularly fitting for global teams due to the complexity and fluidity of team settings. It is practically impossible for any one person to be the most competent one for each type of task and situation occurring in a global expert team.

3.6   What do we know about global teams?

In this chapter, I have taken a brief look at the existing literature on global teams in an effort to better understand what makes these teams more or less successful. It seems that while we know a lot, we still know very little. We have learned that the impact of the two factors that make global teams different from the traditional type of teams, cultural diversity and the virtual work mode, is actually equivocal on team performance. Sometimes global teams perform better than collocated ones, sometimes worse. The virtual work environment and cultural differences tend to lead to *both* team convergence and divergence, pulling members apart and bringing them together simultaneously. We have also learned that the role of team processes, context, and leadership hold promise in understanding what makes these teams successful, but these processes are complex and contexts are too numerous and embedded for

normative models to be meaningful. When it comes to leadership, more inspirational and relational leadership modes seem to hold some promise, but they do not represent a silver bullet to "make" teams successful either.

There is a shared understanding in the research community that factors such as task type, team structural characteristics, leadership, and longevity of the team are important, and attention to matters such as effective communication in an intercultural and virtual context, conflict management, goal setting, and trust building are key for team success. However, for a practicing team member, leader, and a seasoned project manager, none of this is really new or particularly insightful. While reading many studies has been enlightening and helped me to structure my thoughts and feel more broadly informed, it is still hard to grasp how successful teams are formed and how good performance can be maintained over time.

Other than a lack of studies addressing team dynamics over time, what caught my eye was the richness of the concept "performance" in academic studies in general. In business and knowledge work industries, in particular, I am most familiar that what matters most at the project level are task outcomes (being on time, within budget, and in compliance with project specifications – all of which tend to change and be re-negotiated multiple times over the team and project lifecycles), or business results more broadly in less fluid or more stable teams. Much less attention is paid to such performance outcomes as "productivity," "the length of time for the team to reach decisions," "team member satisfaction," "member intentions to leave the team or the organization," or "willingness to engage in further teamwork with the local team members." Further pushing the limits to better understand "team performance" beyond the usual metrics, as well as how different performance criteria may interrelate, seems a promising research area with practical interest.

3.7   Positioning of this study

Cardel Gertsen and Zolner (2012) in their study on multicultural teams point out that the effects of many factors impacting on the performance of multicultural teams are inconclusive. Some possible reasons for this are the quantitative focus of studies and the fact that research has tended to concentrate on the internal dynamics of teams, while disregarding the organizational and environmental contexts in which the teams are embedded. Moreover, studies on global teams answering "how" questions, which are important for advanced theorizing and progressing a given field of study (Whetten 1989), are still very scarce. In line with this, Gilson et al. (2014) suggest that to move forward,

researchers should incorporate longitudinal designs to better understand the complex nature of team dynamics.

In previous research, concepts such as communication, collaboration, and conflict management are usually presented as mediators between team inputs and outputs, as discussed earlier in this chapter, and rarely studied as "dynamics" that evolve over time. Moreover, there is no clear understanding of what is meant by "communication" and "collaboration," or what "conducting effective conflict management" in a global team entails. These variables all seem to be highly contingent on the situation or the team context. The proposed process models refer to rather fixed stages or lifecycle models on team evolution, making it difficult to ground empirically or to understand "process" as a black box between team inputs and outputs.

It seems that to understand global teams is to study complexity much more than to examine whether a limited amount of variables are causally related to team outcome measures (see also Gibson & Cohen 2003, 7). The wheels of change in the empirical world are moving faster than our field of study. It is not only that a not-so-new-anymore organizational form, a global team, has emerged, but our whole human experience is being transformed by technology. Generations born into a digital world for which many considerations critical to the previous generations are redundant move into organizations and start making their voices heard. I can only concur with Hertel et al. (2014) in that despite the growing prevalence of this work form, little is known about the management of virtual teams and, in particular, the human resources within them.

I propose changing gears altogether, or rather, the way to view the world to enrich and challenge our understanding of the phenomenon. Inspired by Gareth Morgan's work on metaphors (1980, 1997), I invite the reader to jump from the world seen as a machine, an assumption inherent in much of the existing research, to world as a river in which process no longer means what happens in that black box between input and output but rather that the world is constant and flux and structures like teams are no longer fixed but always in the making. In this world, a researcher is no longer a statistician objectively observing the world out there but a storyteller (cf. Chapter 2) and a hermeneutician.

This study focuses on how global teams delivering quality work are born and evolve over time, and what these teams look like from within, with the aim of better understanding them and drawing valuable lessons from these teams. Problems global teams face seem to be in large part due to issues with human interactions, organizations lacking to focus on teamwork as something needing attention, and, in general, an over-reliance on technology as a solution to all kinds of organizational problems and as a never-ending source of innovation and competitive advantage. People enact teams. In fact, there are no teams

without human actions and interactions to begin with, and the role of technology is merely that of an enabler. When only teams producing quality task output are considered, an increased focus on interactions and other team performance variables, such as socio-emotional and efficiency outcomes, can be studied and further inform the impact teamwork may have beyond what is relatively easy to objectively measure – immediate team task outputs.

4   FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY

"We cannot step over our shadows."
― Gadamer, 1989

This work is inspired by what Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000/2009) call a reflexive methodology that orients research towards such approaches as 20th century philosophical hermeneutics, which lays the foundation for studying human behavior, existence, and social institutions from unconventional perspectives. With the field of international business quite strongly anchored in the positivist tradition, in this chapter, in addition to discussing philosophical foundations and methodology, I want to briefly explore the nature of interpretative approaches compared with positivist and realist ones. Some possibilities to reconcile are often considered an iron curtain of a sort that divides the natural sciences (where the phenomena are explained) and the social sciences (where the phenomena are understood),[12] and what often leads to defining the latter in terms of the former. Gadamer's words, "We cannot step over our shadow," implies that human beings are never able to see something without implicitly giving it some sort of meaning, because we carry our history in us and the language we use to communicate our thoughts, itself already an interpretation, limits our expression. This introduces an important thought central to both a reflexive methodology and existential hermeneutics – pre-understandings.

4.1   On pre-understandings

Following Heideggerian (1927/1981) and phenomenological tradition, it is part of the human condition to "already be there" as existential beings in the world, influenced by our past, our culture, and the tradition to which we belong, before we even start observing and interpreting the world around us, making the

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[12] The distinction between *erklären* (to explain) and *verstehen* (to understand) was introduced by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), best known for his separation of human sciences from natural sciences. According to him, whereas the primary task of the natural sciences is to arrive at law-based explanations, the core task of the human sciences is to understand human and historical life. Dilthey's reflections on history and hermeneutics were hugely influential on the works of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dilthey/, retrieved on July 4, 2016).

Cartesian subject-object division ontologically problematic. When I study work in virtual, multicultural teams, for instance, I am influenced by my own experience, theoretical and practical pre-understandings, and prejudices on such matters as cultural diversity and working over digital means, as well as by the very teams I study, which transform my understanding; thus, the way I look at the teams evolves over time. So, rather than building artificial divisions between the subject and object and present claims of scientific objectivity I cannot sustain, I rather admit on the outset that my pre-understandings influence my research. I consider this approach appropriate to my work since my intention is not to find causal links or test how variables are related, nor to build grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967), but to highlight meanings and to find patterns of how teams form and evolve the way they do.

Building on Heidegger, Gadamer's (1989) principle of *effective-historical consciousness* supposes pre-understanding as we always orient ourselves to the world from certain presuppositions and prejudgments, and existing pre-structures impact how we interpret new situations. Hence, we are historical path dependent creatures and our behavior and cognition are context dependent. The process and results of my research were influenced by my own standpoint, personal history, and life experiences in two significant ways. Alvesson and Sandberg (2016) make a case for an informed use of pre-understandings when conducting research and theorizing, and suggest that a rich set of insights "outside" the formal study could be mobilized in the theorizing process if we more actively acknowledge, critically reflect upon, and take inspiration from our pre-understandings. This is in strict opposition to what many of us think solid academic work should be like – void of subjectivity – a tradition reflected in the voice of most research studies that avoid the use of the first person and favor language in passive form, as though this exemplifies the seriousness and detachment of the researcher from the studied phenomenon. Not denying that personal biases and bad prejudices need to be avoided to the greatest extent possible in any research, but yet admitting that pre-understandings are "there" already and implicitly inform all theorizing, I rather choose to make them explicit. Potter and Wetherell (1987, 146–150) in their introduction of the concept "interpretative repertoire" in the context of discourse analysis show that even Nobel-winning natural scientists rely on both what the authors refer to as empiricist and contingent repertoires in their rhetoric as they put forward theories, but their accounts portraying their actions and beliefs preceding the discovery are tailored in contextually fitting ways. While in scientific publications, empirical data is given both chronological and logical authority without exception, in interview contexts, these scientists may reveal how the idea of the model introduced really originated as a dramatic revelation, a result of prior intellectual commitment, personal characteristics, unspecified craft

skills, social ties and group memberships, etc. – in any case, factors completely outside the empirical phenomenon.

What I try to establish is that by being transparent about and aware of my prejudices and pre-understandings, I make a conscious effort to step in and out of my own position or "shadow" in this world, and make an honest effort to differentiate between good and bad prejudices. I use reflexivity as a tool to acknowledge my subjectivity, with the ambition of reaching *towards* objectivity, so I do not indulge myself in purely idiosyncratic accounts – or lose my soul to fiction. Moreover, through reflexivity and pre-understandings, my ambition is to "see" things in the empirical material that would have been impossible to capture had I chosen to follow the traditional route of finding a narrow gap and basing my research on trying to "solve" that gap by, for instance, deductive hypothesis testing, or had I relied on grounded theory that uses a different route, induction, to analyze from bottom-up what theoretical insights might emerge from the data. Both these approaches shy away from explicit reliance on researcher's pre-understandings to help build theory. In this study, I already made explicit one part of my pre-understandings in Chapter 2, where I discussed some of my lived experiences of teamwork at Ericsson Canada and Sweden. Throughout my text, I hope I am able to convey to some extent my constant and iterative efforts to use all possible sources of knowledge I have had access to in order to move this study forward.

4.2   A few words on positivism and interpretivism

An important trigger for me to start pondering on the very existential nature of teams was my colleague's constant musings and provocations in the classroom: "Is there an organization when people leave the office and turn off the light switch?" "What happens to Ford and Coca-Cola when no one is "around"? Do they still exist?" These comments were visibly thought-provoking, as evidenced by the many in the classroom who lifted their gazes from their smartphones. This line of thinking, absurd at first, takes an interesting turn in an environment where most of the work is done over distance, over digital means, and when people belong to different units and have never met each other in person. Where is everybody? Where is the team and how can it be grasped? Most of us probably consider that Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and the whole wondrous world of social media exist for "real," even though we might have no idea where the companies behind the products they propose physically are, or to what extent they exist.

The answer to the light switch question needs to be understood philosophically. Some say that firms (or teams) exist as separate entities for a

thinking human to perceive and observe them, and others that this subject/object separation is not possible, and it is people's interactions that bring firms (or teams) into existence. According to Boal, Hunt, and Jaros (2009), while a positivist would argue that organizations are real in the physical world, in line with Cartesian dualism which supposes that nature is divided into mind and matter, the realist worldview holds that the world exists independently of it, and is perceived in a way that these companies are real in their consequences, although we cannot always observe them directly with our senses. Both positivism and realism are based on an assumption of existence of objective reality that assumes that the world consists of atomistic events of sense experience, a being ontology whereby reality is thing-like, already formed, and essentially unchanging (Chia 2003). Although there is an external world accessible to human thought, our empirical experience of it can be deceiving, from where systematic skepticism is necessary, acting as a filter for the observation of external reality. From a methodological perspective, the assumption that reality is objectively given lends itself to methodological quantification and empiricism. The search for objective variables, parsimonious models, causal or correlational propositions supported by data, and logic obtained by experimental methods and cross-sectional survey studies takes center stage. The methodological aim is to establish cause-effect and correlational relationships mainly by statistical modeling and analysis, although qualitative methods such as case studies are common in the realm of the positivist research tradition as well (Welch et al. 2011).

The purpose of positivist research is to connect theory with observations and uncover causal relationships that govern organizations, which in turn will enable managers to better control their firms. This is the philosophical paradigm underlying the *machine* metaphor I put under critical scrutiny in my work (Morgan 1980, 1986). This worldview is often described as deterministic in nature in that human agency is not highlighted, but human behavior is often seen in light of external forces that causally shape it. Individuals' sensemaking processes are not the center of interest as they are challenging to study using the traditional scientific method, or they are not considered to be valid and objective aspects and are often used as variables that at most explain unexpected variance.

It can be argued that the link between theory and practice is often compromised when tight causal relationships under limited experimental conditions are favored, and when human sensemaking and sensegiving is overlooked, raising questions of relevance as well as criticism of reductionism or oversimplification. The theory-practice disconnect is illustrated by an allegory of a swamp and high ground (Schon 1995, in Johnson & Duberley 2000), where the high ground is the ideal and somewhat naïve world of theory produced by positivist organizational science in which the context and human

interpretation is missing, and the swamp is the real complex world of organizational practice in which contextual aspects, human interpretation, and the process view of reality cannot be avoided simply because they are "there." A central tenet of my thesis is the problematization of the *global teams as a machine* approach. Distancing from positivism runs hand-in-hand with this critical stand as instead of trying to find a silver bullet or another incremental variable that correlates statistically with team performance, I study these teams as mini-organizations where people give and make sense to their own experiences and to life around them during the duration of the team's life.

Interpretation theory, including such orientations as social constructivism and hermeneutics, suggests that the goal of social inquiry is to reconstruct the meaning or significance of social arrangements and practices. In this view, an organization exists if people who are part of the phenomenon say so, and in this way, they describe it. A team is a construction of meanings and events as perceived by its members. Thus, my task as a researcher is to capture these meanings and to construct a "team" out of the understandings of its individual members through interpretive lenses, and as the result of many iterative rounds, to contrast empirical material with theory frameworks, as well as reveal new insights I gain along the way. In fact, even though a team may fulfill all the formal characteristics of a team, it might not be one in the true sense of the word if its members deny its existence beyond a mere "grouping of individuals," which in fact, seems to be the case quite often.

According to Little (1991), the central claim of interpretive social science is that detailed accounts of agency are needed if we are to make sense of individual and social action. The author describes this approach as hermeneutic in that it treats the social phenomena as a text to be decoded through the imaginative reconstruction of various significant elements of the social action or event. This interpretive approach adopts an ontology that assumes a constant state of change and a world that is socially constructed in which no objective social reality exists. In this *becoming* ontology, organization is conceptualized as an emergent process rather than a stable phenomenon (Chia 2003) and the basic epistemological stance is to understand how social reality is created (Morgan & Smircich 1980). Interpretive approaches are often criticized for lack of scientific rigor and an excess of subjectivity – a valid point I will return to later in my discussion on reflexive methodology and alethic hermeneutics. First though, let us take a brief look at the philosophical foundations alethic hermeneutics is built upon.

4.3   What do Heraclitus and Heidegger have in common?

This study does not really look at teams as entities, but how (and if) teams become teams – and what kind of teams, at that. Therefore, my intention is to tell the story of the becoming of five structurally similar well-performing teams, an ontological position related to a process worldview, which draws its origins from Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher who flourished about 500 B.C. in Ephesus and famous for his doctrine that everything is in a constant state of flux (Russell 1961, 59). Heraclitus is, perhaps, best known for his riddle, "You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are ever flowing upon you" (ibid, 63), carrying the meaning of a world continually changing, and us, humans, inevitably immersed in this flow. Why delve this deeply into the history of Western philosophical thought?

Much of Western philosophical tradition and scholarship builds on the principles of Enlightenment and the Cartesian position placing the human being, the subject, as the ontological center.[13] The seeds for this tradition were already sown at the time of Socrates and Plato when the idea that one could understand the universe in a detached way by discovering the principles that underlie the profusion of phenomena was born (Dreyfus 1991). Yet, can there be a precise theory of *everything*, including matters concerning human existence – or is this a rather unrealistic undertaking leading to superficial "truths"? Heidegger, considered by many as one of the most prominent thinkers of the 20th century, revived one of the most enduring questions of Western history: what is *being* (Hodge 2015)? When regarding Cartesian ego cogito as the proof of its own continuing existence and as the basis of all things, all entities are reduced to ideas or representations whose validity is determined by the rules imposed on them by the same "subject ego." But what makes such a subject possible in the first place? In Heidegger's view, every entity is a center of meaning, thrown into the world and constantly giving meaning to its environment, inseparable of its context (Hodge 2015, 6). In this way, the traditional concept of the subject "ego" is not denied but expanded. Heidegger does not necessarily seek to neither refute the importance of cognition nor abandon rationalism, or in general, downplay theory (Dreyfus 1991), but to add the act of questioning at the very basis of knowledge and to clarify the very nature of the subject (Mansbach 1991). The human capability to ask such questions, such as "Why is there something rather than nothing?" pushes the starting point for analysis beyond a simple "ego cogito" of a human being proving his own existence by the simple

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[13] *"Cogito ergo sum"* or *"I think therefore I am"* is a Latin philosophical proposition by René Descartes (1596–1650), carrying the meaning that since we are capable of the act of doubting, we cannot doubt our existence. Descartes built his immensely influential philosophy on his questioning of the received wisdom originating from church authorities and established a clear ontological distinction between the mind and the body, the subject and the object.

act of thinking. The line of thinking Heidegger represents also disputes and expands the view of truth as simple correspondence between ideas or statements and objects. For Heidegger, for the traditional correspondence theory of truth to hold, the objects must first become manifest. Here, the "truth" is their manifestation, disclosure, or uncovering, *aletheia*, rather than correspondence, a view anchored in pre-Socratic philosophy that considered the essence of truth resides in the disclosure of entities (Mansbach 1998).

How does one conduct interpretative research to uncover truths on teams in a world-as-a-river where subjects are thrown into it at birth and are inseparable from their contexts? Let us take a look at research on the reflexive mode.

4.4 Reflexivity in research

Especially in the qualitative research tradition, reflexivity is recognized as an important part of the research process and a resource to ensure the quality of the research results (Biese 2013). *Reflection*[14] and *reflexivity*[15] are recurring concepts in my work. I have already categorized my research as following the principles of reflexive methodology closely linked with interpretation and hermeneutics. Additionally, the heart of my empirical material consists of reflective essays written by the team members that are used not only as input to my research, but also as pedagogical devices to allow course participants to think about how their teams evolved and what they learned from their experiences over time. In interviews conducted at the end of the teams' life, which seemed to have cathartic effects on many team members, the participants were further able to think back and collectively reflect on their team experiences. For some members, informal discussions that still surface at times reveal that learning is still ongoing and important insights surface many months after the initial team experience.

4.4.1 *Reflexive methodology*

Alvesson and Sköldberg in their book, *Reflexive Methodology* (2000/2009), make a case for what they call reflective or reflexive research. In general, different uses of the concept of reflexivity or reflection are found in the

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[14] In Greek mythology, Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection on the surface of the water. Here, I take a less self-enhancing approach and consider "reflection" to mean *serious and careful thought* (Cambridge dictionary, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reflection, retrieved on April 13, 2016).

[15] Reflexivity in qualitative research refers to a process where a researcher engages in explicit self-aware meta-analysis . . . and examines how the researcher and intersubjective elements impinge on, and even transform, research (Finley 2002).

literature, which typically draw attention to the complex relationship between the process of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes, as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 8). With work inspired by reflexivity, serious attention is paid to the way different kinds of linguistic, social, political, and theoretical elements are woven together in the process of knowledge development, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted, and written (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 9). When considering the researcher as a socially and historically situated being studying people forming teams over time in their given contexts, the line between subject/object is blurred. Here, the researcher's informed use of practical experience, empirical material, and knowledge of previous theory are all valid resources for knowledge creation.

In addition to making use of empirical material generated for this present research, strictly speaking, the empirical setting allowed me to gain an understanding of the viewpoints and personal contexts of many of the research participants, and to establish social ties with them that allowed me to iteratively discuss their experiences about their teamwork with them. I am also using my previous experience in teamwork (cf. Chapter 2) in a global firm (and elsewhere) where practically all work was centered around teams and projects. This whole study is written in a reflexive mode. Rather than describing clear research designs after the fact and disclosing unambiguous findings, I try to show the messy and often intuitive processes and gradually evolving insights that helped me progress along the way.

Where do the research questions emerge when reflexive methodology is applied? In the words of Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009, 9):

> *Empirical research in a reflective mode starts from a skeptical approach to what appear at a superficial glance as unproblematic replicas of the way the reality functions, while at the same time maintaining the belief that the study of suitable excerpts from this reality can provide an important basis for a generation of knowledge that opens up rather than closes, and furnishes opportunities for understanding rather than establishes 'truths.'*

The first observation that changed the orientation of my research was the puzzling absence of references to cultural differences, one usual moderator or mediator in many studies on global team performance, in the respondents' accounts of factors that made their teams struggle. Moreover, most people in the teams I studied did not act in the least according to predictions of their cultural stereotypes, while many suffered from forced stereotyping imposed by others. This did not become a problem in the teams very often as other more significant factors were at play, but it raised the question to what extent cultural differences understood as categories based on nationality really are

consequential to the teams' journeys and to what extent they are just ready answers triggering questions (in research) and opportunities for convenient scapegoating (in practice). Here, I had to ask myself whether cultural differences as causes of effects were somehow hidden in the material or in the minds of my respondents, prompting me to dig deeper, ask specific questions both formally and informally, but with no significant difference to my initial findings. Another surprising observation was the gradual realization that even the well-performing teams looked very different from within in terms of organization. While all members of some (rare) teams seemed to enjoy their team experience, in most teams, some sorts of problems occurred.

Central to this way of working is the method of abduction I discussed earlier to some extent in the Introduction, in which an often-surprising single case is interpreted from a hypothetic overarching pattern, which, if it were true, explains the case in question. The interpretation should then be strengthened by new observations (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 4) without a fixed a priori theorization around which the research is framed, as is the case in deduction, and without the aim of being theory-free and starting the inquiry from bottom-up, as is the case with the purest form of induction, grounded theory. Abduction is a distinct explanatory model embracing the idea that mind and body, subject and object cannot be separated, and that data are always contextually inserted in a semantic frame, which give them their sense to begin with (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 6), producing a conjecture that is then tested by fitting it over the "facts" (Polkinghorne 1988, 19). Here, the researcher engages in a non-linear systematic combining of material and theory to gradually uncover what is hidden (Dubois & Gadde 2002; 2014). Abductive reasoning is not a new mode of scientific inference but was first developed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), "the father of pragmatism." Peirce conceived of three kinds of reasoning (abduction, deduction, and induction) as three stages of inquiry, in which "abduction is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea, since induction does nothing more than determine a value and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis" (Burks 1946, 303). Peirce underlines the very acknowledgement and questioning of one's belief-habits as an essential starting point for abduction. This takes the logic of reasoning to include human creativity beyond random data-inspired trial-and-error learning or a machine-type of deduction such as computer logic. In abduction, doubt is an instinctual element essential to scientific investigation breaking existing beliefs and habits (Burks 1946).

Abduction is also connected to what Alvesson and Sköldberg (p. 6) refer to as Hanson's (1958) conclusion, which proposes that facts are always theory-laden. When studying teams, I cannot cleanse my memory of the traces left by hundreds of academic articles and other texts I have read, just as I cannot forget

my other prejudices and pre-understandings on teamwork. Thus, the best I can do is to harness what I already know in a constructive way. This can be achieved by constantly combining theory and empirical material for a good fit, and by remaining somewhat skeptical, doubting not only my pre-understandings, but also what I think I see in the empirical data as well as what I have received as a set of theory tools from previous scholarship.

4.4.2   Alethic hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is one possible venue to conduct research in the reflexive mode. The two main hermeneutic orientations are objectivist and alethic hermeneutics (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 91). *The objectivist school* is a continuation of hermeneutics as the interpretation of texts[16] in which the aim is to understand the original thought of the author or the text itself, and maintains a clear subject (i.e., the reader/researcher) and object (i.e. the text) division. This stream of hermeneutics attempts to give social sciences a "scientific" status by emulating natural sciences and by establishing a black and white division at the level of the mission, and is consistent with the classic *verstehen-erklären* dichotomy coined by Dilthey. *Alethic hermeneutics*, as defined by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009, 91), "focuses on truth as an act of disclosure in which the polarity between subject and object, understanding and explanation is dissolved in the radical light of a more original unity" that challenges Cartesian thinking and the classical understanding of the correspondence theory of truth (cf. section 4.3 for a short discussion on Heidegger). In alethic hermeneutics, it is impossible to divide the subject from the object, and the *verstehen-erklären* dichotomy is broken since understanding is a basic way of existing, a sort of ontological inevitability, as our human condition requires us to keep orienting ourselves in our situation simply in order to stay alive (ibid, 95). Here, truth is not fixed but rather changing, always indicating new perspectives, so the researcher's task is then to uncover the nature of fickle individual understandings and meanings. Despite clear differences, these hermeneutical traditions have in common their emphasis on the importance of intuition, which implies a kind of inner "gazing," separate from the more formal and non-perceptual kind of knowledge (ibid, 91) and a belief that hermeneutics is a theory of understanding the general human way of being in the world.

Gadamer and Ricoeur are two prominent thinkers representing the alethic orientation of hermeneutics. Gadamer's central thesis is that our understanding

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[16] Hermeneutics has its roots in the interpretation of religious texts, like the Talmud and the Bible. It gained special importance with the Protestant Reformation that questioned some of the fundamentals of Catholic faith and was later expanded to the interpretation of legal texts as well as to the field of literature and social sciences.

is never merely subject-oriented behavior, but is always historically and socio-culturally limited (Gadamer 1989). As discussed in an earlier section in this chapter (cf. 4.3), we always orient ourselves to the world from certain presuppositions and prejudgments, and existing pre-structures impact how we interpret new situations. Hence, we are historical path-dependent creatures, and our behavior and cognition are context dependent. For Gadamer, the situation and application are intertwined in the complexities of the practical world, or *Lebenswelt*, as application is always specific to a certain situation and the three traditional hermeneutical elements; understanding, interpretation and application are always in an unbreakable unity (Dobrosavljev 2002). Following Gadamer (1989), it is through the fusion of horizons that we can understand different points of view and challenge our own preconceptions, thus enabling new horizons to emerge as a result of a certain inner unfolding of meaning. With the hermeneutical principle of meaning being constructed through mediation between the whole (i.e., a team) and its parts (i.e., team members), the hermeneutic circle is ontologically positive as it allows a flow of time and a flux of meaning. It does not fix concepts eternally, but develops them in the outline (Dobrosavljev 2002). Thus, the hermeneutic circle is flexible enough to support change over time as a result of a continuous dialogue – and as we advance in our inquiry, new horizons emerge.

The basic insight of hermeneutics is that any effort to understand the meaning of *anything* (e.g., a text, an expression, or an artifact) is always guided and oriented by a pre-understanding of a topic in question (Schmidt 2016). The traditional standpoint of management science distances itself from this type of subjectivity, which it considers a hindrance for theorizing, an obstruction when it comes to reaching knowledge. Hermeneutics, due to its focus on subject-based interpretation and lack of formal method, is often considered more as a form of art than a "serious" science. Even though we are living post-positivist times in many ways and in many fields of social sciences, it is still rare to see hermeneutic studies in international business. Ferraris (1996, 1) points to what he considers the unrealistic Cartesian subject-object division, and somewhat sarcastically contrasts hermeneutics with a view of mainstream positivist theory in social sciences as "contemplation of eternal essences unalterable by their observer."

The hermeneutical approach compatible with abduction allows for new understandings, or knowledge, to gradually emerge from a constant dialogue and a contrasting of the whole and its parts (which can be a literary text or a phenomenon we want to study), pre-understandings, and understandings between (written) text and (spoken) dialogue, and rudimentary and then more sophisticated patterns of interpretation (see Figure 2). In this figure, the traditional hermeneutic circle consisting of iterations between the whole and its

parts (objective view) is enriched to also include evolving pre-understandings and understandings (subjective view), as well as emerging patterns of interpretations based on an exchange between what is written and spoken.
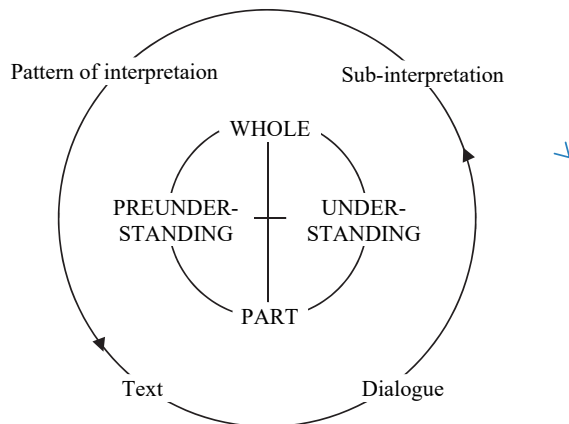
Figure 2   The hermeneutic circle: basic version (in Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 104)

Hermeneutics can be understood as interpreting with insight and inspiration (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009; Ricoeur 1972). Yet, to be considered a serious alternative, efforts need to be made to render more transparent and formal the "hermeneutic art of interpretation" and the transformative possibilities it carries. For an interpretation to be successful, it is not enough to observe the signs or read the text; their meaning should also be established, and for signs to be truly understood, we need to make their meanings our own. While creating new subjective meanings through the use of imagination can be placed at the hermeneutics-as-art end of the spectrum, efforts to establish inter-subjective meanings require a more rigorous approach if we want to take steps towards the domain of hermeneutics-as-science. Ricoeur (1976) proposed solving this problem with his theory of interpretation.

4.5   Ricoeur's interpretation theory

Gadamer anchors his philosophy at the individual level of contextual understanding and uses a dialectical, purposeful approach to the horizons of the

"text" and the "reader," but leaves methodological considerations in the margins. Ricoeur is bothered by this lack of methodology and rigor, and while still underlining the more subjective, interpretive end of the spectrum, he brings in elements of inter-subjective common ground by paying close attention to a formal, interpretative methodology (Ricoeur 1976, 1981). Key to his theory are the concepts of distanciation, explanation, interpretation, and appropriation.

For Ricoeur, the role of people engaged in a discussion or a speech act differs in important ways from the role of the writer and reader in written communication. While two people holding a discussion (or an interview) can constantly make mutual adjustments and act on both verbal and non-verbal clues, a text produces a certain distanciation that separates the author and the interpreter; thus, the text must somewhat speak for itself. While in both oral and written discourse many things can interfere with the intended message, in written form, the text gains an independent life at the very moment of its creation, which is separate from the author's original intent. While a spoken discourse is private and attached to its immediate context, a written one is open in principle to anyone who can read and influenced by the context of the interpreter. This distanciation can be seen as an opportunity as the text offers possibilities for creating inter-subjective understandings. When reading the students' reflective essays that formed the heart of my empirical material, and while acknowledging that recreating the events as exact replicas of life lived is impossible, my colleagues and I almost invariably agreed on the interpretations and meaning we gave to the key events and why they unfolded. This was strengthened by the fact that there were many essays per person making patterns visible, which was often additionally corroborated by interviews or observations, as well as interactions with the participants during the course. All of this helped capture nuances and clarify accumulating preliminary understandings, thereby coming closer to what were first naïve and later more sophisticated explanations of what was hidden in the text or the broader material.

The way I worked with my empirical material was by trying to restore it to a living communication through interpretation (Ricoeur 1981), considering it as an outcome of works and actions of human beings in their contexts. Here, the world of the researcher meets the world of the author/team member, and over time, develops into increasingly in-depth understandings of the team and the way members think, feel, and act. For Ricoeur (1981, 161), the difference between explanation and interpretation unfolds in a dynamic manner:

> *To explain is to bring out the structure, that is, the internal relations of dependence that constitute the statics of the text. To interpret is to follow the path of thought opened up by the text, to place oneself 'en route' towards the orient of the text.*

Here, explanation involves uncovering, in the sense of *aletheia*, what the text holds hidden and corresponds to a more objective reality, while interpretation opens the door for one's pre-understandings and creative use of empirical material and brings the text "in front." In his work, Ricoeur often refers to the non-ostensive nature of the text. This means that a text, with the exception of user guides, grocery lists, and such, rarely talks directly about something, as in the case of my study, a team, but merely refers to it. As he guides us to place ourselves en route towards the orientation of the text, he invites us to make a leap of faith to create knowledge, to make something invisible visible through interpretation as we stand on what can be agreed to be a more objective truth.

The act of interpretation and in-depth understanding of what the empirical material "talks" about is inevitably a subjective effort as each interpreter's life-world is idiosyncratic. Creating in-depth understandings requires a constant dialogue between the internal world of the text/material and the world of the interpreter. Ricoeur, in his work, calls this movement the *hermeneutic arc*, culminating in new understandings through *appropriation* when the interpreter engages in learning, and reaches towards an increased understanding of not only the subject matter or the phenomenon under study but also of self. Figure 3 illustrates graphically how Ricoeur's interpretation theory was used in this study (this figure should be considered as a complement to Figure 2).
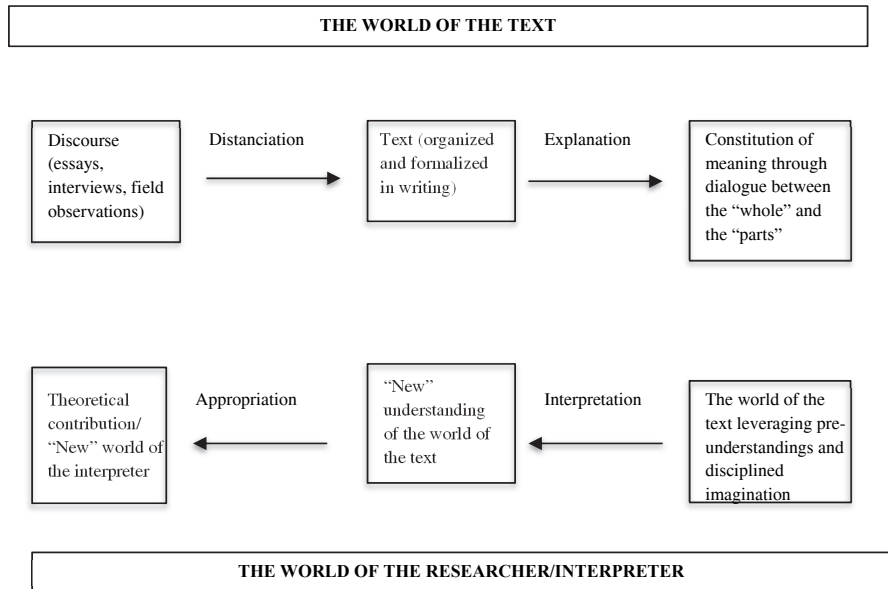
Figure 3   An adaptation of Ricoeur's theory of interpretation – The world
            of the text and the world of the researcher

In this figure, the "objective" world of the text is presented separately from
the "subjective" realm of the interpreter. In my research, I argue that the "text,"
or empirical material, unfolded over time into coherent stories of individual
team members that then constituted the team perspective. While observations
on the text were regularly shared and discussed within our team of researchers
and sometimes with the team members, and building a shared understanding of
the "plot" was quite uncomplicated, interpretation and theorization were more
solitary tasks, and involved a much more subjective effort based on intuition,
abduction, trial and error, and reflection, as I was searching for fitting theoretical
frames and building tentative knowledge claims. How this was done without
"stepping over my shadow" is discussed in detail in the next chapter about the
methods used.

5 CRAFTING THE METHOD

> *"Data! Data! Data!" he cried impatiently. "I can't make bricks without clay."*
>
> **Sherlock Holmes -*The Adventure of the Copper Beeches***

5.1 Background

Conducting research is often likened to detective work. Like Sherlock Holmes trying to solve a murder case, after considering what I had found in the academic literature on global teams following Jarvenpaa and Leidner's 1998 article on communication and trust in virtual teams,[17] I thought it would be interesting to broaden the problem definition and try to find new angles from which to study the performance paradox these teams represent. My decision to look at these teams *as a process*, forming, evolving, and ending, raised questions of a method that would not be feasible to tackle in a comprehensive way in a firm context with the limited resources I had. So, my colleagues and I turned our work environment – a largely virtual university classroom – into a research laboratory. This was really a serendipitous and opportunistic decision at first, and as with any detective work, one thing led to another, often more as a result of creativity and improvisation than careful planning. Analogically to Sherlock Holmes' dilemma, I needed construction material to see what kind of bricks I would be able to subsequently build. To collect it, I needed to craft a methodology based on different approaches both put forward by previous scholarship and by adjusting it.

   The main methodological reference this study builds on is the interpretive sensemaking tradition to case studies (e.g., Stake 1995; Welch et al. 2011), which seeks a true understanding of human experience rather than generating law-like cause and effect explanations, as in the case of positivist epistemology. Interpretive approaches to case study emphasize the uniqueness of the social sciences, in which subjects ascribe meaning to their own behavior, and researchers are part of the world they study. The goal is to seek understanding of human experience with rich contextual descriptions essential to understanding human behavior.

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[17] The 1998 Jarvenpaa & Leidner study is often considered a point of departure for research on global virtual teams.

Another methodological point of reference is what I refer to as autoethnography (Ellis & Adams 2000; Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011) and self-ethnography (Alvesson 2003) of the opportunistic kind (Karra & Phillips 2008). While ethnography of any kind is still very rare in the field of international management, in autoethnography, rather than researching in an unfamiliar context, the researcher is an insider conducting research in his own cultural context (Karra & Phillips 2008). The two impressionist tales (Van Maanen 2011) I told in Chapter 2 are small representative autoethnographic windows to my professional experience in a business firm. In self-ethnography, the researcher does not engage in participant observation as with traditional ethnography, but is more an observing participant who, as part of his or her daily activity, also studies the setting the focal activity is embedded in (Alvesson 2003). In my case, my role as a facilitator of an advanced international course on business strategy provided me with such an environment.

A third point of reference is the quasi-experimental field study approach advocated by Grant and Wall (2009). Unlike traditional quasi-experiments where the purpose is to draw causal inferences with high external validity by deduction, I seek to enhance interpretative sensemaking by generating experimental conditions in which structurally similar teams facing the same tasks and team environment and yielding similar task outputs are compared, with the aim of better understanding what "well-performing global teams (in terms of task output) are made of," when the usual suspects – cultural differences, task dissimilarity, leadership mode, and virtual work environment – are equal or quasi-equal for all teams.

5.2   Research design

This research is a longitudinal and qualitative multi-method (case study and ethnography), multilevel (individual and team) study based on process philosophy and method. Consistent with this approach, findings are rendered in narrative form (Langley 1999; Ricoeur 1976) using sensemaking (Weick 1995) as an analytical tool to interpret empirical material.

It is extremely hard to capture and observe at close range what people do in a large number of global teams over their full lifecycle in existing organizations. To put these hard to capture phenomena under a magnifying glass, we, a team of three course instructors and researchers, created and designed a reality-type of empirical context. In this set-up, during the fall of 2014 and 2015, we observed a total of 248 graduate and MBA students (117 individuals in 2014 and 131 individuals in 2015) in 48 teams (22 teams in 2014 and 26 teams in 2015). All were participating in a master's level course on international business

strategy, forming teams and solving complex problems with practically no involvement from course facilitators.

Many of the participants were working while pursuing their studies. They ranged between the ages of 22 and 46 years, represented over 20 nationalities, and were based in universities in Latvia (47 in total), Finland (149 in total), Estonia (29 in total, 2015 only) and Russia (23 in total). The vast majority of them did not know each other before, and only became acquainted once we had placed them in a team and informed them who their teammates were. To begin, we simply gave them the other members' email addresses and asked them to get in touch with us should there be any problems. Over the duration of the course, we observed the participants executing a number of strategic consultancy-type group tasks over a period of approximately three months (see Appendix 1 for an example of such tasks).

Without knowledge of similar previous research undertakings, we started referring to this empirical environment as a "safari park" or a "reality show," as the setting was similar to a social experiment where we were able to observe the teams and members execute tasks at close range, without being directly part of the setting and without intruding unnecessarily in their team life.

5.2.1   Team composition and organization

Participants were initially divided in teams of five and six individuals (some teams lost some members along the way, but this was rare), ensuring a similar type of team composition to the best extent possible in terms of geographic split, age, gender, and cultural diversity. Members were given total freedom on how to organize their work, how to create communication platforms, and how to divide tasks and team roles. The only formal requirement was that they deliver their consultancy cases on time. We chose this approach since we were interested in observing how teams form with minimal interference, in contrast to what tends to be given and structured research environments, and to observe situations in which the agents have discretion (Feldman 2000), and in which teams are on an equal footing, at least in the beginning of the exercise.

Although a student environment is admittedly different from a firm context (and without forgetting that every firm context is different from each other as well), in modern expert organizations relying heavily on temporary global teams and project-based work and innovation, employees are required to be creative, autonomous, and flexible to face constantly changing situations and demands. Our empirical context was optimized for these conditions to be salient. Often, even in structurally hierarchical organizations, in project-based work, formal leadership structures, in which a nominal team leader has uncontested power

over the team members and superior knowledge to "manage" the team, are not implemented in practice. An appointed project leader is often more of a coordinator, and leadership is often distributed according to the members' areas of responsibility, personal capabilities, the task or project phase at hand, circumstances, and expertise. For this, we wanted to explicitly tap into this type of setting from a phenomenological point of view, and without the somewhat artificial imposition of a leader role (i.e., the most experienced person), to see how events unfold naturally, from bottom-up.

5.2.2   Gathering material

Over the course of a semester, each team operated under the assumption that they were working for a strategy consulting firm that had to solve six (in 2014) and four (in 2015)[18] complex business cases, and then present their recommendations, or competitive "pitches," in the format of seven-minute video presentations to the "principals" and owners of the assignments (course facilitators – we, the researchers), who then formed a panel to evaluate them. Each time, the task was exactly the same for every team, and it was communicated to the team members only at the moment when the members needed to start solving it. In addition, the tasks were increasingly complex in nature. Both years, we started with well-structured standard case studies widely used in business school pedagogical settings requiring mainly analytical and collaborative problem-solving skills, and then designed more and more open-ended complex problem scenarios that required more creativity, and presumably, more intense teamwork. For each case, we gave the teams between one and two weeks to complete the tasks as we wanted to induce elements of both planned and unexpected variation to see how the teams adjusted. The teams were competing against each other for a prize (participation in a valued industry event,[19] all fees paid), and also for recommendation letters for excellent individual engagement demonstrated during the course, which were handed out to five students at the end of the course. To evaluate the cases, we used criteria we communicated to participants ahead of time and used a formal assessment tool focusing on both factual and creative aspects of the video delivered (see Appendix 2). We gave each team both numeric and written feedback on each of their cases within days after receiving them. The videos were evaluated collaboratively to ensure fairness and consistency.

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[18] The amount of tasks was reduced the second year due to ethical concerns over the students' excessive workload.

[19] In both 2015 and 2016, the team that delivered the best set of cases was sent to the *Slush*-event, portrayed as "Europe's leading start-up event". http://www.slush.org

Throughout the course, the teams had to complete one initial team assignment, the purpose of which was to help the team form an initial team charter or document ways of working for their team and to become acquainted with each other (see Appendix 3). Thereafter, tasks of increasing complexity followed. Elements of stress, surprise, and time pressure were deliberate in order to force these teams to develop their own team organization, establish routines, and to simulate real-life environments. In addition to the group tasks, each participant had to write six (in 2014) or four (in 2015) loosely structured journal entries, or what we called reflective essays (see Appendix 4), on how they thought and felt about their team experiences, and to describe how the task execution was organized and how their team worked. Moreover, at the end of the course as part of the final exam, each member based in Finland[20] was asked to reflect on how to build a well-functioning team based on what they had learned from the exercise.

Since the course was based on combining theoretical knowledge with practical experience and a problem-based learning philosophy, formal lectures were few and focused on outlining the cases and key theories in international business strategy. However, there was intensive digital correspondence between us, the three focal facilitators who often met face-to-face to discuss issues and interesting observations, and also the collaborating facilitators in the three other countries, as well as with the students in conjunction with the cases and practical, personal, or administrative problems. In 2015, the course also had a dedicated group in Facebook, which all participants and facilitators had access to. This enabled us to collaboratively monitor the teams, interact with them, and gain a sense of team dynamics, as a direct and continuous communication link to the participants was formed. This heterogeneous correspondence, as well as casual conversations with the participants in the corridors and classrooms, formed a valuable addition to our empirical material.

I intimately followed approximately 10 teams, from which I chose five cases for this study. Over time, I paid increasingly close attention to clues in their members' correspondence to me or other facilitators, comments in Facebook, and frequently sat down with them in the cafeteria or elsewhere to exchange views and just chat informally to get to know them better. Sometimes, I exchanged messages with remote team members, although getting to know them personally was quite challenging. I also visited universities in Latvia and Estonia where I got to know some of the team members as well as the local teaching staff, and met in person with the Russian facilitators whom I had not met before when they came to Finland. With time, I developed a close working relationship with the instructors at all three remotes sites, and information on

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[20] The students based in Finland were the ones we were directly responsible for.

students and the experiment, in general, was regularly changed, especially when we had to solve problems.

Towards the end of the course, team interviews were held with those teams which at first seemed to have formed successful organizations in terms of the sustained quality of their videos and that exhibited no signs of open conflict. Interviews were semi-structured yet quite conversational and often took a confessional direction, as participants were eager to expose their feelings and impressions on not only their team experiences, but also the rather unconventional course in general (see Appendix 5 for the interview questions).

Table 1 presents the sources of data, the level at which they are gauged (individual/team), and their purpose.

Table 1   Sources of empirical data for the study.

Source of empirical data	Level	Purpose
Seven-minute videos (six per team in 2014 and four per team in 2015; 236 in total)	Team	To assess team task performance.
Reflective essays (six per participant in 2014 and four per participant in 2015; 1,226 in total)	Individual	To understand team internal dynamics.
Final exams, essays (149 in total)	Individual	To gauge learning about working in global teams.
Team interviews (five in 2014 and five in 2015, between 45 and 90 minutes induration, all transcribed; 10 in total)	Team	To gather additional information from well-performing teams.
Field observations (email correspondence, Facebook group, casual conversations, classroom interactions, and observations and targeted questions)	Individual/ Team	To gather insider knowledge from team members and teams.

5.2.3   Case selection

Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) recommend using extreme cases as a means of developing theory. By screening and having close knowledge of many teams, I was able to select theoretically interesting ones for my study, namely those that seemed to be performing well from a task perspective along the way. But why focus on teams producing good output only – and why not on *both* well-performing and poorly performing ones, or on only those that work poorly? Successful global teams, both when measured in output and member

satisfaction, are quite rare, and academic research, in general, tends to focus on "deficit models" of what is *not* working and usually provides incremental suggestions how to improve the situation rather than analyzing what works well and trying to understand why (e.g. Caza & Caza 2008). In practice, stories on bad team experiences and failures are abundant, but hardly ever firms and team members analyze well-performing teams to learn from what they are doing right, let alone question whether these teams are as good as they look like. For instance, a seemingly well-performing team may be actually underperforming, have a toxic social environment, or be overdoing what it is supposed to do, thus wasting resources. In Kierkegaard's words, the virtue of this type of team would be purely an *aesthetic* one (Jothen 2016), hiding a less-polished reality under a shiny surface and without being truly successful. I was not all that interested in that surface, but my intention was to dig deeper, and get closer to the inner workings of these teams as an insightful, and to the extent possible, self-critical "insider-outsider."

I chose five well-performing teams, using both objective criteria in that all of them had from "very good" to "outstanding" evaluations in their team tasks (although some were better than others), and subjective criteria in that when considering which teams to study closer, in addition to team task performance, I also weighted how well I had learned to know the team members and how rich the empirical material on these teams was. I also tried to consider a certain variety when it came to team dynamics to be able to construct meaningful and distinct concepts and narratives. I consider the two post-experience ethnographic cases I exposed in Chapter 2 as complementary to these five teams, bringing insights and contextual aspects absent in the student sample, and yet helpful in revealing common patterns regardless of the context. I will come back to this later when I discuss my findings.

5.2.4   *Analyzing data*

5.2.4.1 *Using multiple strategies of analysis*

To make sense of messy process data, the use of multiple strategies of analysis is advised (Langley 1999). Processes are notoriously difficult to submit to systematic analysis with the danger of studies being overly descriptive and lacking rigor and consistency. Welch and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki (2014) cite that one of the characteristics of process studies is their difficulty to go beyond describing patterns to explain *how* and *why,* and the authors lament that despite process approaches receiving increasing attention in management research,

leading to a more refined understanding of the distinction between process and variance paradigms, the majority of studies do not combine process data with process theorizing.

When collecting and making sense of my empirical material, I had not formulated an a priori theory to test or research the questions to the answers. Yet, I did not start with a tabula rasa either, but rather referred to an increasing portfolio of theories (i.e., those depicted in Chapter 3 as well as more general process theories). I then plunged into understanding the well-performing teams as they unfolded, and collected fine-grained data to understand how and why events play out over time the way they do (Langley 1999) and which emerging patterns seemed to be most striking or particularly interesting. Following in part Langley (1999) and Feldman (2000), the strategies I used can be described as a combination of a narrative as well as abductive strategy. I have already discussed the latter in Chapters 1 and 4, so I will now briefly describe what the narrative strategy I followed broadly consisted of.

Pentland (1999) addresses in part the concerns raised by Welch and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki (2014), and suggests using concepts from narrative theory to create a framework for analyzing structural features in narrative data as a means to access deeper structures than what is directly observable in the text. However, rather than studying narrative structures, semiotics, or emerging themes as an end in itself, as is the case with narrative analysis in general (e.g., Polkinghorne 1988; Czarniawska 2004), I use narrative theory as a structuring device, a tool to understand and communicate team emergence and dynamics. More specifically, I accept in line with Ricoeurian/Aristotelian thinking that narrative is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with fundamental elements of our experience. In hermeneutical terms, as reflected in Ricoeur's work, narrative forms a positive circle with the concept of time, giving it meaning beyond mere chronology, paying attention to such concepts as characters, plots, and change events.

A hermeneutical researcher must pay attention to all aspects of narrative – not just the sequence of events stripped from their context, as is the case with positivist process analysis. Although event-sequence data are central to any process, they are often insufficient to uncover meaning – to answer the questions of "how" and "why." In order to tell a whole story, various aspects of narrative, such as focal actors, narrative voice, evaluative context, and other relevant indicators of context, are needed (Pentland 1999). To build an analogy between variance- and process-based models, just like a survey contains indicators for the underlying constructs in a variance theory, narrative text contains indicators for an underlying process theory. As we move from our surface observations toward the underlying structure, we also move from description to explanation. Yet, the central problem in creating explanatory theory remains. Even if we can

correctly and objectively identify the central fabula or plot, how can we identify the generative mechanism and how do we tell "which motor" is running (Pentland 1999)? To me, this represents an inevitable twilight zone where science meets fiction, where neither simple answers nor prescriptive solutions exist, and what makes a difference is the researcher's ability to build bridges between empirical material, theory, and his or her own experience and imagination.

The narrative theory I more specifically rely on is based on Ricoeur's poetic approach in which language is a means to re-describe, disclose, and refigure reality. Given that my work is largely based on concepts inspired by Ricoeur's work from his theory of interpretation to his use of metaphors, this seems a rather natural choice. Ricoeur considers that the meaning-effects of both narrative and metaphor belong to the same basic phenomenon of semantic innovation, as in both cases, the innovation is produced entirely at the level of discourse, or the level of acts of language equal to or greater than the sentence (Ricoeur 1984, ix). While metaphor innovates by aligning words to meanings they do not usually have, narrative innovates with the invention of a plot that synthesizes the heterogeneous. This intent expresses the nature of *aletheia*, or disclosure, a concept at the heart of alethic hermeneutics, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 4.

Ricoeur's progression from the surface to a deeper level of understanding passes through the concept of mimesis,[21] a reinterpretation of the concept of mythos or narrative emplotment in Aristotle's Poetics (Dowling 2011). There are three stages to mimesis that are considered a single, continuous process. Mimesis1 refers to prefiguration, or a pre-narrative structure of experience or level of understanding (here, I consider my empirical material in its entirety; in this study, it is represented by the descriptive analysis spread across this study as well as direct quotes from my material, for instance in Chapters 8–12 but also elsewhere). Mimesis2 refers to the configuration or the emplotment of the story (the narratives I have told in this study, mainly in Chapters 2 and 8–12), and mimesis3 refers to refiguration or a deeper level of understanding, where the world of the interpreter and the text are contrasted to gain this deeper level of understanding (for instance, the findings presented in Chapter 14 and the metaphors in Chapters 9–13)[22] (Dowling 2011).

As an illustration of how I reached a deeper level of understanding to develop an embryonic plot of a team, which I did not include in this study as the team barely pulled through the course, I will explain what happened between Esam,

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[21] Mimesis is often understood roughly as *imitation* or *representation* of something nature and humans have in common. This can be manifested in objects such as statues and paintings, and also in acted or written forms, such as drama, poems, or narratives.

[22] These mimetic processes are directly linked with and are a continuation of the discussion on Ricoeur's theory of interpretation in Chapter 4.

Lotta, and Marisa. Esam, a male of Ghanaian origin, ended up in a conflict with Lotta and Marisa, two females from the Nordic region of Europe. While no one was blaming "cultural differences" directly in their reflective notes for failures, these surfaced as a possible explanatory mechanism in a more informal conversation with the team in which Esam did not want to participate. Lotta and Marisa felt that Esam was rude and disrespectful because of his African upbringing and poor attitude towards women. When we, two of the facilitators, asked Esam what he thought had caused an open conflict in the team, he passionately denied harboring any hostility towards women, having a very deeply Christian upbringing focusing on equality and respect, and after eight years in Europe, adjusting to the local culture. In his view, he and the women had just had disagreements over how to go about completing the task. More than any deeper cultural differences, it seemed more likely that the root problem was disagreeing on how to get the task done, and the women's misinterpretation that Esam was being aggressive from his somewhat expressive manner and language use, a "typical African macho," was a sort of unfortunate consequence of cultural stereotyping.

Analyzing research material inspired by this type of mimetic interpretation is based on a dialectic relationship between the text, the people being observed, and the researcher. It is a continuous, reflective, and creative process, with constantly doubting if what seems to be really *is,* and evaluating and ruling out or accepting any possible alternative explanations. But how does this approach relate to the widely used approach of coding commonly used in qualitative data analysis?

5.2.4.2 Between coding and mimetic interpretation

Because of its richness and potential for discovery, qualitative research has been critiqued as too often lacking in scholarly rigor (cf. Bryman 1992; Gioia, Corley & Hamilton 2012). While these authors explicitly address inductive research based on grounded theory, this criticism is valid for deductive and abductive research as well. Indeed, how can I show sufficient evidence to defend my assertions and knowledge claims? In fact, while in quantitative research, statistical analysis constitutes both a widely accepted theory and a method of data analysis, qualitative researchers base themselves on heterogeneous traditions and philosophical foundations and have no common widely accepted theory that provides an underlying rationale for *what qualitative researchers actually do* when they analyze data (Maxwell & Miller 2008).

Coding, according to many, is an activity that brings order and rigor to qualitative research and represents in a broad sense a methodological activity

that researchers follow, in which they symbolically assign a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion of data (Saldana 2009, 3). *Tandem reporting* is an often-used approach to coding and a technique inspired by both organization theory and ethnographic tradition (Gioia et al. 2012). It seeks to listen to the voice of the informant and present the emerging theoretical patterns (or to conduct *first-order analysis* using informant-centric terms and codes), and then the voice of the researcher (or to conduct *second-order analysis* using researcher-centric concepts, themes, and codes) to then present links between both voices in an organized manner and to step up abstractness. The outcome of this exercise is a formal "data structure," linking first-order concepts to second-order themes to then form aggregate dimensions that are the foundation of a proposed theoretical contribution.

Since the "Gioia methodology" has been so influential in recent years as a means to conduct rigorous qualitative research in management studies and has become somewhat of a benchmark, I applied it as a first attempt to analyze my process data by conducting a trial using the NVivo tool. Squeezing my rich data into narrow, fixed categories and separating the worlds of the informant and the researcher felt artificial, and I had difficulty putting aside the rich understanding I had already developed when reading through all the material, taking notes, interacting with the respondents, and discussing the material with my colleagues. I then realized that because the foundation of this technique rested on discovering new concepts that could be transformed into new constructs, variables, and testable propositions (Gioia et al. 2012), it was incompatible with my hermeneutical foundations. By using categories, I would miss the flow, dynamism, elements of surprise, any sudden shifts, the storyline, and the essence of my text. Thus, I abandoned this technique.

Using Maxwell and Miller's (2008) vocabulary, when I relaxed my efforts to look for commonalities between different well-performing teams, and started to focus on sometimes divergent, convergent, or mixed narratives of team members instead, I shifted from using a similarity-based (categorizing) to a contiguity-based (connecting) analytic strategy without fully abandoning the first one. I had come to realize that due to the narrative quality and richness of my material, strict categorization would cause an unhelpful decontextualization or distanciation from the dynamics of my data. Maxwell and Miller (2008) consider problematic the type of categorization that orders and reorders data based on fixed categories and relationships between these same categories, instead of paying attention to the interconnectedness of events and episodes, of the world of the "text" and the world of the "interpreter," *at the data level*. Another matter of concern they raise is that reordering the data in terms of particular categories can create what they call *analytic blinders,* preventing the analyst from seeing alternative relationships in the data, which is what surfaced

as a key concern for me as well with my first attempt at "systematic" data analysis.

I think two examples illustrating what can be lost when purely relying on placing data in categories and omitting any thoughts to interconnectedness could be helpful here. When reading through my material, sometimes *difficulties leading and motivating student team members*, in particular, surfaced. Since I was concerned about the transferability of my findings, I paid close attention to these remarks and started considering "leading student teams" as a separate category emerging from data, especially as much academic literature is critical of using student samples. Then, I started to take a closer look at some of the people taking leading roles in teams and complaining about "students" or even "Finnish students" as particularly harder to lead than professionals in firms. Nea from the *Dysfunctional Family* team, which is described in Chapter 9, is one example. Extremely nurturing, even motherly, hardworking, wanting to control the team output, and with difficulties giving sometimes much needed negative feedback, how successful would she really be leading a team of professionals? I had had similar problems early in my career leading junior-level engineers, so this was also a personal matter, as I recognized sharing many of the same personal traits with Nea. I brought up the issue with her at one point informally, but we left it there, until I noticed in her later reflections that she had come to the conclusion that the problem was much more in her inability to lead *people*, than in such contextual matters as whether the team was a student or a professional team. Had I accepted the emerging "leading student teams" as a definite data category without making connections and doubting the explanation, my final analysis would have looked very different, and the *Dysfunctional Family* would have never emerged. *Special people* with the sub-specimen of *outright difficult individuals* was another early category, indicating that certain individuals, even if talented, ambitious, and motivated to lead, were just totally incapable of constructive teamwork and thoughtful communication. The presence of these people usually meant that the team was headed for trouble even if temporarily successful. This was the case of Ly in the *Chain Gang* team I describe in Chapter 8. While all team members appreciated her skills and hard work, some resented her manners, and she often came across as rude and inconsiderate. She refused to meet the others in person and preferred to work across distance. When I got to know her better through her master's thesis work and through our Facebook connection, a somewhat more nuanced picture emerged. Ly, a recent immigrant, was under tremendous pressure to finish her degree with the highest marks to continue her scholarship, which she needed to support her family. At the time, her husband did not work and Ly herself was at an advanced stage of pregnancy by the time the course ended. She never complained to her teammates about her personal condition nor

informed them about her pregnancy, which must have been a stressful situation for her at the time. To place her in the category of "especially difficult people to work with" was most likely unfair – but she should have been encouraged to be more open about her personal condition early on, instead of hiding it and carrying the team on her shoulders, metaphorically speaking.

Locke, Feldman, and Golden-Biddle (2015) elaborate in detail how the process of coding is different when researchers engage in validation and discovery as mutually constituted, rather than independent approaches to research. In what the authors refer to as *live coding*, the systematic, procedural nature epitomized by positivist research, and to a lesser extent, by the Gioia methodology, is substituted by a more open-ended and imaginative way of working with research material, joining validation and discovery that aims at new interpretations and theoretical sightlines, instead of building conceptual walls between validation and discovery (see also Glaser & Strauss 1967). The same type of dualistic thinking can be seen elsewhere – positivist *versus* interpretive studies, inductive *versus* deductive studies, studies that generate theory *versus* studies that test it, "verstehen" *versus* "erklären," etc. These mainstream approaches are widely criticized by influential research in organization studies and elsewhere, and alternatives are suggested (cf. Alvesson & Kärreman 2007; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007; Fann 2012; Locke, Golden-Biddle & Feldman 2008; Weick 1989).

Live coding is a data analysis method that allows breaking the artificial wall between discovery and validation, and takes a more realistic stance towards how research and theorizing actually evolve. It is defined in contrast to its opposite, *inert coding*, which has little space for discovering surprising findings as coding is viewed procedurally and directed towards generating a list of code objects that is complete when "the list is ready." The activity of live coding is aimed at validated discovery and is organic in that coding, codes, the coder, and data shape each other and are interdependent and inseparable. The process of coding is dynamic and alters the list of codes and their meaning, seeking to use codes to encompass both orderliness and messiness, definiteness and tentativeness, singularity and multiplicity, and independence and interdependence (Locke et al. 2015).

At first glance, Ricoeur's interpretative theory that I rely on looks similar to tandem reporting in that it makes a distinction between the worlds of the text and the interpreter, but the basic assumptions are radically different and closer to processes described in Locke and colleagues' approach to live coding. In Ricoeur's approach, the two realms of the text and the reader are not epistemologically distinct, but the interpretation flows according to hermeneutical principles as a spiral, or arc, from naïve to more sophisticated knowledge. The ultimate purpose is not to produce constructs to be tested, but

to deepen and expand knowledge and insights, taking seriously the interpreter's ability to use a disciplined imagination as a valid tool to generate new knowledge. Here, discovering connections and relationships iteratively based on the whole and its parts, and contrasting pre-understandings with emerging new knowledge to push further the ever-expanding horizon are key. Thus, for my work, I replace Gioia and his colleagues' guiding mantra, "no data structure, know nothing," with "no new insights without dynamic interpretation."

5.2.5 Identifying themes

Studying the genesis and evolution of teams implied analyzing the material at two levels – *individual* and *team* levels – which means looking at how individual-level narratives diverged and converged and fluctuated over time, and how they developed into team-level patterns to then make comparisons across different teams. My research was originally set to study commonalities in well-performing teams, looking at validated constructs and concepts such as team diversity, degree of dispersion, mode of leadership, trust, communication, and conflict management, as discussed in Chapter 3. Since I did not find any significant new patterns beyond confirming that these well-established constructs mattered in the teams' lives, I shifted the focus to routines-as-practice theory (Feldman 2000) to see if the way these teams established and adjusted routines as a way to generate a necessary structure to conduct work effectively would make a difference. While it was evident that in order to be able to function as a team in the first place, some level of fast routinization of ways of working was necessary at the very least, no significant patterns seemed to emerge here either to differentiate the well-performing teams from the less well-performing ones. I also doubted that, although I had rich longitudinal data, my intimate knowledge of the teams' inner workings may not have been sufficient to detect *how* routines were actually constituted.

As the empirical material kept accumulating, I started to pay attention to irregularities regarding how different these well-performing teams from the task outcome perspective actually were on the inside. For instance, two of the five teams delivering excellent output were radically different from each other. While one team found the experience inspiring and rewarding, the other one housed people sufficiently bound by the shared ambition to get the task done, yet with such infected relationships that some team members were avoiding each other altogether and were developing unbearable stress and emotions akin to hatred. Here, I thought of my experience with teamwork. In firms, we never really questioned or cared about the sustainability of performance or people dynamics in well-performing teams as we were busy with solving problems

created by the failing ones. The "happy families" metaphor from *Anna Karenina* that suggests that there is such a static, homogeneous category as a happy (or unhappy) family and *that these families are expected to be similar* echoed this insight. As anyone who has read the book knows, this first line was nothing but a heart-wrenching provocation proved wrong, as Tolstoy takes Anna's family from an aesthetic illusion of perfection to an inevitable disaster of a very particular kind.

While each team seemed to be a world of its own, several patterns emerged from the material that seemed to be particularly revealing. First, *high-energy, disciplined input by at least two team members and the capability to generate good ideas* seemed absolutely necessary for a team to be able to deliver good output. Then, when comparing the teams, more subtle patterns came through that had mainly to do with *temporal shifts, variations, discrepancies,* and *asymmetries of meaning making* between team members during the teams' life. Overall, *how team members understood and managed time* and the challenges associated with working *in time*, was the scarcest resource of all, as many of us spending our lives trying to balance what our employers want from us, what our family and friends require, and what we need for ourselves to be able to keep up, know so well. Thus, the concept of "time" was a significant source of stress for many, and central to how teams succeeded in their work and as social organizations. Those shifts, variations, discrepancies, and asymmetries were manifested in a number of ways that are present in the stories of all the teams in Chapters 9–13 to some extent, and can be grouped into five themes.

Shared views – the degree to which the team members were able to interpret situations, adjust to each other, to change circumstances, and to organize themselves in such a way that made it possible to function as a true team. For instance, rather than "having good communication," it was more important to have a shared understanding of what "good communication" meant (polite, fast, honest, flat/hierarchical, frequent, equal participation, etc.).

Forces of influence – how the teams organized activities and made sense of such concepts as leadership/followership and decision-making seemed to be of particular relevance. Often, even when deciding on "democratic decision making" or when appointing a formal "leader," what they meant in practice could vary drastically. Which type of leadership mode the team chose was not that critical; what mattered more was how these decisions were enacted and their meaning interpreted among the team members.

Unity of the team – whether the team was able to create a schema or an idea of a team beyond individual needs, wants, and motivations seemed to be essential to establishing a sustainably successful organization. It did not seem to matter much how this was achieved, as long as the "true team" surfaced out of the interactions between the team members. Sometimes, a team emerged

gradually and grew stronger over time; other times, only after some initial difficulties. Still other times, a team was able to reach unity at some point and subsequently collapse. Finally, at times, a true team with a shared schema or team identity was never formed.

Hidden thoughts and emotions – when reading participants' journals and observing them, the force of what is invisible; unexpressed thoughts and emotions, in particular, when they were negative and kept accumulating was a strong indicator of whether or not the team would be able to form a truly successful organization. While the two best and most creative and reliable teams *out of all teams* in terms of output, the *Scouts* and the *Master Cooks*, had very different people dynamics and approaches to work, the budding negative feelings and thoughts in both teams were short-lived, and each member in a dialectic manner with the rest of the team was able to deal with them in such a way that team formation and work was not compromised.

Critical events – all the teams struggled with time management, people dynamics, lack of factual and technological knowledge to execute the tasks, and working under pressure. In such an environment, potential sources of friction are abundant. It seemed to be that team members who captured tiny nuances and potential sources of discontent, took small actions, and mutually adjusted to often subtle situational clues, in particular, early on in the team's life, often played a huge role in defining how successful the team was going to be both in terms of task and social outcomes.

5.3   On trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers often struggle with ensuring and communicating that their findings are credible, and are criticized for lacking methodological and analytical rigor (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The authors suggest that since the traditional (positivist) paradigm makes different knowledge claims than the naturalist (constructivist) one, this inevitably influences the criteria of what counts as knowledge. They suggest four criteria appropriate to assess the trustworthiness of naturalistic (constructivist) research: *credibility, dependability, transferability,* and *confirmability*. I will briefly discuss my research in light of these criteria and add a short section on what a double-edged sword pre-understandings, or prejudices, can be.

5.3.1 *"Good" or "bad" prejudices?*

For a practitioner, there is nothing as annoying as an academic "who knows it all" – and vice versa. Indeed, it is difficult to specify when one's previous knowledge, either of a practical or theoretical nature, hinders or advances knowledge creation. A necessary starting point is self-awareness and intellectual open-mindedness, no matter from which "side" one comes. Both Peirce and Gadamer, even though they represent two rather different schools of philosophy, call for a distinction between good and bad prejudices (Bernstein 2005). One potentially "bad" prejudice I have put under scrutiny, in particular, is my personal belief that cultural differences do not "cause" failures in interpersonal communication and teamwork, although both practitioners and academics often point out to "culture" as a source of problems.

This was particularly tricky when the people I studied in my research did not refer to "culture" as a problem in their reflective accounts on teamwork, but merely to problems with language and communication and other circumstances, in general, thus confirming my own beliefs. When this pattern surfaced, I started to ask the students participating in the experiment questions informally in an attempt to dig deeper, and talked with business people with experience in cross-cultural teamwork about my observations and doubts. All these exchanges, although not unproblematic and unambiguous, seemed to challenge the assumption that "culture divides people." When people indicate "culture" as a problem in their teamwork, they might be merely referring to an easily available external "explanation," thereby relieving them from any personal responsibility over the fates of their teams, rather than a "true" cause for teams to underperform. Structurally identical global teams can be both well-functioning and successful or fail at both their task and as social organizations *just like any team*. The (national) culture of the participants is just one ingredient in the pot, and by far, not the most critical one.

The fact that people participating in the study were writing a fairly intimate and free format personal journal to which I had access to, and were not answering questions directly pointing at intercultural aspects that might have been at play, thus triggering culture-related "explanations," might help explain this pattern. Another consideration might be an ongoing transformation in our society that makes classificatory approaches based on cultural dichotomies obsolete (Hermans & Kempen 1998). Here, a well-educated younger cohort is accustomed to engaging with people from other cultures from an early age, and for whom it is almost instinctive to uphold judgments when communicating with people who do not share their sociocultural backgrounds and who do not rely on "village-type" belief systems of what is right or wrong, unlike the generations preceding them who may still might be inclined to do so. One

possibility, of course, points to a different direction: the participants might not have been aware of another culture's effects on their own and others' behavior, a possibility I consider less likely due to the international exposure these people have had prior to taking part in this study.

5.3.2 Assessing trustworthiness

One of the strengths of my research from the point of view of *credibility* and *dependability* is my engagement in persistent observation and the large number of teams observed over time. Not only did I study many teams over the teams' lifecycle, but I was also able to study them at close range and with many collection modes and sources of data, which constituted a treasure trove of rich material. While the lifecycle of the teams was admittedly quite short and the team members were not under exactly the same type of obligations as are people in business firms, I believe that the simulated context (a "consultancy team") created conditions quite comparable to ad hoc expert teams, in general, at least when it comes to observing the unfolding of human dynamics. I also collected data from two sets of teams participating in the course at different points in time. Findings and observations were contrasted within the research team face-to-face almost daily, and a WhatsApp group was established specifically for research-related correspondence. Emergent insights were often discussed quite intensively both with course participants and professionals in the field. Instead of distancing myself from my own previous experience with teams in business firms, I made thoughtful use of this "baggage" (or pre-understandings – a word I have used elsewhere in this study) to enhance my credibility as a researcher, and to explicitly use this experience as a source for capturing the phenomenon and submitting it to an analysis together with my empirical material.

The hermeneutic reasoning I rely on does not produce "certain" and "necessary" logically air-tight conclusions. In fact, many possible angles and theorization possibilities exist in my rich empirical material, and the author's voice can be heard loud and clear in this study. However, because the contours of consciousness and meaning making correspond more closely with linguistic than with mathematical structures, the methods for its study are not precise either (Polkinghorne 1988, 8). This is both a weakness and a strength of this study. It is important then to keep in mind that the type of truth-claims I make are not those implying proven causality or statistical co-variance of certain concepts. The intent is to enrich our understanding of teams and teamwork and introduce a fresh angle to study a well-established phenomenon in a field of study that has been slow to progress.

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of a qualitative study hold true in other contexts. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) talk about theoretical generalizations "that can travel" from one context to another, since they are governed by similar underlying mechanisms. Lincoln and Guba (1985) underline that it is not the researcher's task to provide an index of transferability, but to provide a database that makes transferability judgments possible. One possible area of concern for transferability (just like for credibility) is the use of student samples. Acknowledging that student samples are sometimes contested as empirical contexts, I claim that for this research, there are no features in the setting that would make student teams less eligible for theorizing than purely professional ones. This is because I take an organization theory stance and tackle the question of "what people do," rather than an organizational economics perspective on "how team or contextual characteristics explain performance." Also, the student setting allowed me to conduct a field experiment in which my colleagues and I, in addition to directly accessing rich data from multiple sources and multiple teams, were able to control and manipulate a number of factors (e.g., the team composition, the type of tasks, and time given to create the pitches), thereby affecting the way the teams as organizational forms were constituted and evolved. This would hardly have been possible in a business firm. Also, we created a meaningful and competitive environment where participants solved business cases by simulating professional setups such as consultancies to create an environment as realistic as possible. The intentional decision to not assign specific roles to team members, such as the team leader, was so the build-up of the phenomena could be observed "naturally." Moreover, we did not use sophomores but senior-level students finalizing their master's degree, many of whom were already active in business and had significant work experience.

On a number of occasions, course participants pondered the differences between working in a business team and working in a student team, especially when the teams went through difficult times. Often these thoughts evolved and changed over time. A quote from Nea, a 35-year-old Finnish woman appointed to a leader position by others due to her work experience as a manager in an international firm, illustrates this point in her sixth reflective essay:

> *I felt I didn't have the right to order the team members too strictly, as this was 'only' a school assignment, not a paid job. I understand that it was a false way of thinking from my part from the beginning – it just feels difficult to take a lead in a group where in the end, everyone is equal.* (Nea)

Confirmability has to do with the steps that were taken, or the process that shows how research outcomes were reached. While I have not established a waterproof "audit trail" (Lincoln & Guba 1985) – it would not have been

possible with an interpretation based on alethic hermeneutical philosophy – I have relied on a reflexive mode of writing and rich anecdotes all along this thesis to increase confidence that this work, indeed, belongs more to the realm of science than fiction.

All reflective essays, interview transcripts, and other material were stored in a structured database following the format: year (2014/2015) - > team - > week - > individual. As the course progressed, I read and graded all the essays of half the teams (over 600 in total), and one of my colleagues read the other half. We evaluated the essays based on a pre-set scale and criteria based on the depth and breadth of self-reflection. While we both had a set of teams we called our "own," we still frequently read each other's essays and commented daily on interesting ones. Comments were also shared on a daily basis with the colleague who was not involved with the reading/evaluation task, but who was heavily involved in idea development and was the overall responsible instructor for the course.

As my research interest narrowed down to well-performing teams, I started to follow these teams closely and scheduled interviews with them. I printed out and organized all material from these teams in files, and first started to read it by following the thoughts of each individual team member from the beginning until the end of the team's life to tap into the "individual" level. I then read the material yet another time, chronologically, one team member after the other at a given point in time to gain an evolving "team" picture. The reading exercise was intense as I needed to capture the dynamics at both the individual and the team level. Therefore, I conducted this step when I could dedicate myself to this task fully without interruptions until I had done a preliminary color-coding and memoing of what I found interesting in terms of emerging patterns. Regarding the interviews, I carefully listened to them before and after transcribing them to focus on the plot first, and then I listened to what the interviewees were *really* saying and introducing elements of doubt. As I gradually started to pay attention to the diverse dynamics the teams represented, I performed an additional exercise of interpretation, focusing on the actions, thoughts, and emotions of team members. From there, I started to analyze material through the lens of sensemaking, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 7 as Weick's framework included many of the ideas that emerged as themes from my readings. My "audit track" also includes observations in personal notebooks, emails, and messages to self and others, correspondence in the WhatsApp group setup for the research team, and the course Facebook page, as well as draft stories I wrote and tentative team metaphors I drew and had other colleagues and some team members comment on, until I was satisfied with the results.

However, what I want to underline is that there is no audit process or a clean, linear demonstration of how I wrote the stories and how I ended up with the metaphors I will introduce in Chapters 8–12. What I will need to do, instead, is

to convince the reader of the credibility of the metaphors and how they came to life by either means or persuasion. Following the somewhat provocative Ricoeurian thinking, the historic approach to accessing knowledge, as in interviews when subjects are eager to give a certain impression, individuals find themselves in a certain mood, triggering certain responses and busily organizing past events and "facts" based on his or her own sensemaking and interests, which is not as far from fiction as many would like to think. Organizational life has a lot to do with human minds, and for good reason masterpieces like Tolstoy's or Shakespeare's work, masters in capturing how those minds work in compelling stories, still talk to us in profound ways. Without wanting to discredit academic literature but merely to take it with some perspective, if ever asked which I found more helpful for leading teams, reading Orwell's (1945) *The Animal Farm* or Cyert and March's (1963) *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, I would have great difficulty choosing, as I find both of these classics profoundly interesting and informative in their own way.

My case analysis (Chapters 8–12) suggests *team metaphors* as one possible team "outcome" to show how different structurally similar well-performing teams can look from within. Let us then take a closer look at metaphors and how they can be helpful in better understanding what global teams are "made of."

6 METAPHORS – WAKING UP THE IMAGINATION

"The pen is the tongue of the mind."
— **Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra**

This study starts and ends with metaphors. I started out by drawing attention to mechanistic metaphors implicitly underlying much practice, research, and definitions on global teams, and suggesting some alternatives by teasing the imagination. In the chapters that follow, I will show by applying some of the principles of the sensemaking framework how five teams in my study became the type of organization they did through an analysis resulting in metaphors. In this chapter, I will explain what metaphors are and how they have been used in studies of organizations, and what promise they hold for accruing our knowledge and understanding of global teams.

6.1 What is a metaphor?

Morgan (1980) underlines the symbolic nature of concepts developed by human beings to make sense of the world. For example, this can be done through language, art, science, myth, and numbers, and are mere attempts to objectify and interpret a "reality" in that they embody subjective intentions in the meanings underwriting the symbolic constructs being used. So, humans try to objectify the world by means of essentially subjective processes – a paradox underlying the very philosophical underpinnings our Western civilization is built on. Rarely do we reflect on the fact that the numeric system, economic theories, deductive research models, and frameworks we use in management research, as well as the very language we use[23] to express our thoughts, are examples of essentially symbolic concepts.

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[23] As philosophers Ludwig Wittgenstein and Noam Chomsky point out, language has serious limitations when it comes to communicating thoughts. While we try to use words to make pictures of facts, our efforts are often quite trivial in trying to communicate those pictures to others, and our thoughts are not necessarily even clear to ourselves. Not all concepts in all languages have words to describe them (what could the Portuguese word *"saudade"* used to describe "poetic longing" characteristic of the Portuguese and Brazilian temperament possibly be in French or Chinese?), and the meaning of many words is ambiguous to begin with (what is the meaning of "angst," "commitment," "loyalty," "family," etc.?)

Language gives us a toolbox and a structure to help express ourselves. Yet, the tools available in that toolbox are limited, and the habitual use we make of language within our sociocultural contexts also limits our expression of the world as we experience it. In fact, people see more things than they can describe in words (Weick 1979, 49). Metaphors, often popularly referred to as *tropes* or *figures of speech*, are commonly used in many literary genres from poetry to academic literature, as well as in common and public speech to help see something habitual in a different light or from a different angle. To metaphorize is to see similarity in difference. To liken a pen to a tongue as Miguel de Cervantes did 500 years ago in his well-known analogous metaphor (in that it shows a logical connection between the concepts of "tongue" and "pen") is to puzzle us with both the difference between the two nouns and the similarity of their function, in that just like the tongue facilitates speech necessary for verbal communication, the pen is used to communicate thoughts by recording them in writing.[24] The power of this metaphor lies in that it still conveys meaning today in an elegant and simple manner that would be hard to express better using words with their literal meaning. A metaphor can be understood quite superficially as a matter of artistic expression and style, or as a literary and descriptive device for embellishment (Morgan 1980), or in its deeper meaning, as an act of semantic innovation, an outcome of interpretative creativity at the word, sentence, or discourse level. This study is inspired by Paul Ricoeur's theory of metaphor exposed in his seminal work, *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977/2003),[25] defining and defending the latter approach and broadly anchoring metaphor in classical philosophy, oratory, and rhetoric, as well as poetry.

Thus, to speak with metaphors is to speak with images and to uncover hidden underlying similarities between two different things without implying they are the same in all respects. For Morgan (1980), the process of metaphorical conception is a basic mode of symbolism, central to the way in which humans forge their experience and knowledge of the world in which they live. For Aristotle, a metaphor consists of *"giving a thing a name that belongs to*

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[24] This analogy is particularly interesting from the point of view of Ricoeurian hermeneutics. Ricoeur points out the difference between a spoken and written discourse in that while in a spoken dialogue the interaction is immediate and direct between those participating in the conversation, in written expression, the text gains an independent life from the author and both distances and brings together those who engage in the reading. Neither the writer nor the reader has sole authority over the meaning creation or interpretation.

[25] The original version of the book, *La métaphore vive*, appeared in French already in 1975. The word "*vive*" in French would translate more directly to something like a "living metaphor," a very different connotation than *The Rule of Metaphor* that has been put forward in the English language version. In my interpretation, Ricoeur rarely uses normative tones in his rather reflective writing, and the French title suggesting that language through metaphor is vibrant, dynamic, and full of life transfers the essence of the book more effectively than using the word "rule" (reflections emerging from my discussion with Bengt Kristensson Uggla in Turku, Finland, May 27, 2016).

something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or on grounds of analogy"[26] and can be defined as *a particular set of linguistic processes whereby aspects of one object are 'carried over' or transferred to another object, so that the second object is spoken of as if it were the first* (Hawkes 1972). The function of a metaphor is to "place things before our eyes" (Ricoeur 1977, 38), and although metaphor is a displacement of meaning at the level of words (p. 46), it is contextually anchored in a sentence, narrative, and discourse. Since the veracity of a metaphor can hardly be proven or falsified empirically, and given the creativity and insight required of an author to convincingly suggest that a thing can be seen *as* something else and communicate a new, enhanced meaning, how can we recognize a good metaphor? Ricoeur (1977, 72) identifies five conditions for a good metaphor – *realism, clarity, nobility, naturalness,* and *coherence* – and stresses that these conditions can only apply to the newly invented metaphors, "author's tropes." Once a metaphor has been widely used, it no longer has the power to surprise, transfer new information, and become a creative outcome of interpretation. The metaphor, "Life is a journey," no longer has novelty value capable of producing a surprise effect and translating new meaning as it is part of our daily vocabularies we no longer question. To say, "Life is a journey," once an innovative metaphor, has become a worn-out expression, even a *cliché* with the passage of time. Yet, what happens to meaning if we liken "life" to something similar to a "journey" (which, in the end, involves travelling from point A to point B in a rather teleological manner, hardly reflecting the path most of our lived lives *really* take!) is quite remarkable. To say, life is an "adventure," a "labyrinth," an "expedition," a "rat race," an "odyssey," or an "exploration" conveys quite different meanings than the rather conservative and moderate word, "journey." Apparently, small nuances at the level of one word can provoke very different mental images, which themselves are idiosyncratic to the person interpreting them, calling for care in the way we use metaphors, particularly in international contexts where people often come from radically different sociocultural contexts. In my study, for instance, I paid attention to the use of the "family" metaphor by a number of participants. In one team that I ended up calling the *"Dysfunctional Family,"* there was a woman from Nigeria who described her team as a family *where all looked after each other and everyone is a valuable member*, and a man from Japan describing the same team as a *typical family in which there is a father and a mother and three children who do nothing unless supervised by parents*. This tells a lot not only about the different meaning "family" holds for these two individuals, but also the divergent ways they experienced their team.

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[26] From *Poetics* by Aristotle, translated by Ingram Bywater, http://people.wku.edu/jan.garrett/ 401s07/arismeta.htm (retrieved on May 26, 2016).

A key theme in Ricoeur's work is how language constructs the world we perceive and live in, and how metaphors can create and recreate meaning through the use of imagination (Ricoeur 1981). The way we use language, even if we do not think about it, is a powerful tool influencing our understanding of the world we are embedded in. Metaphor represents an act of discovery; it re-describes reality, destroys, and reinvents order (Ricoeur 1977, 24), yet it also has instructive value concerning the feeling of pleasure we gain from understanding following a surprise (Ricoeur 1977, 37). A good metaphor can be a powerful tool in conveying information, communicating meaning, and adding to knowledge. It requires wit and deep understanding of the phenomenon to express something *as* something else in a way that is *real, clear, noble, natural,* and *coherent,* like Gareth Morgan's description of organizations as "psychic prisons," a vivid metaphorical image.

The origins of metaphor can be traced to ancient philosophy and public oratory that considered speech a weapon (Ricoeur 1977, 9) intended to influence people in tribunals, public assemblies, and the like. In the public arena, it is certainly less compromising and at least equally effective to say, "Dark clouds are descending upon us," than to directly refer to armed hostilities by a neighboring country. The *theory of metaphor* has its origins in the ancient discipline of poetics and rhetoric (also known as the art of persuasion), and has a link to Aristotelian philosophy. In Aristotle's definition, rhetoric covers three areas: 1) theory of argumentation (*inventio*), constituting the principle axis of rhetoric and linking it to demonstrative logic and philosophy; 2) theory of style (*elocutio*), in which metaphor finds its place; and 3) theory of composition (*compositio*), which is related to the form and structure (ibid). Aristotle linked "persuasion" with the logical concept of "probable," maintaining that the kind of proof "necessary" in human affairs is not the same "necessary" as in natural sciences, but the "probable." Hence, to present proof in matters involving humans and their interactions is to build a plausible and probable explanation capable of convincing the public (or the peers) of the verisimilitude of truth claims, metaphor being one means of persuasion.

6.2   The omnipresent metaphor and its darker side

There is a darker side in using metaphors, calling for some critical thinking and responsible use of this semantic device when creating new meanings and interpretations of human matters. In the field of economics, whether or not the "invisible hand" exists is largely debatable, but much of our economic policy has been based on the assumption of self-regulating markets since Adam Smith first used this metaphor in the late 18th century. Many of us remember the

Biblical, war, and sports metaphors used by the United States (US) President George W. Bush or the Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi (and there are many other examples from history!) to create an "enemy" or to establish "closeness" with the public or electorate. Probably all the Finns still remember the former CEO of Nokia likening the company to a "burning (oil) platform," which with its brutality, not only triggered a sense of pending catastrophe, but probably also made the "platform that burns" a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the company share price took a nosedive after that statement was made.

Metaphors have been criticized for being superficial and of little value. They can be interpreted as being cosmetic, decorative items or mere objects of delectation (Ricoeur 1977, 10). There are also vocal critics of metaphor in the scientific community. Pinder and Bourgeois (1982), for instance, suggest that a heavy use of metaphors, tropes, and analogies in administrative science may be misleading in theory building "because they are not easily eliminable by ordinary scientific means," and suggest that continued reliance on figures of speech from outside the field be constrained. To fully believe and set one's mind to permanently and uncritically see an organization as a biological organism, a machine, or a psychic prison can of course be limiting and inhibiting the advancement of knowledge. However, that is not a reason to stop using metaphors, but rather an invitation to become aware of one's own presuppositions to challenge them and keep an open mind to acknowledge the constantly evolving nature and endless possibilities of knowledge itself and the complexity of human organizations and the mind. There is no reason why an organization cannot be seen *both* as a machine and a psychic prison, if the arguments are plausible and well grounded. Moreover, to assume that social sciences are *like* natural sciences, implicit in much research, often hides a hidden ontological belief that things human are governed by the same type of causal laws as physics, is also largely debatable. While it is not wrong to say that metaphors may be misleading (Pinder & Bourgeois 1982), they are ubiquitous, impossible to avoid, and often implicit. For this, they just cannot be ignored.

Hence, metaphorical thought in itself is neither good nor bad, but simply inescapable (Lakoff & Johnson 2008), and the metaphors we use, just like persuasion, can have selfish or noble ends and make more or less sense, depending on the intent and level of awareness of the persuader of his own underlying assumptions. More than trying to eliminate metaphors, it seems more fruitful to become aware of how deeply rooted they are in our lives and language, and to start making a more informed and responsible use of them both as researchers and practitioners.

We may not know it but we think in metaphor. A large proportion of our most commonplace thoughts make use of an extensive, but unconscious, system of metaphorical concepts, that is, concepts from a typically concrete realm of thought that are used to comprehend another, completely different domain. Such concepts are often reflected in everyday language but their most dramatic effect comes in ordinary reasoning. Because so much of our social and political reasoning makes use of this system of metaphorical concepts, any adequate appreciation of even the most mundane social or political thought requires an understanding of this system. (Lakoff 1995, 124)

Likening the world of business to running a military organization is a good example of a metaphorical language deeply embedded in our Western culture. Even though both academic literature (Pinder & Bourgeois 1982; Weick 1979, 50) and business press (cf. Queenan 2015) often criticize the use of military metaphors as offering a poor foundation for business operations, they are not going anywhere, it seems. We still talk about strategy, tactics, frontline, foot soldiers, positioning, setting and aiming at targets, advertising campaigns, etc., and military academy training is often seen as an asset in job applicants' CVs for managerial positions.

The purpose of a metaphor is not to establish necessary conditions so that x is identical to y *in all respects* to then build empirically testable propositions in the positivist sense. Its purpose is rather to illustrate and convince by a dichotomy of similarities/differences one possible and plausible way of interpreting social reality as it unfolds before our eyes and reveals itself to a researcher, and to build theory based on what Weick (1989) refers to as the use of *disciplined imagination*. Morgan (1980) suggests that the most powerful use of metaphor arises in instances in which the differences between the two phenomena are perceived as significant but not total, as an effective metaphor is a form of a creative expression, which relies upon a constrictive falsehood as a means of liberating the imagination. Metaphors may also help us tell a compelling story, an element lacking in much academic writing (Pollock & Bono 2013).

6.3   Metaphors in the study of organizations

Organization theory is rife with metaphors (Morgan 1980, 1997; Pinder & Bourgeois 1982; Weick 1979), as we have already discussed in the previous section from a broader perspective. Morgan (1980) in his widely popular work demonstrates that organization theory is metaphorical *in nature*, with important implications for theory construction since most organization theory and

research (and I would add practice as well, to a large extent) is constructed upon a network of assumptions that are taken for granted (see also Burrell & Morgan 1979). What Morgan calls the "orthodoxy" is based upon what he denominates the functionalist paradigm (positivism), characterized by the *machine* metaphor introduced by classical management theorists, Taylor and Fayol, among others, during the first half of the 20th century. The machine metaphor is based on principles drawn from mechanics, an assumption of a rational human being, and implies the use of specific means to reach pre-defined goals in clear structures and closed, stable systems. Another common metaphor within the functionalist paradigm is the organization as an *organism* conceived as a system of mutually connected and dependent parts constituted to share a common life, the continued survival of which depends on an appropriate relationship between an organization and its environment (Morgan 1980). Morgan's main thesis is that while mainstream research has long been based on research projects grounded on these two metaphors, much is being left out by a too limited focus, and suggests that organization theory is being greatly enriched by the introduction of more recent, yet so far, less used metaphors, such as *population-ecology, cybernetic system, theatre, culture, text, language game, enacted sensemaking, psychic prison, instrument of domination, schismatic,* and *catastrophe*. He places these metaphors in what he calls the four paradigms (functionalist, interpretative, radical humanist, and radical structuralism), classified along different meta-theoretical assumptions on the nature of science, as well ontological positions (the subjective-objective dimension) (see Figure 4).

Sociology of radical change

Radical humanist paradigm Anti-organization theory (*psychic prison*) **SUBJECTIVE**	**Radical structuralist paradigm** Radical organization theory *(instrument of domination, schismatic, catastrophe*) **OBJECTIVE**
Hermeneutics Ethnomethodology, phenomenological symbolic interactionism (*accomplishment, enacted sensemaking, language game, text*) **Interpretive paradigm**	Behaviorism, determinism, abstracted empiricism **(*machine*)** Social system theory (***organism***, *loosely coupled system, cybernetic system, population ecology*) Pluralism *(political system)* Action frame of reference *(culture, theatre*) **Functionalist paradigm**

Sociology of regulation

Figure 4   Paradigms, metaphors, and related schools of organizational analysis (adapted from Morgan 1980)

Morgan calls for more pluralism in research to challenge the ground assumptions of the orthodoxy, to expand our stock of knowledge, and to offer a richer view on the nature of organizations (see also Morgan & Smirchich 1980). The garbage can theory by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) defining an organization as *a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work* is an example of an innovative metaphor within the functionalist paradigm. Here, the means to the goals assumption underlying the machine metaphor is turned upside down by suggesting that in an organizational anarchy, there is a continual stream of people, solutions, choices, and problems that flow within an organization, resulting in two organizational decision strategies: oversight (to make quick choices) and flight (to ignore). In this model, nothing is solved since problems remain; they are just attached to other choices in the course of time.

In this chapter, I have shown why metaphors are much more than a gimmick at the level of words to add color and expand the use of language. In fact, metaphors are intertwined within our culture and organizational lives, and just like in the case of persistent military metaphors omnipresent in business practice

and theory, they are often persistent and difficult to change and, hence, become self-fulfilling prophecies (Weick 1979). Morgan and Smirchich (1980) express clearly what many scholars and practitioners tend to undermine or forget:

> *It is through the use of metaphor that scientists seek to create knowledge about the world. The metaphors that theorists choose as a basis for detailed theorizing usually derive from very fundamental, and often implicit, core assumptions about ontology and human nature. In selecting different metaphors for elaborating their theories, they implicitly commit themselves to an epistemological position emphasizing particular kinds and forms of knowledge. Debates about epistemology hinge largely on the advocacy of different kinds of metaphoric insight as a means of capturing the nature of the social world.*

To characterize global teams in ways that explicitly or implicitly define them as tools to translate strategies into concrete results in terms of market share, profits, knowledge sharing, cost cutting, or something else is to a large extent a reflection of orthodoxy and a positivist/functionalist epistemology and ontology. Without completely abandoning this worldview, and acknowledging that scientists always view the world metaphorically (Morgan 1980) whether or not they are aware of it, I task myself with expanding these limits further. To limit one's imagination in defining possible problems and solutions by subscribing to acquired wisdom and ways of working, without questioning the basic assumptions, can be harmful and lead to poorer than necessary practical decision making and theory construction. Much would be different in our world today if, based on intelligence available to different organizations at the time of 9/11 and the recent mortgage crisis, *someone* would have been able to see airplanes as "weapons" or financial derivatives as "time bombs."

6.4   Metaphors in this study

As I explained in the introductory chapter, in order to offer alternative viewpoints to enrich previous scholarship, this study takes a somewhat critical view and seeks to distance itself from the mechanistic metaphor and functionalist paradigm when it comes to studying successful global teams. So, to challenge Maznevski and Chudoba's (2000) viewpoint that global teams are *"groups of people who work together* (To what extent?) *to achieve a joint output* (Do they really do that?) *with the members located in different countries"* (Is location really that important in the digital era – people work digitally anyhow and are they not getting used to it? Do not people tend to be mobile, anyhow? What about people of multiple origins stationed in one country?), I use alternative linguistic pictures, metaphors, as well as stories as a linguistic device

to help see alternative "realities." Without placing my research firmly within any of the four paradigmatic "boxes," I roughly base myself on the metaphor of *text* through Ricoeurian hermeneutics, viewing organizational activity as a symbolic document, and by employing hermeneutic methods of analysis as a means of unraveling its meaning and significance (Morgan 1980), as well as on elements from Weick's sensemaking framework to analyze team processes that lead teams to their idiosyncratic destinies, taking their similarities (the condition of being a well-performing team) as a point of departure.

The outcome of my study is expressed through metaphors that are unique to each team. In this way, metaphors are a reflection of hermeneutical interpretation based on my empirical material, as well as my previous experience with teams. Their purpose is to uncover invisible qualities of global teams, or in Ricoeurian terms, to place the new metaphors in front of the reader a bit like an impressionistic painting; to provoke thoughts, to help see old phenomena under a different light, to create something new, to challenge conventional wisdom, and to help stimulate imagination to better understand the true nature of teamwork beyond expectations and definitions based on the input-process-output model characteristic of the machine metaphor. Even though the team metaphors are idiosyncratic just like their stories, my aim was to reach metaphors with a wider application and stories that would reveal theoretical insights that people with practical experience in teamwork would also be able to relate to.

Leaving these thoughts behind for a while, let us now see how sensemaking (Weick 1995) fits into the puzzle.

7   SENSEMAKING OF GLOBAL TEAMS

"The proof of the pudding is the eating."
— **Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra**

I explained earlier (Chapters 1 and 4) that this thesis subscribes to a process worldview. Instead of regarding a global team as a structure, I look at it as an ever-changing flow of interactions between people and events. From this point onward, I will task myself with clarifying what I meant by this earlier statement. In this chapter, I will introduce a framework (*not* a theory, as we shall see later), *sensemaking* (Weick 1995), ontologically fitting into the process worldview.

In the pages that follow, I will discuss Karl Weick's work, which is instrumental to the ever-growing scholarly movement of studying organizations as processes and using the lens of sensemaking to access these processes. Weick's rich scholarship[27] has turned the study of organizations upside down by suggesting that organizations are alive and always subject to change, uncontrollable, and unpredictable in the ways traditional management theory and practice would like them to be. He offers insights into why and how people in organizations act the way they do, as well as alternatives, by praising the advantages of chaos, demonstrating the pitfalls of planning, and celebrating the rewards of such practices as sensemaking and mindfulness (Coutu 2003).

First, however, I will narrate a story of one global team I have been part of while working at Ericsson Canada from two angles: 1) a team as a structure; and 2) a team as a process, in order to give the reader a practical sense of what is otherwise described as an ontological difference (not a very helpful concept when the intent is to enrich practical as well as academic understanding) between a process and structure view.

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[27] Among others: *The Social Psychology of Organizations* 1969; *Sensemaking in Organizations* 1995; *Making Sense of the Organization* 2000/2009; *Managing the Unexpected: Assuring High Performance in and Age of Complexity* 2001, as well as his "crisis papers," which I will discuss in more detail in Section 7.3.3.

7.1 Contrasting worldviews illustrated

7.1.1 Background of the team

A temporary project team was put together at Ericsson Americas to ensure the transfer of responsibilities of customer support and project delivery services from one regional center in Montreal to another in Mexico City. Cost reductions due to pressure from Chinese competitors were the main reason behind the change. Employees from Montreal and Stockholm were given the task of ensuring the knowledge transfer to Mexico within a six-month timeframe. Employees in Mexico were supposed to ensure a fast competence build up. No lay-offs were part of the events, at least in the immediate future.

7.1.2 Team seen as a structure

The core team was composed of six members of five nationalities distributed between three sites: Mexico City, Montreal, and Stockholm, representing the functions of engineering, product management, and project management. The goal was to complete the needed transfer of competence from product experts in Stockholm and senior engineers in Montreal to Mexico within six months. Before the project kick-off, two Mexican engineers were sent to Montreal for a course on technical aspects of the software product and to work hands-on with local senior engineers. The project resource allocation and budget were monitored via SAP applications, and weekly formal project meetings were held. Other means of communication included emails, project plan, progress reports, risk assessments, a team chat group, and conference calls. To kick off the transfer project, a joint meeting was held face-to-face on site in Mexico. The project was considered a high priority by management, and progress was monitored closely in steering meetings held twice a month by the project manager to inform senior management about its progress, secure necessary resources, and flag potential risks.

A project closure meeting and a formal report at the end of the six-month period revealed that formal responsibility had been successfully transferred, although the Mexican subsidiary still needed regular assistance from Montreal, and the deficient English skills of some Mexican engineers was considered a problem to be addressed with further training. The project budget was overridden by five percent, which was within a standard risk margin. Resource allocation sheets showed a chronic shortage of engineers for the foreseeable future, an issue solved by further training plans for more Mexico-based

engineers and assigning people based in Montreal to Latin American projects for as long as necessary. The vice president of regional customer support was satisfied with the project team, despite a few outstanding issues regarding competence transfer, and the project manager received a public acknowledgement in an annual all-employee meeting held in Montreal.

7.1.3   Team seen as a process

Instance one (unfolds in Montreal, Canada): Fabien, a senior systems integration engineer in Montreal, was uneasy. He had spent months learning the ins and outs of a new software product and was looking forward to supporting customers, telecom operators in the Americas region, with installation, integration, and support of the new product. Now, management was asking him to ensure a colleague in Mexico would gain the same competence level as him. If this was the way to go, what would his professional future look like? The only way to keep on learning about products was to be part of customer projects and troubleshooting! He would lose his edge. Over a lunch, he poured his feelings out to Joanna, the project manager assigned to make sure the transfer happened successfully. What could one do? An engineer in Mexico costs half that of an engineer in Canada. One could only hope that those placed in Montreal would keep on getting assignments for R&D and support for advanced products from company headquarters. One could also stall the competence transfer by assisting the Mexicans only minimally; there was the possibility that they would fail, after all.

   Instance two: Joanna organizes a conference bridge for the first project meeting for the transfer project, and another one for the steering group, and sends out the relevant information to participants.

   Instance three (unfolds in Mexico City): Claudio (a systems integration engineer from Mexico) has just had coffee with his manager. It is now clear to him how important it is to succeed with this project to show headquarters and regional management that the newly constituted Mexican site can take demanding assignments. He feels stressed as he knows it is too early and the local team is not ready. Ernesto (a junior customer support engineer) was hired just three months ago, and he is still learning how processes work in-house and has no personal network inside the company. He calls Joanna privately, whom he knows from before to discuss the situation informally.

   Instance four: Joanna organizes another conference bridge for the core team. The team members seem committed (Joanna keeps her concerns about Fabien's and other Montreal staff's motivation a secret), goals are clear to everyone, and budget and other resources are secured, as well as senior management's

involvement. Officially, the project is on track, although everyone who has "been around" knows that things never go quite as planned in situations like this. Joanna anticipates that Fabien (whose wife is pregnant) will most likely be sent to Mexico for (hopefully) a short-term contract.

Instance five (unfolds in Mexico City): Fabien, Joanna, Niklas (a product manager from Sweden), Per (a product engineering expert from Sweden), Ernesto, and Claudio hold a meeting to discuss the transfer project. While everyone remains polite and formal, things look messy. There are many bugs in the new product, making knowledge transfer complicated. Significant communication problems are apparent between Ernesto and Fabien, none of whom master English fully and both have heavy accents, and the training received by Ernesto and Claudio is clearly not sufficient. It is obvious to Niklas and Joanna that it would have been wiser not to start this project at this early stage, but there is no way back now; too much is at stake.

Instance six: Joanna organizes a conference call with the project steering group to flag the problems. Tensions arise between senior product management in Sweden and regional management in the Americas. As a result, a decision is taken to assign Fabien to remain in Mexico for the next six months to support the local engineering. At the same time, Fabien is assigned to another project that from a career perspective looks more interesting the way things are unfolding at the company.

Instances seven to twelve: Regular conference calls and project meetings are held to monitor progress and advance teamwork. Working across three time zones with 10 hours of difference with 24/7 availability is a challenge, especially as everyone has other projects to worry about as well. People start to get tired. No one complains publicly.

(To make the project budget look good, Joanna decides to allocate some of Fabien's and her time to another project with more available budget outstanding.)

(Ernesto, quite aware of his lack of competence to fulfill the project requirements, cuts about 20 percent of his true working hours from project reports to save face.)

Instance thirteen: A project-closure meeting and a lessons-learned session is held with the steering group. The sponsor is content with the transfer overall, but an agreement from additional support from Montreal "as needed" is signed.

(Joanna uses her contacts and personal influence to be assigned to a strictly local project for the next 18 months, full time.)

(Fabien, with a baby now, is sent to work on a customer project in Nigeria for three months.)

So, was the project a success or not? Hard to tell. The judgment depends on the point of view, the outcome criteria, and standpoint of the judgment maker,

the eye of the beholder. This simple glimpse of a real-life project, however, illustrates how different "truths" are uncovered based on how observations are made and what questions are asked. The first example relies on external performance indicators that tell us that, since the project was more or less on time, on budget, and completed within the scope, it was a success. The second one brings the project alive by taking a look from within, and tells some interesting details about human dynamics and relationships, and their evolution over time, while suggesting what could have been done differently to make things right. Karl Weick, in his extensive scholarship, has covered this topic of moving from studying organizations to studying *organizing* – what it means and why it matters.

7.2   From studying organizations to studying organizing

Weick's (1969/1979) seminal work, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, which preceded his work on sensemaking, invites us to reject the view of organization as a *noun* – a structure, and consider the act of organizing as a *verb* – a process, instead. Weick in his work criticizes organizational science that tends to look at simple variables and structures, and academics conducting research programs with a narrow focus that seldom uncover anything truly interesting or novel. Weick invites researchers to expand their interest into organizational processes to raise novel and interesting research questions in order to build relevant theories and uncover hidden truths. The shift of focus from studying organizations as entities to studying organizing as a process represents an ontological turn to take into account that organizations are always changing, evolving, and being renewed, carrying the possibility of change and reflecting the dynamism of organizational life and of the very human condition (see Chapter 4). Like Cervantes, the 16th century Spanish author of *Don Quixote* playfully suggests, it is only when the pudding is eaten, its true existence is proven and meaning fulfilled, I suggest that a global team is more an outcome of organizing, rather than a sum of its input variables. Lasse from Las Vegas, Bo from Bombay, Vladimir from Vladivostok, and Hong from Hong Kong all work for the *DreamMachine* multinational firm with their electronic devices and access to the corporate intranet, do not yet form a team per se. A team only starts to "happen" as people start interacting, "teaming."

7.2.1 Foundations

The often cited quote, *"How can I know what I think until I see what I say?"* is attributed to the early 20th century British author E.M. Forster, best known for his novels *A Room with a View* and *A Passage to India*, and is also used by Weick to problematize the concept of organization as a noun and the idea of human rationality. The quote implies that as an author writes, his thoughts become apparent only once a word, sentence, or text has been put on paper, and only then the meaning becomes apparent and subject to possible corrections and further interpretations. The quote is provocative as it makes an upfront attack to the supposed rationality of human beings and suggests that we make sense of things only *after the fact* and do not "see" history (or life) as it unfolds, but from a bracketed vantage point, a given moment in time frozen to reflect on and explain what has already happened.

This line of thought represents what at first looks like a paradox when transferred to organizational life. For *an organization* (or a team) to be, there must first be *organizing* of some sort in terms of the alignment of individuals' actions. Weick suggests that organizations are often reluctant to admit that a good deal of their activity consists of reconstructing plausible histories after-the-fact that explain where they are now, even though no such history got them precisely to this place to begin with (Weick 1979, 5). Apparently, rational and logically functioning business firms in which teams live their lives are more or less converging constructions made up by people who are a part of them, and what is left after the "lights are switched off" apart from the buildings, tools, brochures, websites, and other artifacts,[28] are structures constantly enacted and kept alive by constellations of interacting people, also called employees and managers.

Thus, organizations composed of people, while clinging to the ideals of rational behavior and logic, are really more into the art of after-the-fact sensemaking, storytelling, and ongoing best-effort collective activities through more or less successful processes of social influence, than to something extremely controlled, carefully planned, and heroically managed – the kind of narratives found in annual reports and television interviews of Wall Street bank CEOs and politicians.

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[28] *Artifacts* are commonly referred to as objects made by human beings. However, I refer here to a broader understanding. Edgar Schein (2010, 23) in his model of three levels of culture defines artifacts *as: 1) the surface level of a culture, including architecture, language, technology and products; 2) artistic creations, myths, and stories, and published lists of values; and 3) an organization's observable rituals and ceremonies, etc.*

7.2.2 What is "organizing" and why it matters

Organizing can be defined *as "a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors"* (Weick, 1979, 3). "Consensual validation" refers to collective grounding concerning what is real and illusory, and involves constant negotiation among organizational members, with the overall goal being to reduce uncertainty or "equivocality," which can be understood as the richness and multiplicity of meanings that can be superimposed on a situation an organization must manage (Weick 1979, 174). Organizing is often likened to *recipes* for getting things done and interpreting what has already been done, and *grammar*, a systematic account of rules and conventions by which "interlocked behaviors" are assembled to form social processes that are intelligible to actors. Yet, often, organizing just happens, crooked as an ant's path and iterative, as when a child is facing a forced decision of *one* among dozens of flavors and choices for toppings in an ice-cream parlor. In Weick's vocabulary, interlocked behavior is called a *double-interact*, the basic element of organizing that takes place between two or more individuals involving acts of control, influence, and authority (Weick 1979, 89). The way behavior unfolds is a process of mutual influence and communication. As we shall see in my case descriptions in Chapters 9–13, an initial interaction can set an embryonic organization-in-the-making on wildly diverging paths, depending on the situation.

Let us consider two separate incidents from my empirical observations where two team leaders from two different teams find the level of participation of one of the team members insufficient, and how differently a simple double-interact unfolds with long-standing consequences to the whole team. The communication reproduced here takes place in a chat group created as a platform for team communication by the teams themselves.

Team A

Team leader: If you, Stan, are not going to do your work in a timelier manner and with better quality, we will have to let you go from the team. What do you say?

Stan: My overall work schedule allows me to work on this project on Monday afternoons only. Can I do the first part of our task and then send it to you all by midnight, and you take it from there?

Team leader: Okay, no probs, let's try that.

Team B

Team leader: For this team to work, everyone needs to respond and do their part in a timely manner and with care!

Tilda (a non-delinquent team member doing already more than her fair share): I agree!

Team leader: Okay, all of you, please send me your input by Monday night, and I'll fix the final presentation early on Tuesday morning.

From the same situation, the paths of these teams were set to diverge, although the different interactions between the two teams as they happened might have looked quite minimal and trivial, even undetectable after the fact. Whereas in Team A the problem was addressed directly, respectfully, as a true dialogue, and targeting Stan, the team member with the problem behavior undermining the team's success, in Team B, the problem statement was undirected, generic, and the final burden was assumed by the team leader, allowing for the problem to repeat itself in future tasks and compromising the team's chances for success. The "delinquent" team member who does not react in this example at all might not even know that the comment was directed at him due to such things as differences in perception of what is "timely" and "quality," for instance.

7.2.3 Means first, ends after

Following Weick's views, organizing is an act of interdependence in which teams "act" through the collective behavior of individuals belonging to it, and a team exists only to the extent that people who are a part of it agree that the structure created by the very processes of organizing is real – as they perceive it. Recurring interactions or patterns of interlocked behaviors enacted by members assembled further into higher-level processes in a world in constant motion give a team, in part, its idiosyncratic "structure." In a formal business world obsessed with performance targets, blueprints, and measurements, the roles of means and processes are purely instrumental – they are mere paths to goals. Individual human beings, however, have many goals in life other than those set out by corporate strategies, the content and purpose of which an average worker often ignores or does not consider as personally relevant.

Acknowledging this, Weick elevates means above goals when it comes to human interaction. He suggests that there is no need for organizational members to share goals to act collectively, at least to begin with; means convergence is more important for the survival and adaptation of the organization as people

may strive for subjectively inspired ends (i.e., learning, career advancement, fame) for different reasons. Hence, the key point is to interlock *behaviors* (Weick 1969/1979, 91), not people, as portrayed in individual competence maps, resource plans, curricula vitae, and other organizational artifacts. Well-functioning organizations may look chaotic from the outside as there is no *one* recipe to achieve a goal, and in a turbulent world, goals change along the path. Indeed, several means can produce the same result, and successful organizations may appear to lack coordination and regulations. Conversely, some organizations strictly adhering to a formal plan and rules, and which have set out to succeed according to their expectations and their material needs fulfilled, may in fact be failing.

7.2.4   *Loose coupling and organization-creating and sustaining processes*

The concept of "loose coupling" is central in Weick's thinking. Two systems that are joined by a few common variables or weak common variables are loosely coupled (Weick 1979, 111). A global team with members belonging to different organizational units and contexts, and each working on multiple projects, is a loosely coupled system. The way people behave may depend much more on the situation and interactions, than on, for example, personal traits, structures, or role definitions. In most modern expert organizations, people are "loosely connected" and have significant degrees of freedom for action and engagement. While facilitating more flexibility and less vulnerability to disturbances, loose coupling also makes organizations more complex, fluid, and harder to control. Many times, managers are not experts in the specialized subject matter area of the employee reporting to them, and it is practically impossible to control what everyone *really* does at any point of time and what that implies from the point of view of time management. This leads to situations of overburdening certain employees and underusing the talent of others. Time is, after all, a truly limited resource. There are only 24 hours in a day and 52 weeks in a year, a fact not even the cleverest boss can change, as investment bankers I have been collaborating with in an ongoing research project often remind me.

Weick likens the act of organizing to the theory of natural selection, in which processes of *enactment* (corresponding to the concept of "variation" from evolutionary biology), *selection,* and *retention* are interlinked and interdependent. However, organizational environments are not considered objective phenomena, as they are enacted and influenced by not only the environment, but also by organizational members and the very act of organizing. Hence, even though organizing resembles in many ways the natural selection

process, the significant distinction is that organizational actors are not passive receivers of random variation. Rather, they are active in enacting and modifying the very context they are embedded in. Closely associated with these sub-processes is the concept of *sensemaking* that builds further on the thought that we act first, and then form our ideas and opinions based on what has already happened.

7.3   What is sensemaking?

Sensemaking is an activity central to organizing (Maitlis & Christianson 2014), and captures reality as an ongoing accomplishment that takes form when people make sense of the situations they find themselves in. It is a social process directed at creating order from confusion and chaos (Weick 1995), and to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or violate expectations in some other way (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). To talk about sensemaking is to talk about reality as an ongoing accomplishment (Dionysiou & Tsoukas 2013) that takes form when people make retrospective sense of the situations in which they find themselves and their creations (Weick 1995, 15).

With its roots in pragmatism of the early 20th century,[29] and as a parallel movement to Garfinkel's (1967) use of the term "sensemaking" in the field of ethnomethodology as a way of studying the everyday practices of actors as they interact, interpret, and account for their experiences of reality (Maitlis & Christianson 2014), sensemaking is also an ever-growing and rich stream of literature. Triggered by Weick's (1995) classic text, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, empirical sensemaking research has burgeoned and is now conducted in various contexts from organizational behavior, organizational studies, organization communication, education, and healthcare (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). There is a myriad sensemaking-related definitions, constructs, and specialized forms of sensemaking, such as *sensegiving*, defined as "the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991) and *sensebreaking*, or "the destruction or breaking down of meaning" (Pratt 2000). In the context of global teams, sensemaking can be seen as an organic movement bottom-up of the team-in-the-making, and sensegiving and sensebreaking a form of social influence exerted by a powerful team member or an outside manager or another person.

In its original conception, sensemaking contains seven properties (Weick 1995, 61–62): *identity* (addresses the question about who I am as indicated by

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[29] According to Weick (2006), Dewey's description of life in the spirit of pragmatic philosophy *as interruptions and recoveries to create balance and order* is sensemaking in a nutshell.

the discovery of how and what I think); *retrospect* (to learn what I think, I look back over what I said earlier); *enactment* (I co-create the object or event with others when I say or do something); *social* (what I say and single out and conclude is determined by who socialized me and how I was socialized, as well as by the audience I anticipate will audit or care about the conclusions I reach); *ongoing* (my actions are spread across time, interpretation is continuous); and *extracted cues* (I extract contextual cues to help decide what information is relevant and what explanations are acceptable) (Salancick & Pfeffer 1978). Thus, through enactment and by extracting cues, people in interactions selectively and continuously make retrospective sense of the world they live in, which is reflected in their identities.

7.3.1   What sensemaking is not

"It makes a lot of sense." "My boss is not making any sense at all!" "I cannot make any sense of that poem by Emily Dickinson." Our everyday life is cluttered with the expression, "to make sense," and its many variants. Making sense of sensemaking may be challenging because the concept is part of our everyday language. Here a few definitions of what sensemaking *is not* in the frame of this study.

A specific theory. Weick characterizes sensemaking as a perspective to study organizations, or a "frame of mind about frames of minds that is best treated as a set of heuristics rather than an algorithm" (Weick 1995, xii). Hence, sensemaking is more of a lens, than a unified theoretical framework.

An individual or a collective activity. In the frame of this study, at least, it is both. Organizations observed when the "lights are switched off" and with only artifacts left, do not engage in sensemaking. The people who left for the day do. Team, the phenomenon I am trying to better understand here, is a small organization, a collective at the micro level, and the very basic building block of many modern organizations. Weick explains that sensemaking is grounded in both individual and social activity (Weick 1995, 6), and tensions between social and individual aspects are inherent in organizational sensemaking. A significant body of sensemaking literature explores precisely how inter-subjective meaning is created, and the role of sensemaking in the process (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). Also, in layman's terms, what makes sense to me might not make sense to you, and the outputs of sensemaking efforts of two people facing the same situation may differ dramatically, even if these two people share the same sociocultural background.

The sensemaking of a collectivity tends to rule over individuals. The sanity-madness paradox is a recurring theme in classic literature from Shakespeare to

Dickens to Cervantes. To say, "*Too much sanity may be madness. And maddest of all, to see life as it is and not as it should be,*"[30] while displaying an apparent contradiction, brings us to themes of control, conventions, and acquired truths that are repeated when no one is "mad" enough to search for alternatives, "fight back," and use imagination to keep dreaming, triggering what is, perhaps, much needed change. While looking for "talent" at the level of discourse, many organizations in reality are uncomfortable with creativity and difference, and readily classify people with diverging views, maybe not as mad, but as those who do not quite fit in.

Pure interpretation. We interpret poems, languages, laws, religious texts, etc. Interpretation is a component of sensemaking, but unlike pure interpretation, it not only deals with the interpretation of texts, but also with how the text is constructed and read (Weick 1995, 7). Thus, sensemaking has strong conceptual links to hermeneutics since it is understood both as the interpretation of texts and situations and as an eternal loop joining pre-understandings and understandings.

To these sensemaking "negatives," I also add that sensemaking is not a miracle cure to solve the problems of organizing and global teams. In terms of theorizing, it is a tough quest to balance parsimony with comprehensiveness (Whetten 1989) to make meaningful knowledge claims by resorting to complex and hidden thought processes to explain phenomena. To understand patterns of social sensemaking and how individuals' understandings intertwine with teams' views is not a simple task, so parsimony is inevitably compromised. Due to its immense popularity, sensemaking as a concept has been somewhat diluted and modified over time, and studies looking into how sensemaking unfolds in real time are difficult to conduct (as I learned while doing this one). How do I really know what goes on in peoples' minds if the actors in my study often do not know it themselves? How honest are they in their communications – with themselves and with others? It may be more straightforward to study after the fact how mistakes in flight safety control rooms, industrial plants, or firefighting procedures leading to catastrophes are really a result of a series of unfortunate events that have more to do with shortcomings in human decision making than technology, than to examine how virtually working teams go about their daily lives.

Following these reflections, I propose visiting rich literature in sensemaking in crisis conditions for inspiration. We shall see how using the sensemaking perspective helps illuminate our understanding of how enactment and other properties mesh into more or less fortunate collective interpretations and actions in situations of organizational crisis.

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[30] Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*.

7.3.2 Studies on crisis-type situations

In crisis situations and unexpected events, people must act without proper cues. Even though organizations are always in a process of movement and change, this is especially true in temporary organizations, like global teams often are, where nothing exists until organizing takes place, and people often do not know each other from before and have few opportunities to interact face-to-face. Individuals and teams managing crisis or unexpected events are faced with many dilemmas. On the one hand, hazardous and rapidly unfolding situations are difficult to comprehend, so people want to gather more information to determine the most appropriate action. On the other hand, the demands of the situation often require them to take quick action with incomplete information (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). For example, in the case of a telecom equipment provider's global team composed of customer support and other engineering experts in Spain, Finland, and the US who must recover an outage in a teleoperator customer's messaging system, creative yet systematic troubleshooting protocols are instantaneously put in place for team members to start diagnosing by educated guesswork, followed by a quick fix, and hopefully ensuring the system goes live again as soon as possible. Making a wrong diagnosis costs many hours additional outage time, creating friction with the customer and financial losses for the provider, as end-users do not have access to their usual services and complaints pour in. This type of constant crisis handling is commonplace for global teams working in customer support in telecommunications and IT industries and is part of "business as usual."

Weick (1988, 1990, 1993), in his pioneering work on enactment in crisis management, showed that what are often thought of as technological failures have, in fact, a strong human element (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010), suggesting that sensemaking in crisis conditions is made more difficult because action that is instrumental to understanding the crisis often intensifies it. In other words, to sort out a crisis as it unfolds often requires action that simultaneously generates raw material that is used in sensemaking, thereby affecting the unfolding of the crisis itself. An action taken in a state of confusion and ambiguity can both help solve the situation or make it worse. An individual or a team that is alert to cues and critical of routinized expectations and pre-understandings is in a better position to enact the crisis situation in a more fruitful way, than if merely following set ways and procedures without questioning the underlying assumptions.

Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) expand this stream of literature to not only look at sensemaking and crisis, but also at sensemaking and the turbulent context of organizational change in general (M&As, strategy changes, restructuring, introduction of disruptive technology, etc.). Despite obvious

differences, there are important parallels between the two contexts. Both situations are characterized by ambiguity, confusion, and feelings of disorientation. Additionally, scholars in both fields tend to emphasize technological factors to explain outcomes, thereby obscuring the role of users and the meaning they make of it (Orlikowski 1996). This present study reaches further to include global teams, a stream of literature equally heavy with attempts to find structural and technological explanations to human problems, in this rich body of research. In particular, Maitlis and Sonenshein's (2010) argument defining two core themes underlying sensemaking in turbulent contexts, *shared meanings* and *emotion*, are also critical to the context of teams as we are going to see in the following chapters.

7.4   Making sense of successful global teams

It is fascinating to imagine how individual sensemaking processes intertwine for a virtual team of five strangers from different sociocultural contexts placed in different locations and without regular opportunities for face-to-face communication to function. How does the team build routines or other structures, and what happens when regular team life is interrupted, for example, in the case of a glitch in communication (bad phone lines, intermittently functioning Skype communication), or sudden pressure from outside (tightening project timelines, an angry *communiqué* from a customer, or a sudden addition of a new team member requiring extensive training)? In fact, occurrences or disturbances are quite commonplace in many global teams, and the constant problem solving and contingency management that team members in changing environments often engage in can be understood as representing mini-crises of a sort. Ambiguity, uncertainty, equivocality, and a complicated sociomaterial environment often characterize the life of a global team. How can the perspective of sensemaking help understand the inner workings of global teams? Groups of people do not become committed teams where individuals prioritize team goals more than their own agendas and truly work together towards a common goal by a simple declaration or creation of an organizational chart or project specification. The extent to which individual sensemaking becomes collective on matters crucial to the functioning of the team defines the very degree of the team becoming and remaining a "real team," as opposed to just a group of people working together.

The body of research on how sensemaking unfolds in global teams is extremely limited. A study by Rafaeli et al. (2009) is a rare exception. The authors integrate research streams on sensemaking and team mental models, and suggest that the evolution of a shared mental model concerning the project's

goals and work processes relies on a recursive triangulation of two cycles: a direct cognitive cycle, in which the sensemaking process is influenced by, but also leads to, the team mental model; and an indirect, emotional cycle, in which individual intuition and emotions influence the sensemaking of team members and the emergent team mental model. Haas' (2006) research on traditional teams working in highly political, ambiguous, and knowledge-intensive settings is another example, albeit not from a virtual context. She found that teams operating in conditions that enhanced their sensemaking capabilities performed better. This is particularly significant in knowledge-intensive work settings, where there is often an abundance of both problems and solutions, making it difficult not only to know which solutions are best, but also which problems are most important. It seems natural to argue that in such uncertain contexts, team sensemaking about the material gathered and options available becomes critical (Maitlis & Christianson 2014).

Despite constraining elements embedded in the global team context, such as lack of presence, reliance on technology, and multiple demands placed on team members by different people, team members are actors, agents in co-creating their environment and the team as such, as well as the processes necessary to accomplish the work they are assigned to do. Becoming a team, just like organizing, in general, is often an iterative, ongoing, messy process of trial and error where "best effort" and "good enough" are a matter of fact, and "confused" is a regular state, rather than an expression of a "well planned," "best possible," and "fully rational" course of life by people fully in control of their fates and the life of the team. Following this line of thinking, without some level of shared meanings and collective sensemaking, there will be no team in the true meaning the word.

In Chapters 8–12, I will examine how collective sensemaking is accomplished (or not) in five well-performing teams by broadly focusing on the degree to which inter-subjective shared meanings and emotions (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010) are established, and how that influences what the team becomes. I will also show how the unfolding of events over the teams' life turns them into very different organizations represented by metaphors. From the point of view of style, I rely loosely on narrative form that can be defined as a "sequence of events, experiences, or actions with a plot that ties together different parts into a meaningful whole" (Czarniawska 2004). Following Polkinghorne (1988), I use the term "story" as a synonym for "narrative" to illuminate how different social sensemaking patterns can be in teams that look very similar from the outside. Storytelling through interpretation is a way to explore why certain things happen and why events evolve the way they do. As Ricoeur points out (Dowling 2011, 5), narrative always involves, due to the logic of emplotment, a strong implication of causality, "one thing because of

another." For Ricoeur (ibid, 35), narrative is a way to close the gap between the time of the world (the cosmological time) and the time of the soul (subjective experience of time), and to create a third time, a bridge between the two, specific to the narrative itself that takes into account the characters, events, and meaning nested in the cosmological time that inevitably advances along the immutable laws of the universe, oblivious to all human concerns.

I will tell five team stories under the headings: 1) shared views; 2) forces of influence; 3) unity of the team; 4) hidden thoughts and emotions; and 5) critical events, identified as "themes" in Chapter 5. These themes are broadly similar to some key concepts from the sensemaking theory frame discussed in the previous chapter: events (small and large ones triggering individual and social sensemaking in the teams – the most significant event being the constitution of the team itself), and team members' thoughts and feelings about team identity, capacity to deliver, commitment to the team, and expectations on team life when it comes to both the task outcomes and social interactions. All of these are forces influencing what the team becomes and how successful they are along the way, key concepts behind the "why" and "how" of these teams' paths. In each team's story, I also include a brief description of who the team members actually are, the "sensemakers" and agents responsible for making the teams what they become in the end. These are not meant to be exhaustive personality profiles, but helpful insights into better understanding some of the team dynamics and outcomes.

Before moving forward, a word on how well each team in this study performed. All of the teams were delivering good output, although there was often some variation from case to case and some teams were better than others, overall. No one in these teams ever made a formal complaint to the course instructors and no mediation for conflicts or sorting out misunderstandings was needed; this is enough to assume the teams were doing reasonably well. These five were well-performing teams, among many other teams that did not do quite as well as they did. In the chapters that follow, I present them in an ascending hierarchical order, from the worst to best performing when it comes to social dynamics (please see Appendix 6 for evaluations of each team's task performance).

Emily Dickinson in her well-known poem[31] suggests that telling the truth "slant(ed)" indirectly may sometimes be more effective than telling the truth "as it is." This may well be partially why certain novels, plays, poems, stories, as well as theories, travel across time and cultural contexts so well, and have

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[31] *"Tell all the truth but tell it slant/ Success in Circuit lies/ Too bright for our infirm Delight/ The Truth's superb surprise/ As Lightning to the Children eased/ With explanation kind/ The Truth must dazzle gradually/ Or every man be blind"* (Emily Dickinson).

somewhat of a universal appeal. While I do not pretend I can tell *the* truth,[32] I hope to live up to Weick's expectation of what sensemaking ideally is when reflected in stories:

> *If accuracy is nice but not necessary for sensemaking, then what is necessary? The answer is, something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something which resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively but also can be used prospectively, something that captures both feeling and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities, something that is fun to contrast. In short, what is necessary in sensemaking is a good story*. (Weick 1995, 60–61)

Now, let us meet the *Chain Gang*, the *Dysfunctional Family*, the *Sandbox*, the *Scouts*, and the *Master Cooks*. In the spirit of the Heideggerian aletheia (or alethic hermeneutics as discussed in Chapter 4), the purpose of which is to reveal the hidden and the invisible, I start with original illustrations of the team metaphors to add a visual dimension to an otherwise textual interpretation.[33] Then, before going into the teams' stories per se to disclose how each team became its metaphor, I briefly describe what each team metaphor means.

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[32] Some truths are more credible than others – and even though many truths are possible, there are not as many truths as there are people. Letiche (2000) writes about phenomenal research that operates in a world of *heteroglossia* (allowing for two or more expressed viewpoints) that can be termed ironic. Ironic because it does not attempt to establish any absolute "truth(s)," but does have interesting perspectives and lively texts as its goal.

[33] In fact, we are used to all kinds of symbolic representation: diagrams, formulas, flow charts, boxes and arrows; even written language relies on symbols – letters. The world we are immersed in is rationalist, so these representations are accepted forms of expression in much organizational scholarship. In this sense, I claim the images I use are just another symbolic form we are less used to seeing in the academic context, but not necessarily of any lower value than the other ones, as their aim is to help the reader to see "the invisible," the result of my interpretation, and to create abstract knowledge, just as with the more commonly used graphical conceptual frameworks and the like.

8   THE CHAIN GANG

Figure 5   The Chain Gang

8.1   The backdrop

People in a chain gang work hard – but some work harder than others. Although all members had big dreams and plans at one time, presently, they are just individuals chained to each other, executing given tasks in tough circumstances without much joy or team spirit. Chain gang members do not easily trust each other, but strong bonds of unconditional mutual help and assistance form and grow stronger over time between some members. In a hostile world, loyalty matters more than rationality. While some still see a glimpse of the blue skies, others may have given up for good on a brighter future, or on each other. What matters most is one's own destiny and the task at hand, even for the one who is dreaming about the great escape.

8.2   The Chain Gang from within

Sometimes, groups of people who do not have any other choice but to work together achieve great things: many bridges, railways, and other structures have been built by forced labor. Many of us may have experienced the same in firms; sometimes, teamwork is a test of endurance and one of those things one just has

to put up with. The Chain Gang is a team in the sense of Adair (1986), "a distinctive class of group, which is more task oriented than other groups and which has a set of obvious rules and rewards for its members." Yet, the members have not chosen to work together, and if given a choice, they would rather be somewhere else, perhaps in another team with members of their own choosing, or perhaps admitting teamwork is not for them to begin with. Unlike people serving prison terms, the work in this Chain Gang is voluntary, although participants may have underestimated the tasks before committing. Now team life is instrumental; the work must be done, all must contribute to qualify for rewards, and a potential withdrawal is not a pleasant option. Tangible tensions are palpable between some members and different sub-groups have formed. The invisible digital fence saves the team from open conflict. One has to wonder, how is this team's successful performance possible – and what is the price of success?

8.2.1   Meet the characters

There are six members in the team.

Ly, a Vietnamese woman in her late twenties based in Finland, describes herself as a "sometimes lazy person who gets things done effectively and efficiently once I get started." In this team, we do not get to see the lazy Ly, but the ambitious, hardworking, and task-oriented Ly, who is also pregnant, as her teammates discover only in the end of team life when she becomes extremely exhausted. She never complains openly, though, and has a low level of tolerance for what she considers poor behavior or incompetence. In many ways, she corresponds to the stereotype of a hardworking Asian (as her mate, Victor, points out), but there is a surprising trait in her that defines her way of working. Ly is very direct, outspoken, and impatient when it comes to teamwork. At the expense of harmony, she just wants to get the job done and does not see any point in meeting the other team members, even over Skype, and prefers to work online.[34] She seems slightly annoyed by other team members' meeting requests, "We do not have to be at the same place at the same time . . . it is difficult to organize, so I do not think the virtual world is a big deal any more. It should be no problem for people, they are so busy, the internet makes things easier . . . . Why do we have to make it a big deal?" she privately questions. If she does not like the quality of someone else's work, she is not shy to comment or erase teammates' contributions, creating tension and hard feelings, especially when it

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[34] There is another side to Ly. As she describes, *"My family means the world to me,"* and she reports being much more community oriented in her own Vietnamese circles. Here, in this team, it is the task and her career that matter. She does not seek strong social ties at work, only in her private life.

comes to Frederic and Maria. Together with Lena, Ly keeps the case presentation together time after time, makes sure the video is done, and pushes the team forward in ways that may make the team efficient and effective, but which may be perceived as insensitive and rude. As Anita summarizes, "Ly did more than the others, she was very motivated . . . She mentioned this in the beginning. No free riders! Rules were set from the beginning. Ready to work hard." Sort of a slave driver, some may say.[35]

Frederic, a French man in his mid-twenties based in Finland, is a true musketeer, a young man with high ideals and principles. A former army man, he believes in God and wants to be proud of his achievements. Sharing one's experiences and learning from strangers is important to him. When he talks about a team, he really means it in the sense of "all for one and one for all."[36] He finds virtual work challenging due to the lack of contact and thinks that *"it is really hard to manage with all the people only on the internet,"* preferring to *"have some physical contact and to see the person I am speaking with."* He likes to meet with some of his mates occasionally in the nearby coffee shop to talk about assignments, human dynamics in the team, and life in general.[37] Frederic has a close connection with Maria, whom he knows from before, and they both defend and look after each other when times are tough. Over time, Frederic clashes severely with Ly, whom he considers rude and imposing. With her, his experience from teamwork in conflict situations does not work, and he feels increasingly constrained and inadequate.

Maria, a Finnish woman in her mid-twenties based in Finland, has experience in multinational teamwork, and she is currently working in other cross-border teams in a big firm. She likes to take the role of "a steersman," ensuring the team reaches its goals, but perhaps more importantly, in a social role, "to help encourage others to give their best input and ideas." After a strong start in the team, Maria experiences a high workload on other projects and the death of a close family member – two events that impact her participation negatively. While other team members accept this and are quite understanding in the beginning, her unreliability creates tensions over time. For Maria, giving and getting respect is important in teamwork. For this, Ly's abrupt ways are not

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[35] Ly confesses in the interview that she thinks her being so direct has probably caused her not to "go anywhere" in jobs she has had. Yet, she is faithful to her ways and does not try to change.

[36] Frederic's army experience has clearly influenced his expectations on what teamwork should be like. He refers to his team as a "squad" quite frequently and regrets this team not being like a true team, a squad, in the army where people were helpful and one could trust one's life in teammates' hands. He uses the term "false" when he talks about this team, which is quite revealing: *"When I was in the army, we also worked with a lot of nationalities and in some special units, and it was also hard to manage with them, but I think here it was something different . . . there were no false relationships, one had to prove one was strong enough to be in the group and that one put enough input into it."*

[37] The occasional face-to-face meetings take place between Frederic, Maria, and Victor only. Ly never joins (Lena and Anita live in Latvia and do not meet in person).

always to her liking, and she unconditionally sides with her friend, Frederic, when conflicts arise.

Victor, a Finnish man in his mid-twenties based in Finland, is a former professional hockey player whose career was cut short due to injury but who still has "a strong will to win." He sees himself as a good team player and as a "laid-back person" with many interests. Indeed, he stays away from conflict in this team and rather tries to contribute to team cohesion without taking big roles (or making unreasonably big efforts).[38] Victor likes face-to-face interactions and feels that "*things are much harder to solve online . . . for instance, one can easily write something that might offend someone even though you really don't mean it*." In work life, he thinks that "a good group makes the difference between a good and bad workplace" and feels he is able to adapt. In this team, Victor does his part without pushing the limits or volunteering to take leading positions, and he stays away from creating or sustaining socially difficult situations.

Lena, a German woman in her mid-twenties based in Latvia, admits she has very little business experience thus far, but she is looking forward to the challenge of teamwork in this team. She is good at making audiovisual presentations, both technically and performing voiceovers for videos, valuable skills to complete the cases successfully. Lena does not seek conflicts but rather prefers to solve problems: *"I would rather work in a great working atmosphere than not feel comfortable with what I am doing."* However, she understands that working under stress is challenging and focuses on getting the work done, without thinking much about the team social life. Yet, she finds solving "extensive tasks" without face-to-face contact difficult, and she would "prefer face-to-face meetings and brainstorming together." Yet, even though Anita and Lena live in the same city, they meet in person only once to work together due to time constraints and the convenience of the virtual work environment.

Anita, a Latvian woman in her early thirties based in Latvia, has a very busy job at a financial institution, and despite her commitment, she has trouble finding time for team meetings and working on the cases. For her, teamwork must be done on weekends or late evenings, which the others find difficult to accept. She considers herself a responsible person but has trouble fitting everything in her calendar. With trial and error, some patience, tension, and adjustments from her teammates, she succeeds and her task input, once she gets to it, tends to be of good quality. With a background in humanities, she is learning oriented and, in principle, avoids conflict and tries to work by "setting

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[38] At least on one occasion, Victor tries to calm Frederic down and advises him not to care about Ly's bad manners, a gesture Frederic greatly appreciates.

a good example" and "striving for the good feeling." Other team members tend to refer to her as a "good team player."[39]

8.2.2 Shared views

In the beginning, all team members agree with the idea that the team, with its diversified knowledge base, is capable of delivering good results.[40] In fact, when it comes to task delivery, the team learns to develop routines, and the members know what to expect from each other – an impression that only grows stronger over time with the accumulation of good task results, and even though the social dynamics between some members become infected:

> *. . . over the cases, what I found to be, you know, quite surprising . . . how we sort of started to connect our ideas, you know, make everyone . . . it was so that Case 5 went twice as fast as Case 1 because we were able to . . . we got to know each other and, you know, I know that she is going to do her part; I knew he is going to do something.* (Victor, interview)

To some extent, members share a sense of the need to balance the workload in a fair way, and they manage to take shifts in taking on heavier and lighter tasks, at least from time to time, although in the end, it is clear to all that there is a hierarchy; Ly did more and Maria less than the others. However, under the surface, there is considerable turmoil, and the team membership starts to resemble forced labor, with Frederic and Ly, in particular, who cannot stand each other, and Maria who has personal struggles. While everyone is committed to being part of the team, what "being committed" means differs drastically across team members. The biggest difference is at play between Ly for whom the only thing that matters is "surviving the tasks"[41] after interpreting that most of the team members are not as quality focused, ambitious, and skilled as she is, and Frederic for whom individual commitment is directly linked with the team being a real "squad," with strong emotional ties where members can depend on each other and where everyone is accepted the way they are and are given an opportunity to learn. The other type of difference appears between Ly and Victor. Victor is willing to do good work, but not at any expense to his other responsibilities and personal life, an attitude that is very disappointing to Ly who wants the team to be perfect:

> *In the beginning I wanted to have high quality . . . but I did not feel people were contributing that well . . . they did not pay*

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[39] Both Ly and Victor explicitly refer to Anita as a "good team player" in their interviews.

[40] The team gives itself the name, *"Team Diversity,"* in the team kick-off meeting, as all members come from a different country.

[41] Ly refers to her approach to work in this team as *"killing the chicken,"* just getting the task done.

attention to that. I do not know if it was my personal or cultural . . . so I tried to avoid . . . help the most I can . . . and they do what they want . . . so I have to stay away from that. (Ly, interview)

Ly is a bit confused and quite unsure how to make sense of the situation – for her, she puts in her best effort and the others do not. For Ly with her own self-view as a quality-oriented and ambitious person wanting to raise the team to her own standards, the others' apparently non-ambitious orientation is a bit of a mystery. She makes sense of this as moral or cognitive shortcomings and a laid-back attitude, rather than as possible negative reactions to her rather non-empathetic communication style, or as legitimate alternative views on teaming and quality standards of deliverables. Immediately, she distances herself socially from her teammates and does not even seek to meet Maria and Frederic, her two local colleagues. Although she may develop closer ties with people in other social settings, these people, in her view, are not worth getting closer to socially. Lena, reflecting back on her past team life in the Chain Gang, states that "this team could have worked if all members were committed to the same level," and she is probably right; the team would have been a more balanced organization if the members had converged either towards Victor's more laid-back work philosophy[42] or Ly's perfectionist one. Both Victor and Ly may have given good (enough) team results, but together, these orientations just created tension, even though somewhat paradoxically, the task results the team was measured by were consistently very good.

Maria's situation is different. From the end of the fourth case, struck by grief in her personal life, she lives her own tragedy privately, which has a serious negative impact on her real and perceived commitment, and which her team members receive with mixed feelings. Frederic whom Maria sympathizes with and with whom she has very close social ties, gives her unconditional support and convinces her to stay in the team when she wants to give up as "together they can pull through." Ly, understanding of the situation at first and allowing Maria to take a leave from teamwork, gets upset when she sees Maria attending a social function. "How come she is able to meet with people and not do work?" she wonders, adding to her already negative view on the Frederic/Maria pairing, and not considering that executing intellectually hard casework in a difficult social setting is different in nature than merely attending a social function.

Although when everyone is online discussing how to solve the cases, communication about work seems to flow well, and the team is productive when designing solutions together, there are always problems in the execution

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[42] Victor takes the fact that the team's pacing style is quite deadline driven in a relaxed and even fatalistic way, *"I would say I would hope that we would have better scheduling . . . (laughs) . . . but that's something that you cannot just change,"* while Ly grows increasingly stressed and annoyed over time.

phase.[43] There is a serious chasm between team members on what "communication" is and what it should be. Ly does not feel the need to meet in person or over Skype. For her, work is work, and social contact is nice with people one likes and is close with, otherwise unnecessary. All that is needed is for team members to be online when agreed, do their work, and answer the questions surfacing in team chat forums with the shortest possible delays. The perceived lack of responsiveness is a substantial problem for Ly, who views this as a moral problem of an inferior, irresponsible attitude to work. Yet, at times, the others may simply not know what to say, or they withdraw, fearing negative or unpleasant messages from Ly who then attributes the team "communication problem" entirely to shortcomings in her peers:

> **Interviewer**: *Was it hard for you?*
>
> **Ly**: *The most annoying thing in this group was communication*
>
> **Interviewer**: *How did you communicate?*
>
> **Ly**: *I think the attitude or behavior of people was a problem. We used Facebook chat for that . . . so annoying when you can see people have seen your message, but they do not reply . . . It's so obvious that they have seen it, but they do not contribute with any opinion. Sometimes, it was just Lena and I interacting. Lena was the person who created the most templates for Prezi and Google Docs in the beginning. So it was like . . . how do I get ideas from others if they do not talk?*

While Lena enjoys Ly's appreciation, she suffers from the lack of contact with her team members, and tries to learn to cope with the frantically paced online environment she has been thrown in. Anita's personal preferences for communication do not matter to her that much and she never complains; she is on a survival mode between many projects, and the asynchronous communication mode that becomes the standard in the team saves her from having to abandon the team altogether. Frederic, Maria, and Victor try to meet face-to-face every now and then to discuss difficult topics and to make communication more personal at least in their sub-group. The team members' expectations on what communication should be like are not shared, and no one seems to be willing to adjust, which pulls the team apart as a social organization.

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[43] Only once, at the end of the fourth case (for which the team receives the grade of *excellent*, releasing some of her pressures), Ly expresses partial happiness with her team: *"This week, I took the main initiative to hold the team together, and every member also tried to work with this case, so the teamwork was to some extent smooth and we finished early."*

8.2.3   Forces of influence

The team charter the Chain Gang develops in the very first team meeting is very explicit and detailed about how the team members are expected to act. Here are a few basic team rules the members agree on before kicking off their first case:

> *When the need arises and the discussion seems to get off track, all team members have the right and the responsibility to steer the discussion towards a conclusion or a decision. /Everyone is treated and respected as an equal member of the team, regardless of differing experiences, abilities, skills, and capabilities. /Everyone will follow the agreed schedules and deadlines, as well as the division of tasks/and responsibilities. /Everyone is responsible for giving his or her best input to each case.*

While this looks very good on paper, members' interpretations of this initial agreement differ substantially, and when tensions grow, it becomes hard to remember that the team agreed to "respect everyone as an equal member," for instance, and this charter sinks into oblivion. While Ly may think that a colleague "avoiding work" (Maria) or "unqualified for teamwork" (Frederic) or just "lazy" (Victor) is not worth her respect, Maria and Frederic may think the same of Ly due to her total lack of "empathy" and "rudeness." It is not even clear what "follow schedules" refers to exactly (what about quality? how do we deal with contingencies? or, what if someone is unsure of how to do the task?) or what "to give one's best input" means (the "absolute best" or "good enough" under the circumstances?). No formal team leader is assigned, but from early on, Ly starts pushing the team to her desired direction – towards excellence. She is fiercely focused on the task, and the emotional and human dimensions go totally unnoticed by her. She seems insensitive and uncaring, in particular to Maria and Frederic, who both consider her to be an unfit leader, even though they acknowledge that she possesses the needed technical and task skills:

> *I think even to take leadership, she was quite aggressive: 'Okay, you have to do this, you have to do that . . .', and I think it is not natural leadership . . . she was more taking the leadership for herself, not the group, and I think a leader has to be a leader for the group, not only for himself.* (Frederic, interview)

> *. . . you just cannot direct but also need to encourage, and I think she did not encourage, like at some point I had to do the financial plan or something . . . and I was not able to do it.* (Maria, interview)

In many ways, team members' understanding of what leadership means in this team diverges. At extremes, for Ly it means getting the task done, and for Frederic it means securing a socially functioning and psychologically safe environment to work and grow. Maria acknowledges Ly's contributions, is grateful Ly took

charge when she herself, usually sort of a natural leader in her own view, was not able to contribute, and admits that "Ly is hardworking" and "made the whole group work, even though her methods were not the best ones." Anita and Lena, while aware of Ly's abrupt communication style, are not excessively bothered by it, and focus on the task and deadlines, sort of personal "survival" instead, just like Ly. Ly stubbornly believes the others should do what she tells them to as she genuinely feels she "knows more," a claim that is never really substantiated in any other way than in her persistence, diligence, and work ethic:

> *This (course) is knowledge intensive . . . hard to tell if people are good or not ahead of time . . . how can I tell them that I know more . . . hard to show . . . even if I know more, it's like 'Why should I believe you?'* (Ly, interview)

While Ly interprets her colleagues as being comparatively less qualified than she is, the others do not necessarily see the situation in the same way. The only generally accepted difference is that she works hard, more than others most of the time, and the whole team benefits from her work. When Ly tries to enact her sense of superiority, others view this as an expression of social incompetence. Frederic and Maria, in particular, emphasize the need of social support and equality instead, while Lena, Anita, and Victor tend to let Ly's attitude "go." In particular, Victor ignores her, and at times, tries to calm Frederic down over a coffee and advises him to "move on and don't let her bother you too much." This leads to conflicting sensemaking over legitimacy and notions of how leadership/followership should be organized in the team. Over time, the team becomes divided: Ly, Anita, and Lena find a shared understanding of how to bring the work forward, while Frederic, Maria, and Victor build close ties and unconditionally support each other. The team becomes like two teams in one, forcefully joined together by more and more asynchronous communication. Ly's growing anger towards Maria and Frederic not following her instructions is evident – consistently making sense of this as outcomes of their lack of ambition, competence, and reliability (and not as a result of bad team interactions contingent upon her brusque communication) – and she gives up on them and the team – and focuses on getting the tasks and the team "over and done" with:

> *Hard to tell them that they are doing wrong. I was trying to. They were jumping at me. Mainly Maria and Frederic. Because they know each other so they are protecting each other. When I say Frederic is not doing the right thing . . . I feel what he found he copied somewhere . . . not related . . . I gave him time to revise it . . . and he said he did not know how to do that. And then I say 'I question your competence' . . . and then Maria was jumping at me . . . 'no, you are not helping . . .' I tried to help but it did not work.* (Ly, interview)

Ly here interprets her interventions as being helpful, giving feedback, and getting the work on track, while the others, allied against her and with each other, irrationally "jump" at her. Frederic is very aware of his junior status as a consultant in this team and expects the "team" to support him in the learning process. He does not understand why Ly is so judgmental and does not help him learn. Ly attacks his legitimacy to be part of the team and questions his integrity as someone who "copies" information, which outrages both him and Maria. It is her manners more than her message that they find unacceptable.

There is great confusion whether or not there is a leader in the group, what "to lead" means, and how influence is exercised in general. Anita acknowledges Ly taking responsibility for the tasks and being "a kind of leader," while Lena rejects Ly's position as the leader in the group as she, too, takes a large portion of tasks related to the coordination of team activities, particularly to get the cases started. Maria acknowledges Ly's work input but never refers to her as a leader, and Frederic, for whom to even exist, leadership exercised by any leader must be "natural," and who respects more "people who have the ability to hear than the capability to speak," rejects Ly altogether as someone to work with. For Ly, Frederic is limited in his capability to hear and act on her expert advice, and for Frederic, Ly does not bother listening to him and the others, and in his understanding, acts as a social bully and a socially totally incompetent person. Both of them are sort of "deaf" to each other. Victor thinks there are no leaders in the team and that one of the team's strengths is that no one takes "big roles." Although he thinks Ly has been a "tough lady from the start," this does not bother him that much, as he feels free to act and take charge when he wants. In his understanding, they are all equals bringing in different qualities and stepping in at different times, and he does not think that Ly's coordination activities are a sign of leadership in any way. He describes his view on how things got done:

> . . . now I see it like I said, different personalities have different leadership capabilities . . . let's say someone is good at summarizing the ideas, and someone is good at organizing and so on, just to try to fit it together, but it takes time for a team to sort of find the best practice to do this . . . .I also think that, like you say, if someone knows more about an area, you know he or she should step up, but in my mind, it does not have to go that way that 'you are leading this case because you know about that' . . . and also help others without being 'a leader.' (Victor, interview)

Victor does not share some of his colleagues' extreme and asymmetrical views on prevailing processes of social influence in the team, but rather makes sense of the leadership-in-action as based on situational variation. Everyone has certain capabilities to engage in acts of leadership based on how the competence he or she has matches the need at hand. His disposition has a somewhat neutralizing effect on the otherwise polarized team dynamics of social influence.

8.2.4 Unity of the team

The Chain Gang never forms a truly united team, although in the beginning, everyone is hopeful. The team is even able to solve their very first conflict in what at first appears to be a successful manner. During the first case, a division in the team between the two geographic locations, Latvia and Finland, is caused by difficulties in finding a timeslot for team meetings due to conflicting schedules and, in particular, by the extreme difficulties Anita has in finding time to work on the projects. The problem is openly framed by the collocated members in Finland as a direct message to Anita: "How are you planning to address your problems with participating in work with this team? Do you want to be part of this team?" After a quick negotiation, the team is able to overcome this problem, partially at least, by allowing for more independent offline work and by abandoning ambitions to work via Skype meetings to allow Anita to continue. However, this way of working does not allow the team to form as a social organization, which makes it possible to avoid facing gradually increasing conflicts and differences of opinion. Anita explains that "even though we were able to resolve the division, there was no real team feeling . . . overcoming difficulties together was a unifying force . . . and I know the others struggled as well." She feels that what matters the most, despite both resolved and unresolved difficulties and conflicts, is that the tasks were handed in on time each time and the outcomes were outstanding most of the time. Anita is also grateful for not having been kicked out of the team for her low availability.

After the initial coordination problems during the first case are solved, even Frederic qualifies his team as "almost professional" and is ready to optimistically face new challenges – before the team has trouble solving the second case and tensions rise. There is another brief, bright moment when after receiving a disappointing grade for the second case, which functions as an external shock that unites the team, the team manages to upgrade to "excellent" for the third case with a well-balanced effort. The team, however, falls back into confusion with Case 4 over what the case is about, how it should be solved, and how to organize the teamwork. Right after Case 3, even Ly reports that her stress level is eased, and Victor feels that "the team is co-operating and performing better and better all the time." The team members unanimously make sense of their team being a true team when high task performance meets a rewarding, or at least not disappointing, team social experience. After the initial enthusiasm at the moment of team formation, this only happens once in this team's life.

Maria and Frederic are the only team members with strong social ties, but these were formed before the team was ever constituted. Their bonding is not very team oriented either, as it is personal and overrides any team-level or task considerations. When Maria talks about an *"encouraging team"* that helped

her not quit when she suffered a personal loss, she really means Frederic and Victor (whom she considers "one of the strongest" in the group) – their support being enough of a "team" support for her to keep going.[44] Otherwise, she talks about the team being just individuals working for their assignments as a "problem-solving unit" and not much of a "group effort." Victor focuses on the need to meet or at least interact in a synchronized way for a team to work properly:

> *You know what helped me a lot was that I was able to meet with Frederic and Maria and have some chit chat and talk about everything else but the case and then something about the case, so that helped me a lot and build some trust . . . and it does not necessarily have to be in the same physical town. Skype would work also.* (Victor, interview)

In this way, the three "socially oriented" team members form what they make sense of as "their team," but what is really a sub-team that forms firmer and firmer personal relationships with each other over time. The "task-oriented" team members form their own sub-team in which they feel comfortable and find rewarding, where no unnecessary time is wasted in social chit chat and where the purpose is to *work*.

Ly keeps on pushing the group, but no one has any idea how tough the high workload, the feeling that she has to "push," and the sense of responsibility are on her. They do not realize that she is just waiting for the team to dissolve and for the last task to be finished.[45] The external pressure in terms of task requirements combined with her high ambition is a source of a lot of stress, which she tries to cope with by focusing on the task only and ignoring the worsening team dynamics altogether. This make her feel powerless, although she never conceptualizes the situation as something she should take any personal responsibility for. The fault, in her view, resides in the incompetent, lazy, or otherwise unqualified others. In the end, Ly is happy that "she does not have to work with this team ever again." At the same time, she reveals a softer, harmony-oriented side that she felt had to be abandoned to endure the "forced labor" situation imposed on her:

> *I was surprised with the good grades, the group was not working in good harmony, just like parts and not connected . . . like with the second case . . . I was so frustrated to put together the stuff in Prezi . . . it was not connected at all . . . I asked myself how to do this and that . . . I would have liked to know my teammates better*

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[44] Frederic is able to persuade Maria to stay in the team by showing unwavering support and using expressions like "we are going to survive this together" in his communications with her, enacting his "army squad" team mentality to some extent.

[45] The degree of Ly's discontent is only revealed when she refuses to meet with the rest of the team for the final interview.

and learn about their skills. This was time intensive so I did not have time to study, so I was lacking the learning in theory. It was just like 'killing the chicken,' getting the job done. (Ly, interview)

8.2.5 Hidden thoughts and emotions

There is a lot going on under the surface in the Chain Gang. All team members try to put what they consider serious effort into their work, although not always to others' full satisfaction. From the task perspective, the team is successful for which members take pride, but a seemingly irreparable chasm builds up between Frederic and Ly, whose temperaments seem to be totally irreconcilable and who do not even try to mend the gradually worsening situation. Frederic, and to a lesser extent Maria,[46] focus on the team's emotional and social side and cannot accept Ly's cold, insensitive, and even rude task orientation,[47] a way of being that Lena and Anita end up accepting, even though Anita feels at some point "attacked, hurt and helpless."

Frederic bonds with Maria whom he is friends with and trusts, and maintains a habit of going for a cup of coffee with Victor to discuss the case work and to vent his frustrations. While he acknowledges Ly as a knowledgeable person taking an important role of influence in the team, none of this matters to him as he resents her lack of manners and takes her interventions as personal insults. He does not even tend to consider her task input when describing who does what in the team, and gets clearly emotional and constrained when Ly's name is mentioned. For him, "Maria makes the presentation right," even though Ly is in charge of the final version every time. Frederic interprets team life through a lens of personal drama in which the teamwork is like "being a lost person on an island who never fished or hunted, even built a hut . . . survival." He tries to contain his emotions, but the situation gets too difficult, as he feels "attacked, disrespected, and inadequate"[48] and is incapable of even trying to consider the type of pressure Ly is under as a possible, or at least partial, explanation for her extremely direct communication style. With the tight deadlines and carrying much of the responsibility for the final team deliverable, something Frederic admits he is too junior to be in charge of, Ly is quite understandably stressed, a sensemaking path that does not occur to him.

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[46] Maria thinks in the beginning that she and Ly are *similar* in a sense; both want to get the task done and can take a leading role if needed. However, this initial sympathy is erased over time because of diverging feelings over team social aspects.

[47] Maria finds the way Ly speaks to Frederic unacceptable and describes her as an "offensive person" (she uses the Finnish word, *päällekäyvä,* difficult to translate into English without losing nuance).

[48] Frederic explains during the Case 4 that *"a feeling of not being in the right place, I can guarantee you, is the worst feeling ever."*

Ly is stretched under an unreasonable workload she has taken for herself and has no patience for what she considers a lack of competence, laziness, or commitment from others. She needs the team to do well to maintain her grades, and also because she is pregnant and worried about her immigration status and income level. Yet, she never shares any of this with her teammates, but instead hides behind the computer screen. She thinks it is the team that has made her stressed and believes, "I would have been better off doing the tasks alone." Her tone is often bitter when she makes sense of other team members' behavior, in general, as being a consequence of lacking motivation to learn, not having initiative, or even refusing to obey her:

> *They did not want to do that/ It is easy to do that, but I think they did not want to learn/ Lena was the one who volunteered . . . it was her voice on the video all the time . . . Others, they did not want to stand up to do those things, it is just they submit their parts and that's it/ That Finnish girl, she did not obey,* etc. (Ly)

Ly thinks equal contribution means delivering output up to her standards, and she does not consider the impact of different backgrounds and starting points of the team members. For instance, as Maria points out, the content Frederic provides is of good value if one manages to see behind his poorly written English and the formatting of the text. The pragmatic Lena is not aware of the extent of the brewing conflict, although she acknowledges Ly is "sharp" when dividing tasks. Not liking the virtual work environment too much, she struggles with motivation as in her view the team members ideally "should support each other more" and "there is too much work and a new task starts right after delivering the last." Lena is not the only one trying to stay motivated. Ly complains (other than about her teammates) about the lack of instructions, guidance, time to learn, and Frederic feels like "overtraining, overdoing, just pushing up to continue almost giving up." Even though they never rally against instructions or openly complain, team members attribute some of their problems to unreasonably tough tasks from the "management" and to too tight timelines they have to comply with.

8.2.6 Critical events

This team sends itself on a destructive path right from the beginning, as initial contact making becomes a negative experience for all, setting a distorted mood for teamwork that the members are not able to reverse. Even a sad personal event in Maria's life becomes part of the team drama due to the lack of communication, trust, and openness between members. Even though the team

succeeds in securing everyone's commitment for task execution, this is often a result of coercive processes and hostile behavior.

Others do not answer Ly's first message. As soon as her teammates' names and contact information are announced, Ly sends out a message requesting an online meeting – and fails to get answers in the following hours. She then sends another very direct push message, immediately triggering defensive behavior. Ly talks about how the team got started:

> *It did not start nice . . . I tried to contact people, 'Are you joining the course or not?' No answers in one day . . . and then I sent a push message and I get like 'don't be so aggressive.' So they did not have time to reply yet . . . but we had a deadline and I did not know them. So it was not a good start.* (Ly, interview)

Without a reply from her teammates, their commitment was not clear to Ly because "I did not know them and had never worked with them and did not know if they even existed." Frederic, in particular, feels that Ly's assertive communication style from the very beginning makes working with her "a real stress." Not a good starting point for executing six challenging tasks.

Anita is almost kicked out of the team. During the first week, Anita is not able to participate in team meetings due to her other commitments, thus becoming somewhat of an outsider in the team. This is against the "no free-riding" policy the team had agreed on in the beginning. The teammates in Finland join together in an effort to ask Anita to explain how she is going to improve her level of participation – or else "be kicked out of the team." Lena, more sensitive to Anita's difficult situation between her day job, MBA, and family, steps in to defend Anita, promising they would work it out together.

However, sparing Anita from being expelled has the consequence of the team dropping any attempts to have face-to-face communication and scaling down ambitions for simultaneous communication, making the escalation of hidden conflicts and problem avoidance easier.[49] So, by solving the problem of a lack of time for having meetings with a decision to not have any creates another one. But in the moment, this rather direct communication helps, and the team had "nothing to complain about" regarding Anita's participation. From that moment on, as Maria put it, Anita's task outputs were always timely and of reasonably good quality. As an added benefit, this rather harsh episode helped everyone in the team make sense of the team's "no free-riding" policy as a serious one.

Maria's close relative dies. Sometime between Case 4 and 5, Maria suddenly announces she cannot work because a close relative, father or grandfather (no one really knows), has died. Victor explains:

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[49] Victor explains in the interview: "*How I remember it, Anita explained the situation to us very well and she said that 'I want to contribute and I want to be part of this,' so we just had to find ways to connect with each other, and it was probably because of that we started using Google Docs, so even though she was not a part of our meetings, she could participate.*"

> *Yes, actually it was probably on Monday or Tuesday during one case when she said that 'guys, I won't be able to do anything.' Of course, everyone understands that, so we decided that other members would do her part.* (Victor, interview)

While Frederic and Victor stand behind Maria, "being understanding" has its limits for some, which comes up when Ly spots Maria taking part in a university social activity. Ly, with already a rather negative opinion about Maria, is quite judgmental, overall, thinking Maria is using a death in the family as a way to avoid work in the team:

> *I was confused . . . because then she (Maria) was still joining the organizational activities . . . if she is not emotionally able to attend work . . . then how could she attend social activities? I did not understand that!* (Ly, interview)

> *I feel if she is too sad if someone close dies . . . she would not be able to do social activities . . . So I wondered why? She just said, 'sorry, I cannot do this, I have to go home' . . .* (Ly, interview)

For Maria, she had no choice other than to participate in her role as the leader of the student union, a matter Ly is unaware of, and for her in the state she is in, doing cognitively and socially charged work is not the same as participating and leading a social event. Also Lena gets upset later on when she waits in vain for Maria's input as the deadline approaches. In the end, she has to do the work herself, "I swallowed my anger and moved on . . . she has some problems at home . . ." Lena interprets. Maria is very humble about her behavior when she finally comes back and openly acknowledges in the end that "I am the person who did the least work." This sad family event and how Maria behaved, and how her behavior was interpreted further increased the level of tension in the team and the division between Ly's and Frederic's "camps."

8.3 Summary

While the members of the *Chain Gang* are proud of what they achieved, they all agree that there was no team really, after all. Team life for them was only about people managing to reach a sufficient level of coordination to execute six demanding tasks under mounting pressure. The differences between the dynamics in the task- and people-oriented sub-teams, different understandings of what the leadership dynamics in the team were or should be, and different ambition levels lead to a sort of team level cacophony where some got stressed and overworked, some remained quite neutral, and some became depressed, hurt, and doubting their capabilities. Exhausted, everyone was relieved at the dissolution of this team. The most important sensemaking processes in this team

were related to the importance different members gave to social integration. One person's sensemaking of others' behavior as lacking ambition, capacity, or reliability triggered directive and "non-social" communication, something that then further increased the "non-sociality" of the group work. The widening gap between the members' views on whether the team is a social or a task-resolving entity to begin with made the team practically broken – most likely beyond reparation.

9 THE DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

Figure 6 The Dysfunctional Family

9.1 The backdrop

A dysfunctional family is usually plagued by conflict and misbehavior of some sort. Sadly but not surprisingly, people in such families often live their lives with the understanding that such an arrangement is normal. Often, parents are not able or willing to act as such, and there is a mood of discomfort and uncertainty lingering in the air. The family is lacking coherence and direction to provide a place for everyone to fully evolve both as individuals and as a family unit. While in some dysfunctional families, the source of the mishap is obvious – parental neglect, alcoholism, or some other visible or invisible ailment – in others, the reason for the dysfunction is less obvious. When something happens, the mother is not able to get up from the bed one day, the 16 year old leaves the home for good, or the otherwise well-tempered father blows up in anger on Christmas Day, leaving everyone outside the family in shock – while the family members themselves seem to be less so. They have grown used to malfunctions and distortions of all kinds, and constantly adjust

to each other's shortcomings, while no one has enough insight or energy to address the situation at its root. And time just goes by.[50]

9.2   The Dysfunctional Family from within

While most families – and teams – have some dysfunctional components, this team rather quickly develops dubious routines and expectations that are sticky and deepen over time, gradually setting the team on a path towards a likely downfall. Yet, nothing can be detected from the outside; the results are good (although declining towards the end), everyone seems to be smiling, no one places a formal complaint, and all members are taking part in team activities, or at least it looks like it. Until one takes a closer look. The figure above shows a traditional, idyllic family on a ride. The impeccably dressed and good-humored mother is sitting in the driver's seat a bit uncertain of where to go. The father sits on the passenger side having perhaps a better idea but does not say anything for some reason. The three children on the backseat are each in their own world; one enthusiastic just to be on the ride, one absorbed in self-reflection, and one somewhat detached, sleeping.

9.2.1   Meet the characters

There are five members in the team.

Nea, Finnish woman in her mid-thirties based in Finland, is the leader of the team, the "mother." Modest on the surface, she does not push herself to become the team leader, but her previous experience as a practicing manager in a multinational firm makes her the most qualified person to lead the team, or so it seems at least to others (and herself) in the beginning. Nea is very ambitious, quality oriented, and a perfectionist, and she likes to control the work output so no silly mistakes or outright stupidity slips in. Other than uncompromising when it comes to quality and overpowering when it comes to her relationships with others, she is empathetic, nurturing, and caring, and readily forgives other people for being late or for not abiding to agreements. She tends to blame herself

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[50] *Dysfunctional family* is a common term in psychology used to describe families that are unable to deal adequately with normal social relations. For instance, "a family with multiple 'internal' (e.g., sibling rivalries, parent–child-conflicts, domestic violence, mental illness), or 'external' (e.g., alcohol or drug abuse, extramarital affairs, gambling, unemployment), influences that affect the basic needs of the family unit." (McGraw-Hill Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine. © 2002 by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.)

instead.[51] They are all nice people after all, and she understands that never in real life is everyone equally skilled and knowledgeable. Inevitably, her workload accumulates, and she gets tired over time. Very tired.

Yoshi, a Japanese man in his mid-twenties based in Finland, is the "father," the co-pilot, yearning to take over the steering wheel once in a while, yet never doing it. While Nea takes responsibility over the team delivering the assignments on time, Yoshi tasks himself with trying his best to provide the team with the necessary structure in the background to get the team to its goal as painlessly as possible. He writes and disseminates memos, schedules meetings ahead of time, uses tactics like asking direct questions to motivate all team members to speak up in meetings, and initiates shared online documents.[52] Yoshi's authority is somewhat limited because of his lacking English skills. In the chaotic team context, he actually manages it all admirably well, but is never happy, and others rarely formally acknowledge his efforts. For him, all members in a team should contribute equally. The team never reaches his high ideals, and over time, he grows grumpier and grumpier, without ever raising his voice or externalizing his thoughts – let alone feelings.

Sam, a Finnish man in his mid-twenties based in Finland, is the sleeping *enfant terrible* – charming, relaxed, creative, and full of exciting ideas when he is in the mood, which he rarely is. The others need to compensate for his unpredictable level of engagement; yet, when he does start paying attention to the task, his contributions are much appreciated. He misses the first online meeting during the first case and gets to do what he considers a "left-over task," and this appears to mark a decline in his motivation. And why struggle, sweat, shed tears, and stay up late at night when others seem to have taken the reins to steer the team to one good project outcome after the other?[53] His reasons for his sluggish effort as a result of being sick, travelling, organizing a committee, or whatever are always accepted, and he promises to take a more prominent role "next time," time after time. There is so much work and the team works under such pressure that even his sporadic active interest is welcomed. And he has plenty of what the team needs to thrive – ideas.

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[51] Nea struggles not only with being a leader, but also with handling stress and with how to let go of control and learning to trust. *"As a team leader, I'm quite stressed because I sense that some people seem to deliver only under pressure and at the last minute. But that is, of course, a very common feature in many. For me, it only creates additional unwanted stress, and it is something I need to learn to deal with if I fancy a career in a leading position." (*Nea, Case 1*)*

[52] Yoshi tirelessly works to organize the team better, underneath the surface *". . . I noticed that our team tends to be late with deciding when to meet. Therefore, I made an online questionnaire to decide for meetings schedules on Monday (the day the case was sent out). I also tried to present important points for discussion ahead of time.*" (Yoshi, Case 3)

[53] Sam does his part but does not seem to have any remorse for doing only the absolutely minimum. *"I made a good five (industry) forces and SWOT analyses that were included in the presentation and organized the rest of the work. Nea recorded the video and did the rest of her task. Everyone else did their job, but I do not know who did what because I finished my part quickly because I was absent for the rest of the week."* (Sam, Case 3)

Lana, a Russian woman in her early twenties based in Russia, is a happy person and cheerful by nature. Coming from a different institution in a different country, she has never taken part in this type of teamwork before. A junior member in the team, she, too, is an idea-rich and communicative person and appreciative of other team members, in particular Nea and Yoshi, who coach her and help her to get up to speed with both the theoretical and technological knowledge needed to work in the team effectively. This is often time consuming for Nea and Yoshi who just tend to add tasks to their own long lists of duties (including making sure Lana is on board). Unaware of all the work it takes to coordinate the efforts of five people time and time again to produce a timely business case in video format, she sees the team and teamwork through rose-colored glasses.[54] Perhaps due to her relative immaturity and lack of direct feedback, her input is often a bit late, which can be fatal in a team environment where every moment counts and deadlines are unforgiving.

Gina, a Nigerian woman in her late twenties based in Finland, is composed, polite, business-like, and reflective by nature. As she tends to be silent and a bit late with her tasks, the others, in particular Yoshi and Nea, suspect she is somewhat passive and uninterested, all annoying traits in a team working on difficult tasks and rushed deadlines. Yet, deep inside, she observes her surroundings very carefully, self-consciously, and pensively. Her calm and professional manner, and the polished way in which she carries herself are in stark contrast with her insecurities and heightened level of self-consciousness.[55] An IT expert, she fails to produce a video with images and voiceover during the very rushed first case and is embarrassed about it. She let herself and her team down! And in any case, early on in the team life, she feels her ideas are of less value than the others' as she has no business background. Or, "Are they really?" she questions later as the team is reaching its final goal. Those who decide in the team seem to discriminate against her creative input, she thinks. Are they being selective, perhaps? She concludes, somewhat philosophically, that she knows now that she is good at organizing and ensuring that requirements are met in a project, a skill she says she discovered only through her relationship with others. She is not upset or angry – she understands life is not always smooth and how much hard work Nea and Yoshi put into the team, and she is very appreciative of their efforts for the common good.

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[54] Towards the end of the team's life, Lana has still not captured how frustrated Nea and Yoshi were, how little true common understanding there was, and was sad about the dissolution of the team. *"I feel that I would like to work with them, if we have some similar projects. It is because we established ourselves as a team. We have a certain structure of our work and understanding between each other."* (Lana, Case 6*)*

[55] Gina's choice to use the word *victim* when referring to her ideas being rejected by others is revealing. *"Overall, I learned that it is good to have a joint review of individuals' tasks. In such discussions, some members help by generating new ideas, making a more solid point, and sometimes to the extent of discarding some points raised by others . . . Although those members have good intentions, it is a bit embarrassing if I'm the victim."* (Gina, Case 3)

9.2.2   Shared views

At the kick-off, the team writes down "ethical values," "empowerment," and "solid teamwork" as central guidelines to its work. The guiding thought is to build a "true" team despite its known limited duration, deliver excellent results, and be the best team of all – to win, that is. To achieve this goal, members acknowledge, for instance, that a "shared commitment" and "active participation" are necessary, but as time shows, it is unclear what these concepts mean to different team members. Nea and Yoshi make an unwavering "commitment" to the extreme without ever talking about anything at a deeper level, or discussing informally in private the concerns they share about how the team functions and how to address them. Yet, they seem to have reached a silent understanding of what the team needs not to drive off the road. This is seen during Case 3, for instance, when Yoshi, in order to fix a serious problem the team has with pacing the work and finding time for online meetings, puts together a meeting-scheduling tool, an effort highly appreciated by Nea. Both of them consider team online meetings the cornerstone to progress the tasks as a team; the others either give these meetings less importance or are more last-minute driven and unwilling to initiate work early on. Most often, someone is missing from these meetings because they are busy elsewhere. Nea and Yoshi make sense of each other's' behavior as being responsible colleagues, and the knowledge that they can count on each other helps them in their work, although they never talk about this explicitly:

> *This time, we tried a bit different approach. I asked everyone if we could agree all the Skype meetings already on Monday – all at once. I was very pleased to notice that one group member (Yoshi) had a very 'hands-on' approach to this; he made a survey of the possible times, and in the end, chose the schedule based on our answers.* (Nea, Case 3)

Both Nea and Yoshi know what competence and work it takes to put the cases together and have the capacity to bring the task forward. Sam's interest level varies, but tends to decrease over time, and he makes the interpretation that the rest of the team members are more accepting of his absences than they actually are. He always seems to promise to do more later on, but that never materializes, and the rest of the team lets him get away with this, time after time. He makes sense of Nea's silence, in particular, as a sign of silent approval, while Nea and Yoshi take his promises literally as such – and the situation continues the same until the end. For him, this way of working represents "good teamwork" and some sort of camaraderie. For Nea and Yoshi, his empty promises are signs of irresponsibility and a lack of care and respect. The fact that the team never clarifies what is meant by "good communication," "collaboration," etc. suits

Sam well, as this way it is easier for him to slip into the background, and they all seem to avoid confrontation and open conflict. At least, he is apologetic and aware of his lack of input in teamwork. Nea, in particular, thinks Sam is a "good kid" deep inside and is inclined to give him a chance time after time, while Yoshi is less forgiving and considers him more as a free rider. The team learns to pull through with only a partial commitment from Sam, and the dysfunction is never addressed openly:

> *I feel that our team works as a team because it was fine for everyone that I was sick and couldn't participate in this case. We spoke that I make a bit more effort for the next case, and our team succeeded well even without me. I would say that that's a good ability of our team.* (Sam, Case 3)

Gina and Lana, the most junior members, are truly on board, but both are rather focused on their own learning and self-contemplation, than on the production of the best possible cases. While the "children" have implicitly chosen the personally gratifying scenic route and take the position of followers in the team with the expectation of being guided by Nea, the two "parents" they rely on drag the rest of them to a highway of top-class performance. Yoshi interprets it as his responsibility to "motivate" his colleagues to be more explicit and active in the team's creative work, without ever really reaching this goal – and over time, his interest in the team declines:

> *This case was the highest performance one, but it was the worst teamwork because only two of us contributed aggressively. That's why I will try to motivate all members to come up with ideas.* (Yoshi, Case 4)

Nea, feeling personally responsible for the team's outputs, is at times guilty of over-committing and taking too much on herself and lacking trust in others, which burdens her and further relegates others to a more passive role. She always revises and completes the presentation package before submitting it to the board, even if it means working late nights and weekends, despite having another job and young children. Like Yoshi, she too makes sense of the situation as a result of her own shortcomings in managing the team's work:

> *I have yet to manage the assignment so that I would not have to spend excessive amounts of time on it during the weekend.* (Nea, Case 2)

At the other extreme, the equally capable Sam is willing to compromise quality as long as the team gets by just fine – everyone is working on multiple projects and he does not spend all his time working; sports and social activities take their toll as well. Unlike Nea who tends to be forgiving and understanding of others' shortcomings, Yoshi never ceases to try to extract better quality work and thoughts from his teammates, who never meet his personal expectations.

His understanding of work morale is that it is everyone's duty to do one's absolute best, and he does not understand why the others do not bother. After four cases and trying everything he can think of, he ends up giving up on the team he feels is "hopeless," although his involvement in the two remaining tasks is equally high:

> *To be honest, I don't want to work with this group again because every time, only Nea and I take the responsibility for the cases. Of course, there are things we should do to improve the team's condition but nothing happened even when we had had several plans to improve.* (Yoshi, Case 4)

Two out of five people striving for excellence is not enough, and along the way, the team downgrades its ambition from "we want to win and be the best team" to the motto, "better done than perfect." Their assignments are never late, although the team visibly loses steam over time, and their results are good but not excellent in the most demanding last two cases. Other than developing ways of working and processes of how to tackle the assignments, distribute tasks, and record the video, the team also routinizes a continued disproportional work effort by Yoshi and Nea. With that setup, the car the team sits in is headed towards a precipice and is saved only by the dissolution of the team after three months.

The team is fairly good at generating ideas and concepts, or "destinations" together, but struggles not only with sharing understandings about how to get there, but also with temporal aspects, the "driving velocity." After the first two last-minute videos involving late nights and stress, the next two cases are on time, a significant relief in particular to Nea, Yoshi, and Gina, only for the team to fall off the schedule again afterwards. Different preferences for pacing work is a central problem in this team. Everyone other than Yoshi and Nea tend to be late bloomers (or non-bloomers at times), which causes constant tensions and continuous efforts by both to "make" the rest of the members become more timely and autonomous.

Whereas for Sam his behavior is a consequence of having understood that Yoshi and Nea sit on the front seat so he can relax, a laid-back and last-minute lifestyle and the rather low priority this team occupies in his life, with Gina and Lana, the situation is a bit different. The tasks are increasingly demanding, and they both are often insecure and uncertain of how to proceed and too shy to speak up. They rely on Nea for instructions and guidance, which are always not as clear as they would like or need to trigger concrete action or behavioral responses. This cycle leads to what Nea and Yoshi consider a puzzling silence, and a lack of interest is formed.

The most cherished shared implicit value of the team in general is *"harmony at all cost,"* enacted by all team members as active conflict avoidance, even

though this is often only true at the surface-level. All agree that the team is capable of excellent performances and the environment is very friendly, which everyone appreciates. Yoshi, perhaps more than the others and particularly in the beginning, appreciates the team harmony and lack of open conflicts as a necessary foundation for good teamwork. However, over time, the hidden conflicts clearly plague him, although he does not say a word or share how he feels at any time:

> . . . *our good point is that we are not that serious and can do the task with fun. This is a good point for continuous improvement like Kaizen.* (Yoshi, Case 2)

There are discrepancies about what some basic concepts, such as "good communication," mean. For Gina and Lana, it means an empathetic tone that makes one want to try what for them is extra hard, and for Sam, a relaxed place to work. For Yoshi and Nea, "communication" means, more than anything else, instrumental and necessary exchanges aimed at solving the task as a team. When the team communication does not lead to concrete actions towards task completion, for them, communication is "failing":

> *In my team, we talk to each other with respect and use friendly words. Everybody is polite; some are even too polite, so it makes you want to go the extra mile with them. Communication is excellent.* (Gina, Case 4)

> *I am the team leader in our group and I find it very frustrating. I do not get answers – or even reactions – to my questions I post in Skype. Also the deadlines I have set or we have mutually agreed on have yet to be respected.* (Nea, Case 5)

In short, while the team has fairly shared understandings regarding what the team is capable of, the task itself, and what it takes to create and maintain a pleasant and respectful team environment socially, there are severe discrepancies in their perceptions of how to reach the goal and the effort it takes to do so. This dynamic creates escalating tensions.

9.2.3 Forces of influence

The team's choice to appoint Nea as team leader, but with a democratic setup so that the leader will only intercede in situations where consensual decisions are not reached or respected, is the most important decision the team takes together. Nea's strength is to organize what is required to get the task done, but she has difficulty leading people, which she tends to readily admit herself:

> *Our decision making is in theory done democratically, but in practice, I often have to suggest – if not politely order – tasks to*

team members. If the decisions are left to the team, very seldom does anyone take the initiative. (Nea, Case 3)

Nea seems to make sense of the agreement such that "democracy" comes before "leadership" and is upset over the others not being self-directed, while the others expect her to coordinate the tasks and make sure everything gets done. Since Nea is competent in task execution and more experienced than the others, her telling the team how to proceed does not seem to bother her teammates as much as it bothers her to give them instructions. What is important for most is that creative decisions around case solutions are done together, which they usually are. Engaging in self-reflection, she first blames the context, "It is hard to lead a team of students," but later on admits, "It is hard to lead a team of equals," and then finally ponders her own shortcomings, "I have had this problem of leading people a long time," an issue she understands she needs to address if she wants to advance in her career as a manager. Her biggest leadership qualities – empathy, hard work, care, task competence, and ambition – are not enough when working on short deadlines and in a chaotic environment. Having accepted to be "the leader" carries the responsibility to behave as one, which is what other team members expect. Too much empathy seems to compromise team effectiveness and create slack as members do not conceptualize the importance of their active contributions. Yet, Sam and Lana, in particular, seem to appreciate this seemingly relaxed and inclusive way of working:

> *Decision-making was easy because everyone tried somehow to adapt to our team and did not take big roles.* (Sam, Case 6)
>
> *In our team, everyone has a voice, can agree or disagree.* (Lana, Case 3)

Gina is inspired by Nea's humble manner and dedication to work most of all, which she finds inspiring:

> *We all went to sleep very late yesterday because our leader was so stressed that we wouldn't meet the requirement — the video presentation. I sacrificed my sleep because of our leader's humility, and I guess the rest of the members also missed their sleep because of the same reason.* (Gina, Case 4)

Gina seems to make the sacrifice to stay up late to work for Nea's sake who she elevates as "the leader," and not so much because she is committed to the task itself. Yet, clear instructions, well-articulated expectations, and a low tolerance for unacceptable behavior (such as not respecting internal deadlines or not delivering work of good quality) are missing. Other members expect Nea to be tough and demanding when needed, and willingly accept being reminded of duties and even given negative feedback by her when justified. The expectation is there, but she does not take charge, leaving the team adrift at

times and causing added workloads and stress for herself. Sam would need more "pushing" from time to time, and Lana looks up to her expertise and as someone who can solve the problems along with Yoshi:

> *Nea as our leader had once to push us forward and after that we kept rolling once again as a team. Some of us had less motivation/time in the last cases, but everyone tried to do their best for the team.* (Sam, Case 6)

> *Nea is the leader. Actually, she always knows what we should do. She coordinates teamwork. As a rule, the core idea of our projects belongs to her and Yoshi.* (Lana, Case 5)

When it comes to creative work, the principle of "democratic leadership" is applied, everyone has an equal say, and decisions are made jointly. This works well and the team excels in mobilizing its members' rich ideas, while the follow-up and delivery cause problems, as Nea and Yoshi often point out:

> *Decisions about different tasks within the team are quite often done by me as a team leader. I noticed that democracy and questions do not really work with those, things are just left 'hanging' and undone, if I leave it to that.* (Nea, Case 3)

> *Throughout this case, I was thinking that democratic decision-making is good but sometimes it needs a lot of time. For this reason I said, 'I will listen to your opinions and then make a decision.' I tried to understand every member's opinion, but on the other hand, tried to make decisions to increase the speed of our proceedings.* (Yoshi, Case 2)

The partly democratic, partly leader-driven mode of organizing work is confusing, as members' sensemaking of its meaning and implications tends to differ. Yoshi tries to engage in leading the team in a more subtle way. On one hand, he often tries to encourage and inspire everyone to speak up and participate in discussions, and on the other hand, he makes decisions when too much time has passed and work is not progressing. Nea does not seem to understand that others expect her to make sure things are not "left hanging"; this is part of her responsibilities she has agreed to assume by accepting to become the leader, after all. The team is capable of generating good ideas in addition to maintaining a culture of respect even when times are tough, but Nea almost never fully enacts the leader role the others have entrusted her with. Also, Sam, Lana, and Gina, in particular, never accept being truly compliant followers as their individual work is often late, promises are not kept, and work of lesser quality than what is expected of a team that pretends to be a "winner" is delivered. Nea interprets the reason why the team functions the way it does as a result of her own lacking skills as a leader, and she assumes full responsibility for the situation, not thinking that perhaps the others had some responsibility in

the team as well, and that her being the leader does not necessarily mean that she is alone responsible for things such as "motivation." Yet, in the end, she comes to a reasonable conclusion about where she needs to improve as a leader if she is to lead teams in the future:

> *I have perhaps too much empathy for people to be in a leading position – at least when I'm not superior by title or similar. I also let my frustrations take over and block my creative thinking – creative in the sense of finding a solution to motivate people. I am good at organizing tasks, but I have a thing or two to learn about organizing people.* (Nea, Case 6)

All along, Nea struggles together with Yoshi, with performing a large amount of work, a fact that goes unnoticed by the others, who take a too comfortable position as followers and who really do not follow either, but expect things to be sorted out "by the team." They both tend to perform tasks by themselves, instead of mobilizing the others. Everyone seems to consider the role of the leader as someone who does things for others and not as much as someone who facilitates work and inspires co-workers. This is why Nea, more than a leader, is sort of a "mother hen" who "points things out politely" and is always ready to step in and defend the "kids" no matter what, someone who finds getting angry and losing patience as non-dignifying behavior. Yoshi is the structure-providing father in the background who does not get that involved with the "children," but patiently (until his frustration is so high that he wants to leave them, that is!) tries to turn the dysfunctional family into a functional one. Unfortunately, the team never discusses any of the teaming issues openly and honestly.

9.2.4 The unity of the team

Over the team's life, the members only hold one face-to-face meeting early on. Except for Lana who is debriefed afterwards, everyone is present. Despite a lack of direct face-to-face contact, the team manages to organize effective routines involving a complex set of digital platforms together. Every member knows which medium to use for each purpose; Google Docs for document storage, Facebook for ongoing communication, Skype for scheduled online conversations and meetings, and emails for specific purposes, such as sending task-related information to Lana who has occasional trouble connecting to the internet. Each member has clear tasks, and when someone is unsure of how to proceed, there is someone to help, at least eventually as response times from Sam, Lana, and Gina are sometimes slow. Problems arise with getting everyone to work according to the plan – and, in particular, the schedule.

Over its lifecycle, the group really becomes a "real team" during the third and fourth cases when the best results are achieved; the cases are completed early and everyone (except for Yoshi perhaps) is happy with everyone else and with the team experience in general. After that, the tasks get more demanding in terms of the active teamwork needed to solve them, and the members start to get tired. The downfall that follows, leading to worse results than before and a downgraded mood, is dramatic with Yoshi wanting to leave the team, Nea's bottled-up anger building up, and Sam getting more and more demotivated as tasks get tougher and the pressure, which he is unwilling to take on, increases. Yoshi and Gina use the family metaphor of the team in opposite ways, showing how differently they make sense of their team life:

> *Our team works like a family. Children are not able to do anything without orders from parents. In this team, Nea was the mother and I was the father. If a parent did not say anything, children did not act. They were just waiting for orders from parents. When the parents were busy, our team did not advance anymore.* (Yoshi, Case 6)

> *My team stands for unity, togetherness. It's like a family with no parents and yet very united. No one condemns a suggestion no matter how invaluable it may sound. I can't explain with words how we do that, but it doesn't make you feel stupid or sad but rather makes you want to think broader or see also the big picture next time.* (Gina, Case 6)

From a sensemaking perspective, the very different use the two members make of the "family" metaphor to describe the team reveals, in part, the source of the various dysfunctions within the team. Yoshi refers to the team as a family in a rather traditional way, where team members who are supposed to be equally responsible are not, and two members, himself and Nea in this case, have to carry the whole weight of the team, while the others are passive and not always even following instructions. For Gina, the family she refers to is a psychologically safe place, facilitating individual learning where one is of equal value and accepted, even when he or she makes mistakes or is incompetent. The way these two members refer to their team makes it seem like they are working in two different teams altogether.

Lana is rather enthusiastic about her team experience all along as it has been a great place for her to learn. Sam, while admitting the problem of pacing the work by talking about the team as a "slow to start diesel motor," is appreciative of the lack of pressure and the possibility to work independently on partial tasks. However, Sam ignores the fact that while he may not have felt too much pressure, Nea and Yoshi did, and that his behavior, or rather inaction, was one of the sources of their stress:

> *I feel that my team is the best one. Everybody is involved in teamwork and does what she or he actually can. We come to joint conclusions very fast.* (Lana, Case 3)

> *We are like a diesel motor . . . well planned and organized, but it takes time to see the results because we first did everything individually . . . but in the end, pretty efficient when we combined our parts . . . everyone could plan their working time by themselves.* (Sam, Case 6)

From its optimistic beginnings, the team stumbles on, failing to establish a shared sense of what the team is about and what each person's role is. Members talk very differently about their team – those who contribute the least are the ones with the most positive understanding of their team experience, while those who contribute the most express a desire to leave the team. Yet, respect and politeness are shared values that all identify with, and the team is able to reach a good balance and be a "real team" at the mid-point in its lifecycle.

9.2.5   Hidden thoughts and emotions

Unexpressed emotions and hidden thoughts that influence how members perceive teamwork, other members, and their own place in the team are a force to be reckoned with that affects both task and social outcomes of this team. Nea agonizes in a state of constant frustration altered by some relief in the middle of the teams' life, blaming mostly herself when the task execution falls short of her expectations. She resents things not being fair as she perceives it, and in part, makes sense of what she thinks is others' lack of dedication as a sign of disinterest, and in part, as the "normal" way things go in life:

> *I'm mostly content with our teamwork, but in all honesty, I am still experiencing frustrations with some team members not meeting the deadlines we have set within the group. I do sense that people in our group are not equally interested or devoted to our assignments, but at the same time, I know it is normal. I just don't think it is fair. I've been thinking of ways to share the responsibility and engage encouragingly the members who so far have done the least, but as I myself have the features of a perfectionist, I find it rather difficult.* (Nea, Case 4)

Yoshi keeps on accumulating anger and contempt towards the team in general – at the end of the three-month period, he is ready to leave and give up, having lost his faith in the team, despite its good results:

> *Compared with other cases, this case was the worst output in my experience ever. Even when I tried to contact them, they said nothing and sometimes they were critical without having*

> *contributed. Nea and I were really frustrated with this situation but we were not able to repair the team.* (Yoshi, Case 6)

Lana's constantly happy mood is contrasted with general disinterest by Sam who seems to be barely around and mostly interested in generating ideas, and not so much in the hard work required to organize them and make the videos. Gina struggles with shame, shyness, and low self-esteem, which comes across in her constant remarks of considering herself as being a "lesser" member in the team, a condition the others never confirm. Her sensemaking after her teammates vote for Nea's proposal as superior to hers reveals these insecurities, as she thinks this choice was made not based on the quality of her proposal, but because of her status as a team member with less experience:

> *As I ponder over why they didn't choose my solution, I could only think that maybe it's because I do not contribute as much as the person who made the analysis on Italy, or it's because I do not have work experience and the other does. For the first time, I felt my team members were being selective. However, I understand this happens in life – everybody goes through such situations in life.* (Gina, Case 6)

The key team members from a task-completion perspective, Nea and Yoshi, seem only in brief moments to be in a balanced state. None of their negative thoughts and feelings are ever dealt with openly, although the team manages to address some of the issues, such as frustrations with time management, at least temporarily and succeeds with creating an encouraging environment for everyone to speak up and feel safe. How severe the problem of leaving tasks to the last minute is to Yoshi and Nea, and how much Gina's insecurities affect her participation, are not visible to others. Yet the consistently good results are encouraging and carry the team forward. Nea admits at the end of the team's life how happy she is that all the tasks are done and ponders whether cultural differences were at least partially at fault, an explanation that seems a bit far-fetched, to say the least[56]:

> *I am very glad the last assignment is now done. There were times I felt that this team was somewhat functioning and everybody was doing their share, but more often, I was completely frustrated. Often even when I thought we had a common understanding, due to the cultural differences perhaps, the result delivered was not at all what had been agreed. Also the lack of respect towards others – shown in disrespect of other's time – was disturbing.* (Nea, Case 6)

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[56] It is interesting that after considering in the beginning that the very diversity of the team was what led the team to be so creative, now in the end, she attributes some of the issues the team had to cultural differences, despite the fact that collaboration was at its best between her, a Finn, and Yoshi, a Japanese man 10 years younger than herself, and at its worst, between her and Sam, also a Finn.

9.2.6   Critical events

A number of events critical to the team's life influenced its path, which were mostly associated with a partial failure to secure everyone's full commitment to the team and the burden caused by hidden negative feelings and thoughts.

Gina's self-esteem is shattered. One important team event is Gina's failure during the very first case to solve a problem related to her field of expertise, IT, despite her best efforts:

> *We had a problem converting our PowerPoint slide to video, and everybody was looking up to me to fix it because I have an IT background. It was very stressful for me when I couldn't help my team; I did my best to fix it to the extent that it caused me to deliver my individual assignment late. The essence here is that I really tried my best.* (Gina, Case 1)

This is a defining moment for Gina as a member of the team. She feels somewhat withdrawn and shy all along until the end, as in her understanding, she failed the team by not being able to solve a task related to her field of expertise, even though the others never blame her for her failure. Other team members could have done more to make her feel comfortable with the situation and to help her overcome her reservations to participate as a more active member. No one seems to understand that the reason behind Gina's silence is her shyness and insecurities, not a lack of motivation.

Nea's absence (and coming back) creates havoc. Nea's leadership style is confusing – she is both nurturing and controlling. She misses the first team meeting for Case 2. This is an opportunity for the others to shine and take the lead, and for Nea to trust them and sit back for a change. Yoshi steps forward and takes the lead. Yet, Nea seems to be unhappy with the meeting outcome and upset with not being updated to her satisfaction; she cannot make sense of Yoshi's minutes of the meeting and fails to get an answer from him to clarify them:

> *This time, we did not have enough time to talk, so there was a lack of consensus between people who attended the meeting and Nea who did not and who made the video recording and finalized the case. I decided to be the person who encourages others to do their task this time.* (Yoshi, Case 2)

> *I read the notes but could not quite understand what would be the strategy and the things we were concentrating on. Despite my requests to fill me in (on line), nobody seemed to have time. Before Sunday, that is.* (Nea, Case 2)

Her decision to make radical changes to her teammates' work is a discouraging factor for the others, who continually shy away from making

major decisions. From the others' points of view, Nea is the most knowledgeable member and the elected leader, after all.

"Too demanding" tasks. The last two assignments are more demanding and require more collaborative work and meeting time than the previous ones. When the team receives the first one of these tasks, Sam is not happy and attributes his own lack of motivation as a motivation issue at the *team level*, failing to acknowledge his own problem as such:

> *The case instructions were also different so it took a bit of time to swap from the previous case to this one. Also that we had less material to process (or we had to find it on our own) made it different and that we had to create a new idea maybe made it more difficult for us. We had in this case, in my opinion, a lack of motivation.* (Sam, Case 5)

The others do not seem to mind the changes in the task; on the contrary, they find the more creative and research-intensive assignments more inspiring than the previous, more structured ones. However, by losing Sam's interest, the team misses out on his creative capabilities, perhaps more than a fifth of the hidden capacity the team has. Indeed, the lack of his personal motivation is a reflection of diminishing "team" motivation, as it does not go unnoticed by the others, and the effects are felt in terms of Yoshi and Nea needing to step in even more, contributing to the already increasing level of frustration and exhaustion.

Nea's outburst. This is when Nea, during the very last case, finally blows up and talks straight to the others via the message platform in Skype; she gets what she has been struggling with all along – participation of the other members to reduce her burden.

> *I should have pointed this (being late, passive attitude) out in the beginning already as unacceptable behavior, but as mentioned, I had difficulties given negative/constructive criticism. In the last case, however, I poured my heart out after one meeting, when nobody else showed up. That seemed to help and I got two of the team members working harder. I only wish I would have done it earlier.* (Nea, Case 6)

A bit too late for this team to become a functional one, Nea learned a lesson on the importance of letting others clearly know what it takes to complete the tasks, and what it takes to lead the team with "good communication" needed to achieve "solid teamwork."

9.3 Summary

The *Dysfunctional Family* seems to agree on the principles the team should be guided by and converge on the idea that all its members are wonderful people good at generating ideas and capable of delivering excellent results. Whenever everyone is paying attention, the team is creative, and when they finally start working on the execution of their project, they work well together. The problem is getting everyone to act on those plans and ideas. The team identity is split, its underlying meanings are diverse, even schizophrenic, and members do not share hidden thoughts and felt emotions with each other, even though doing so would be absolutely necessary to get the team to work together as a truly functional one and to ensure everyone's true commitment. The dysfunctions in this team do not lead to great drama, but they are deeply embedded in the team life. Most team members seem to be in a state of self-denial that anything is wrong or struggle with an inability to externalize felt emotions and thoughts in a constructive manner. From the perspective of sensemaking, the diverse understandings of how leadership is and should be enacted kept on pushing this team towards the ditch. An appointed leader acting only partially as such and appointed followers failing to fully follow created recurring loops of confusion, anger, last minute stress, and an uneven workload distribution until the cathartic moment when the leader finally blasts out an angry question, "Where is everybody – why am I here alone?", triggering an immediate positive reaction towards the wanted direction. Clearer instructions, explicit rewards for doing one's best regardless of the results, and clarification of the meaning of basic concepts would have been helpful in mitigating the team's problems.

10   THE SANDBOX

Figure 7   The Sandbox

10.1 The backdrop

A sandbox offers a safe, flexible, and creative environment for children to play in. At times, they can play together and at other times alone, as there are no fixed rules and play often evolves inspirationally on-the-go. It is a place where the very young can learn all kinds of skills: motor, technical, artistic, and social. Children's play is dynamic; playmates may change, and sometimes it is not that bad to be alone, as one is surrounded by friendly others. However, thinking of the end result, like the sand castle in the picture above, its quality may be affected if some of the children participate only marginally. And what if one of them goes home and confesses to his mother with teary eyes in the evening: *"They did not want to play with me today – I want to go to a different playground tomorrow!"*

10.2 The Sandbox from within

A team that behaves like five kids in a sandbox, such as the one above, is a bit more of a problem. The end result may be beautiful, but what is the team losing

if, like in the figure showing the girl with the phone and the boy sitting on the edge of the sandbox, two people are sort of turned off, just minding their own business, and only half-heartedly taking part in the project under development? Yet, a team like the *Sandbox* can be quite a pleasant place to work. In this case, three members have embarked on a joint project enthusiastically while two others sit aside, aware of the castle in the making, but a bit outside the play yet without leaving the box, at least for now. While one of these loners seems to be quite fine with just connecting with other people outside the sandbox, the other one is more self-absorbed and has turned his back on his playmates altogether. It is not that these people dislike each other; it just feels easier to only play with those with like interests who one know better and who happen to be nearby, even if being selective means the end-result will be less elaborate and beautiful in the end.

10.2.1 Meet the characters

There are five members in this team.

Ioanna, a Romanian woman in her mid-twenties based in Finland, after receiving her bachelor's degree in business and languages has worked at the IBM project management office in her home country. She is eager to be proactive and bring her experience to this team to help it succeed. She is competitive, energetic, outspoken, determined, and passionate to the point that her behavior sometimes alienates others and makes them insecure, as her skills in empathy are somewhat deficient. She is too busy working to reflect on her own behavior and being stressed most of the time does not help. In weak moments, when insecurity takes over and she feels overwhelmed, she says she tends to retreat and just be quiet. In this team, however, there seem to be no such moments. Over time, she wakes up to the fact that there might be something she is doing wrong,[57] as despite many attempts, she struggles to coordinate the team so that everyone would be truly involved. Unfortunately, she fails to realize that her overpowering and overeager manner may push certain team members further away.

Harry, a Finnish man in his late twenties based in Finland, is an industrial engineer presently completing his business degree. He has a truly international background and has lived in the US, Russia, China, and Korea. Harry is ambitious, enjoys doing research, and is willing to take roles of responsibility

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[57] After the second case, Ioanna observes: *"I learned that one should have a lot of patience when working with others. I think that usually I have patience, but when I have a deadline, it disappears. No time for patience! Why do my colleagues not understand me?"* Instead of pausing to think "why," she just rams on.

without imposing himself by force. His hard work and knowledge of theory that he actively and continually accumulates impresses others, and all team members respect him, although he does not assume big roles or seek the limelight or praise.[58] Being a very calm and non-confrontational person, he never rocks the boat but becomes somewhat of an anchor to the women in the team, all of whom get well along with him.

Elena, a Latvian woman in her late twenties based in Latvia, is somewhat of a rebel and has a playful sense of humor she likes to cultivate. Presently, she works as a behavioral psychologist in fraud management in the banking sector and is taking an MBA on the side. When asked who she is as a person, she responds coyly that she is not quite a "person" yet in an existential sense, but only striving to become one.[59] She is learning driven, prefers practical tasks, and "cannot stand aside when people are sad." To her team she brings creativity, which is sometimes misunderstood by the other members. This is possibly due to being unable to explain her original, but at times, somewhat odd-feeling ideas because of the lack of direct interactions. Her motivation and good spirit is dampened when this happens; however, she does not become resentful, but takes new tasks, sometimes more and sometimes less enthusiastically.

Lorena, an Estonian woman in her mid-twenties based in Estonia, is working as an HR specialist in a construction firm while completing her master's degree in business. She describes herself as a well-organized, good-hearted, and headstrong person, yet hopes to become more open and daring, and learn to better understand other people – skills needed in virtual teamwork she understands. She is more goal oriented than people oriented and does not think of herself much as a communicator; thus, she avoids speaking unless she fully understands the topic or is able to formulate a clear opinion.[60] For her, difficulties in her team are another opportunity to learn both about working in teams and about herself – and she just does not give up.

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[58] After the very tough Case 3, Anja describes Harry admiringly and acknowledges learning from his skills, such as time management: *"I am really grateful for Harry as he is the greatest professional among all of us . . . he did all the basics of our work, even the first variant of the presentation. He created the structure that we kept improving, and I really admire his operational skills as I know how many other things he was working on, but still found time to work on our case."*

[59] Elena continues answering the question, "Who are you as a person?": *"I can say I am a woman, but this is my gender, I can say I am a human, but that is simply a place I hold in the food chain, and I could say I am a specialist in finance, but that, again, is my profession. Any adjectives like open or sincere would not answer the question either. Honestly, I do not know who I am as a person."* She does not act and think like a "typical" businessperson or student, and her personality may be a bit hard for others to understand and her ideas are difficult to follow.

[60] Lorena aspires to be more courageous, but her nature is to be rather reflective and learn by observing: *"I like to read and to have the theoretical base knowledge before acting. But at the same time, it is always a pleasure to learn from someone who is more experienced."* This trait may make her seem passive and unmotivated at times in the eyes of her more spontaneous team members.

Anja, a Russian woman in her early twenties based in Finland, describes herself as a patient listener and a hardworking overachiever, a trait that "sometimes destroys her life" as she is very tough on herself, maybe unnecessarily so. For her, what matters most in teamwork are "good relationships between team members" that she feels are "absolutely necessary for the achievement of common goals." She just wants to keep on solving cases, come out of her shell, and gain confidence, but she has some difficulty in this team and finds it challenging to share her ideas openly, especially in the beginning and mainly due to Ioanna's "autocratic manners."[61] Over time, Anja learns that having ideas is not enough, but "one must also fight for them."

10.2.2 Shared views

The first team meeting in which the members get to know each other and form the team goes very well. Members talk openly about their lives and first impressions are quite positive.[62] Everyone seems to be prepared for teamwork – a feeling that carries over the first case, despite the initial chaos and confusion over how to get the case done and how to work as a team. Anja's thoughts reflect this initial team optimism and shared high expectations:

> *It is the first time in my life when all members of my team are not lazy but really hardworking and ambitious.* (Anja, Case 1)

The team members share the expectation to fight and to work hard to win the contest, a mood that is maintained through difficulties, and even though with time, it becomes more and more unlikely the team will achieve this ambitious goal. The passage of time reveals that not all members are equally driven and their levels of "commitment" vary. Ioanna's enthusiasm and motivation to win are exceptional, and the more learning-oriented Harry works tightly in tandem with her. Anja is motivated but lacks self-confidence, which is probably due to her English being less fluent than the others' and her recent arrival from Russia to Finland – a matter of adjusting to a rather different institutional environment. Elena and Lorena, after their initial enthusiasm settles, while taking teamwork seriously, are less inclined to "fight like warriors" and their struggle becomes rather to define and affirm their own roles as remote members in the team. Elena is very active in the beginning and at the very end, Lorena sporadically, and Anja shines, in particular, during the last case – a manifestation of varying

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[61] Anja seems to achieve some of her personal goals at least during the team's life, as she reports in the end that *"now I am more certain about my ability to solve any problem and work with people from different nationalities."*

[62] Team members extensively discuss their first Skype meeting in the team interview and seem to share the feeling that the initial team get-together was rather inspiring and "even personal stories were exchanged."

commitment and a changing perception of one's own capacity among the members. These oscillations are due to very different reasons. While both Anja and Lorena struggle with summoning up enough courage to take an active role, Elena gets thrown off track somewhat after Ioanna replaces her as the team leader towards the end of Case 1. Whoever feels that she or he is doing more than the others, tends to make sense of others' passive disposition as intentional freeriding or a lack of competence. Elena, in her assigned role as the project manager for the first case, expresses her frustration and doubts over the others' commitment:

> *The strength of our team is that we are all active and willing to learn and receive good marks . . . yet, not everyone is involved and willing to work their hardest . . . and not everyone put in the same amount of work, waiting for others to fill in the gaps.* (Elena, Case 1)

Not surprisingly, there is quite a lot of confusion about how to prepare the first case within the given timeline, and the team struggles with coordinating how to perform the necessary analysis, solution strategy, and video production. There is a difference between "everyone being hardworking" as individuals and working effectively as a team, as the team learns. Elena, disappointed with the teammates not following her instructions in the first case to fill in the analysis in the shared documents, interprets this is as some members' lack of independence and their excessive reliance on others' work, while these "others" are just confused over the task and uncertain about how to work together on a shared document to take the task forward, and how to learn to collaborate as a team. In her colleagues' view, Elena's instructions and leadership are not quite all that competent. For Ioanna, in particular, this situation becomes a trigger to take over the lead and to finalize the case with Harry, whom she meets with face-to-face in private:

> *We had Skype meetings for two hours without deciding anything, because some team members did not want or did not know how to answer the questions. Also, it is very inefficient when all the team members agree with you and there are no other opinions.* (Ioanna, Case 1)

Ioanna makes sense of the "no progress" situation in a similar way as Elena, attributing the fault to others' incapability or unwillingness to work. Yet, her panic reaction is to take on the task herself without having a discussion with Elena first, which must have come somewhat as a surprise to Elena. None of them seems to take into consideration that these issues related with a slow start can be just initial hiccups in a team, and not so much a sign of some irreparable individual flaws. Anja, for instance, does not attribute her own passiveness to being uninterested but to Ioanna's excessive "nagging" and criticism:

We were completely lost in time . . . yet, there is good communication, people are nice with each other . . . but we were unproductive and had three Skype meetings, two hours each. Why? I do not understand. There was criticism from Ioanna . . . if people are always criticized . . . they do not want to talk anymore. (Anja, Case 1)

By Case 2, the team becomes more organized,[63] splitting into two subgroups in charge of "analysis" (handled in principle by the two remote members) and "strategy" (handled in principle by the three core members), and everyone has learned to know each other better:

By now, we are more familiar with each team member. We already know how any of us behaves solving the tasks – how much one contributes and who is the one with new bright ideas. (Lorena, Case 2)

Splitting the tasks may have seemed like a good idea at first to speed up work, but this decision furthers the division of the team according to geographic fault lines. Often, teammates do not work in concert and much unnecessary, invisible, or uncoordinated work is done. Anja, in particular, has ideas and plans she does not share openly with the others until the last case, while Elena tends to work in isolation on the same tasks as Ioanna and Harry, and Lorena is often confused and insecure over the task she is supposed to execute. Ioanna feels, increasingly, that Harry and she "do all the work . . . and there is no other choice" (Ioanna, Case 2), because "we actually did not receive any help or response back" (Ioanna, Case 1), and "a lot of information is gathered but not enough time is left to build solutions" (Ioanna, Case 1), and that "girls just say 'agreed' or 'good idea' without critical thinking" (Ioanna, Case 2). Aware of the ticking clock, Ioanna seems to think that without her there is no team, and increasingly concentrates most of the control in her hands while becoming increasingly judgmental of others, silently blaming them for abandoning the "team." She never seems to consider that her own behavior and way of expressing herself has anything to do with the others' slow or low response rates. Elena, in particular and not that surprisingly, goes silent with the abrupt change of leadership in which the others collectively manifested their lack of confidence in her as a leader. The difficulty level of the tasks and the quick work pace required to execute them successfully are other challenges faced by the team. Everyone is to some extent overwhelmed, but while Ioanna throws herself fiercely at task coordination and Harry to hard work in research, Ioanna

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[63] After Case 2, Anja thinks that ". . . *things got both better and worse.*" A better division of labor and more clarity did not make a better team, and they failed to return to the level of enthusiasm the team had in the very beginning.

inadvertently alienates the others with her stressed manners and rough-around-the-edges style of communication.

The team's initial idea to "do everything together by working on all questions individually first to then build a common understanding," backfires as members do not learn how to do this effectively. The outcomes are imprecise and confusing, and the approaching deadlines put pressure on members. None of the tasks are really completed, and no one is sure what he or she is responsible for. Skype meetings of up to two hours are held in the evenings that do not bear fruit. This way of working becomes ineffective, no clear decisions are made, and the team risks running out of time. Thus, the team is trapped by collective confusion making, rather than sensemaking.

Based on this experience, the team members decide to drop communication over Skype altogether, and to focus on sharing thoughts in the Facebook group and the shared work-in-progress documents on OneDrive, a practice that becomes long lasting. The team members assume that "Facebook works as everyone has access to their phones 24/7" (Elena, Case 2), and "Skype meetings are a waste of time" (Ioanna, Case 2), as well as "ineffective and difficult to organize" (Harry, Case 3). The team members collectively make sense of Skyping as an inefficient means of communication for this team, while no one questions the lack of structure of the meetings or the less than perfect preparedness of the team members as the problems. While it may be easier not to organize cumbersome meetings and face each other in person, avoiding these inconveniences makes reaching shared understandings even more difficult in a team that has not yet formed effective collaboration practices.

The lack of shared meetings combined with time pressure pushes Harry and Ioanna to communicate privately both electronically and face-to-face. Hence, not all information is available to everyone anymore. With this decision, in Anja's words, "The team becomes more productive but members no longer have fun." Harry tends to reflect on the divisive effect that shifting to communicating with only those three who are collocated as opposed to communicating with all involved has on the team as an entity, but is unable to solve the situation. Cutting the remote members from the loop makes case resolution faster, after all. To go ahead with cutting off people's work versus waiting to have everyone on board is a key issue in the team and affects members' sensemaking – "I feel bad but time has no mercy" versus "My contribution is not accepted".

> *The communication in Facebook and OneDrive was relatively transparent and all group members were able to follow team communication. However, the use of personal WhatsApp and Skype in person-to-person communication made it difficult for all the team members to follow the progress of the project. At the same time, the use of WhatsApp made it possible to progress at a relatively fast pace. We also had face-to-face meetings with*

> *Ioanna and Anja, during which we were able to exchange information better.* (Harry, Case 1)

> *At the moment, Ioanna and I are using relatively very private messaging and these conversations are not visible to all. There is a risk that valuable information is withheld from the eyes and ears of all group members, which may lead to severe misunderstandings regarding the progress of our team.* (Harry, Case 2)

From the technical perspective, the team has all the communication tools in place needed for collaboration, but collectively, the members fail to find a shared communication rhythm and a clear purpose for each tool. It becomes tempting to blame freeriding and the laziness of less active members, rather than persisting on finding each other in the virtual world. A strict division of roles as an alternative to live communication and very little simultaneous collaboration is problematic under tight schedules, particularly in a context where tasks require increasing amounts of creativity and everyone's input would be absolutely necessary. Team members would also benefit from others' support for consultation when executing individual tasks. Tensions increase, in particular, during Case 3, which most team members find very challenging, as Elena and Anja decide to stay in the background, behind the virtual "wall":

> *Participation of people in solving this case was weak and it was possible to see that some of our consultants did not read and follow the discussion on Facebook. In the first week, only Ioanna, Lorena, and I participated in the discussions. It was rather difficult to get results as a team when there was not any conversation or any feedback given to the people putting in effort on the case.* (Harry, Case 3)

It is only after the last case is completed that Ioanna, looking back, has second thoughts about having dropped Skype meetings, at the time a unanimous decision by all the team members after the traumatic first case. Maybe simultaneous communication and more direct collaboration would have helped the team after all, and blaming the medium instead of making it work for the team was a mistake, she speculates in the team interview. Harry's final reflections indicate this may very well be the case, as he realizes that frequent communication to solve problems together can become an important motivating factor:

> *I learned that communication among team members on collaborative platforms and proactive working also motivates others to participate. As an example, Elena worked very hard and this also made others interested in the topic. It was possible to see that we were exchanging a lot of ideas and useful material on*

> *Facebook, and it felt motivating when people participated in collaboration.* (Harry, Case 4)

For most, the members' asynchronous ways of making sense of the cases and finding possible solutions, as well as personal doubts, make the team too unproductive, forcing Ioanna and Harry, or so they think, to concentrate the case proposals in their hands, and too often, to do the teamwork as a team of two instead of a team of five. For them, time is short and they feel they must be pragmatic. In this way, Harry and Ioanna lose their faith in the "team" as their understanding is that they are the only ones truly engaged, while Lorena and Elena feel they are sidelined and not included in critical team communications. While the core team focuses on building local teaming capabilities, a deeper and deeper fault line forms between the collocated members and the remote members, who are perceived to be slow, incompetent, and unreliable at least to some extent, and the team never reaches its full potential despite excellent task deliveries.

Even though the team encounters a lot of difficulties, still "the results were not as catastrophic as expected," as Ioanna points out in the end. For her, teamwork is a continuous learning process:

> *I associate the cases with the stages of a learning process. We had the chance to learn something different at every stage. And I believe this is what teams are about; to grow, to learn step-by-step, and to develop the team members . . . In the end we managed to find each other, to discuss, and we had a lot of fun together. But I think success is relative.[64]* (Ioanna, Case 4)

The team learning to work together is quite painful. When some members do not know how to progress or are insecure about their capabilities, they sometimes resort to "borrowing" ideas from internet resources – or remaining silent. Ioanna has high standards for quality she ferociously defends and manages to establish them as the team's benchmark:

> *I messaged, 'Is it possible to get right information?' as some others (Anja and Elena) copied some material . . . Anja had clearly no clue what to do . . . I agree we should reuse ideas but they should be formulated . . . I want us to be original! (*Ioanna, Case 2)

At this time, Ioanna interprets that Anja and Elena are not only incompetent, but also lazy and engage in unethical behavior. Whereas Anja, who is truly clueless about how to proceed and under pressure with no time left, takes inspiration from Wikipedia, which leads to a loss of respect in the eyes of Ioanna. For Ioanna then, a more or less conscious decision to marginalize them

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[64] Ioanna thinks about how difficult and stressful the team life has been too often, and how the team was not able to become a truly united team of five members.

make sense. Why collaborate and rely on people who cannot or do not really contribute and who act in morally flawed ways? For Cases 2 and 3, Ioanna and Harry receive hardly any of what they consider valid input from Elena and Anja,[65] and for Cases 3 and 4, the members work on two different documents and are only partially coordinated. Building a common understanding becomes increasingly difficult:

> . . . here no one wrote anything or just like they were confused and needed more time to understand the problem . . . So messages just stopped . . . Harry did the first variant of presentation, and for the rest, there was disconnected information in OneDrive done by everyone else and this information was never used . . . it's like there were two projects. (Anja, Case 3)

A lack of individual competence, real and perceived, is a clear showstopper in creating a team fully confident in its capacities and trusting each member to do his or her part. Although the domineering Ioanna considers teamwork a learning process, she is readily judgmental when her teammates deliver what she considers low quality. The team is not considering individual doubts and lacking skills as a collective challenge, but rather an individual's shortcoming impedes the team to fully develop and improve its capabilities. A prolonged time together during the last case allows sufficient bonding, a shared understanding, and trust to form between Ioanna, Harry, and Anja. Relieved and happy with this achievement, these three members push aside the fact that two members were left out of this unification to a large extent. This is an act of partial denial and sort of a refusal to engage in sensemaking when faced with socially awkward situation that does not absolutely need to be resolved for the team to complete the task. It is also unclear how Elena and Lorena truly make sense of the way the last case was finalized and about their relative marginalization in the team in general.[66]

10.2.3 Forces of influence

The team does not appoint a formal leader but rather agrees on roles needed in the team before doing anything else: organizer, communicator, innovator, evaluator, and project manager. Elena, the person with the most experience in business, takes the project manager role for the first case and decides that everyone needs to work on it independently without dividing the tasks, in order

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[65] Anja reports, however, working long hours on analysis for Case 2: *"On Saturday, I spent all day answering questions about analysis, and Elena worked some, too. Lorena did nothing claiming she 'does not know' . . . so I fear low quality of answers was a problem . . . and Ioanna and Harry needed to fill the gaps."*

[66] The tone of Lorena's and Elena's individual reflective essays becomes more distant towards the end.

to tap into the creativity and ideas of all team members. This decision is a bad one, however, or at least it leads to unwanted consequences as the team runs out of time. Elena falls ill during the week and does not react to the problem with clear instructions fast enough, further complicating the situation and spreading confusion. Elena blames "others"[67] for being inflexible and the general difficulties in managing a virtual team:

> *Hard to coordinate a large group of people in different locations and the majority of people are not flexible in their views.*[68] (Elena, Case 1)

Ioanna, worried about meeting the deadline, makes sense of this as a situation where the leader lacks capabilities and starts to think about taking over the leadership. Anja criticizes Elena's decision not to divide the tasks between the members and for not being more structured and clear in terms of what is expected of each member. In short, both Ioanna and Anja interpret Elena's behavior as not "leader-like":

> *I expected for the leader to come up with a flexible plan to discuss things together. I felt that our leader was not assuming the responsibility, and I expected that she would be more involved. I believe that a good leader should come up with a flexible plan, ask us if we agree with it, and coordinate. Is she the right person to be the leader?* (Ioanna, Case 1)

> *If we do not divide the answers, nobody feels responsible for answering them . . . maybe someone else will do this, they think. If we divide the work, we get answers early, and it is not even important if they are right or not. At least to have something to start with!* (Anja, Case 1)

Nominating a leader with the responsibility of steering the team to task completion creates confusion when the person leading and those who follow have a different understanding of individual responsibilities and the qualities required to work in a team like this (i.e., what is meant by "following" and "leading"). Even though members see that Elena coordinates some activities and arranges shared documents, this is not enough to take the team forward fast enough as the others are expecting a "stronger hand." Confused by Elena's apparent slowness to react and the approaching deadline, the stressed Ioanna supported by Harry becomes skeptical of her leadership and steps in to complete

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[67] Elena mainly refers to Ioanna here.
[68] Elena mainly refers to Ioanna here, who in her and Anja's opinion at least, is a bit rough and undiplomatic at times, even though her efforts are valued.

the case by the deadline.[69] Anja and Lorena passively approve as they are happy that someone else is doing something as they are not inclined to step in. Elena thinks the others just did not follow the plan in a disciplined way, and in her view, especially Ioanna refused to follow instructions she did not like. These developments during the first case scar the team for good, as differences between Ioanna and Elena remain unresolved.[70]

While Elena is silent over the events, Anja has mixed feelings. In her view, Ioanna is a competent leader for this team as she gets the task moving. Yet, she shares the same impression of Ioanna as Elena, as someone who has difficulty listening to others and who see things from different viewpoints. It is partially for this reason that Anja is unable to bring forward her ideas in the team:

> *Ioanna is a really good team captain, hardworking, with good initiative, and active. She really saved our team. I strongly believe that without her, we would not have been able to make the video but she has one disadvantage: she loves her own ideas only and hears only herself.* (Anja, Case 1)

Harry stays more neutral. He makes sense of the change in leadership as a move from a more democratic mode to a more autocratic mode of working. He clearly enacts this change himself and takes a role of a subordinate, happy that Ioanna takes his ideas into account before making decisions:

> *Ioanna was our project manager and she made all major decisions about the material we used in our video. However, she asked my opinion on some of the decisions she made. In the first case, we were more equal, everyone did everything . . . now the work was more divided and project managed, more structured . . . (Harry, Case 2)*

Lorena is happy with Ioanna's leadership, despite her occasionally rough manners, interpreting her intervention as filling a void in the team:

> *One team member emerged as a team leader who appointed times to get things done on time. So, the dynamic has changed. As I wrote last week, maybe we were in a desperate need of a leader, and we were.* (Lorena, Case 2)

Over time, both Lorena and, in particular, Elena take a certain distance from the rest of the team, but they never stop trying to add their contribution when

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[69] It is hard to tell why Elena, an experienced project manager, is so passive despite her commitment to becoming the "project leader." During the first week, she was also sick, which may offer at least a partial explanation. Her occupying a full-time position in a financial institution offers another one.

[70] In the final team interview (in which Elena does not participate), all members, including Ioanna, confess that "something" happened between Elena and Ioanna that made their communication a bit awkward. This probably had to do with Ioanna taking over the leadership role from Elena and with the many occasions when Elena's contributions were cut from the team presentations.

they feel inspired, [71] and they never become openly resentful or hostile. Good team results seem to help accept less than perfect team dynamics. The new leadership style introduced by Ioanna helps to get things done, but does not solve all the team's problems, such as the timeliness of internal task deliveries and the equal participation of all members. In particular, Lorena and Elena struggle to complete their parts of the work in a timely manner, which the rest of the team needs to build their contributions on. Harry and Ioanna make sense of this in very different ways. Harry takes some personal responsibility over what he recognizes as inadequate guidelines Ioanna and he gave to Lorena and Elena, while Ioanna sees this as a result of her lack of capability to motivate "the girls," a sentiment that grows over time as she engages in a self-reflective process of understanding her own performance as a team leader:

> *Yet the analysts missed the deadline . . . the guidelines for analysts were too confusing and the tasks too broad, so it became overwhelming.* (Harry, Case 2)

> *I failed to motivate the girls; why do I have to do everything? I have other projects, too, just like them . . . It is easy to read instructions like 'leader should motivate others,' but how to do that?* (Ioanna, Case 2)

> *I felt I did not coordinate the team as a good leader and that sometimes I did not accept that I needed to adapt and play the game with the toys I have . . . and try to make them better.* (Ioanna, Case 4)

Harry, Lorena, and Anja all silently approve of Ioanna's self-imposed leader role, as after the chaotic first case, they all share the opinion that the team needs firmer leadership, and in their view, Ioanna, despite her direct and unrefined style, is the team's best choice. After so much chaos and time waste, there is a marginalization of reflection and dialogue, and roughness is viewed as acceptable and difficult to modify. Elena's opinion is not known as she chooses not to comment on the change of leadership, which per se indicates some possible hard feelings that are unexpressed. Ioanna struggles and feels that she is not able to be tough and a good enough leader, capable of making others follow, and she tries such tactics as being "bossy" and giving direct instructions, without any self-reflection as to whether there are better alternatives. Anja, burning to use her skills and to overcome her hesitation to become active in the team, holds back her own initiative to contribute, as she fears negative feedback from Ioanna and is insecure about her competence, until the last case. Lorena and Elena are taken back by Ioanna's and Harry's frequent decisions to cut their work contributions without consultation, but on the other hand, they are pleased

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[71] This is seen, in particular, when Elena, after being very quiet for a couple of weeks, takes the initiative to build the whole of Case 4. The topic, healthcare, is close to her heart.

with the team results and never voice being hurt or suggest better ways to collaborate. Harry is much more aware of the reasons behind Elena's and Lorena's sluggish performance than Ioanna, and really feels bad for having to erase parts of his remote colleagues' work. He acknowledges that the structure he and Ioanna created for Elena and Lorena to conduct the analysis for Case 2 was too confusing, which partly explains its lateness. His efforts to bring the team together are subtler – too subtle to have a transformative effect. In a way, Harry and Ioanna work so well together that it has become easier to leave the others out of the big team decisions and heavy case work, although they both know they should involve others more and stop using time pressure as an excuse.

Despite an ongoing problem to integrate the "remote" and "core" members into one united team, the team is resilient and flexible. When Ioanna falls ill and has to travel during a couple of days during the third case, Harry steps in to take charge of coordinating the case research and the production of the presentation. He tries something different to encourage participation of the others – leading by example and moving person-to-person discussions to the common Facebook group[72] for better inclusion of all members:

> *I produced a lot of material for others to comment early on, hoping to inspire them . . . this did not work and practically no one participated in the presentation building process.* (Harry, Case 3)

> *Main decisions were made in face-to-face meetings in Finland. I tried to move discussions to Facebook, but as team members did not participate in discussions, it was easier to make decisions face-to-face . . . I felt bad to leave, in particular, Lorena out . . . but time was running out.* (Harry, Case 3)

Back from her trip, Ioanna meets once again face-to-face with Harry to complete the video. By now, she has developed a firm idea of how the team "works":

> *From my point of view, it is very simple how this works. If Harry and I do not have enough time to solve case studies, the result is bad because the others are confused or they have exams and other excuses. I wonder what will happen if Harry and I do not do anything for the next case study. We cannot just leave the others to do this.* (Ioanna, Case 3)

In Ioanna's absence, Harry tries to fix the team issues of inclusion and time management by leading by example – only to get disappointed. It is likely that,

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[72] Harry calls for all the team to work by presenting clear instructions on Facebook as soon as Case 3 is announced: *"We would need information about: 1) what the shipping and shipbuilding industry should be like in the future; and 2) How to change the business model. The key goal of the case is to make these industries more reliable for European system providers."* (Case 3)

at this point, subtle cues were no longer enough to help steer the team, and that Lorena and Elena had grown accustomed to being marginalized and to the fact that the main decisions were always made by the "core" team, most often in face-to-face meetings. Ioanna makes sense of the situation that nothing would happen without her and is very grateful to Harry for his reliability and for being on her side. When Anja finally transforms in their face-to-face session during the last case and becomes active, openly critical in a constructive way and lively, Ioanna feels happy and accomplished, without thinking much that her failure to pull in the remote members was significant.

10.2.4 Unity of the team

The team is united in the intent and goodwill of each member to participate and deliver high-quality competitive cases. Everyone in his or her own way tries to improve the way the team works, but the team succeeds only sometimes and partially in becoming a well-functioning organization. Over time, this group becomes "just a bunch of people with the same interests," and far from a team of "inspired warriors" they aspired to become in the beginning to win the challenge, as Ioanna points out in the end of the last case. Yet, the team never ends up in an open conflict, although there are severe differences of opinion along the way. The members get along and their differences are mostly related to task execution and team organization, and much less to human dynamics. Often, individuals make efforts to affect change, and this willingness to do something about the team is believed to be one of its strengths:

> *I am glad every team member wants to get the best results; they all work hard and try to find relevant information for given tasks. Yes . . . there have been ups and downs, we have changed our routines and tried different ways to make our teamwork better.* (Lorena, Case 3)

On a personal level, the members do not get stuck when interpersonal differences of opinion or misunderstandings arise; yet, the team never learns to bridge the virtual divide and become a true team of five. Already, the first case is a shock[73] as the team has a "hard time putting people and assignments in place and there were many misunderstandings" (Lorena, Case 1). Their initial commitment and motivation is not enough to bring the team together:

> *An over-motivated team is not a guarantee of success . . . we should work more and talk less . . . we should have planned better and divided our work . . . if we want to win.* (Anja, Case 1)

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[73] Lorena describes her feelings after the first case as *"having crashed, as we did not know how to go on, what's next."*

Here, Anja makes sense of her team as collectively suffering from a sort of over-eagerness to work together and to have a rewarding social experience, risking task execution, which then influences social interactions in a negative way. The sense of a fluctuating state of confusion and misunderstandings prevail during the team's life. When Ioanna talks about "feeling the spirit" of the team during Case 4, she is referring to her local team members who finally manage to align tasks and social aspects in an optimal way. This time, Anja joins in as a full team member to complement the good working relationship that has already been established between Harry and herself since the very first case.[74] Anja, happy with having gained the courage to speak up and to see the positive reaction of the others, reciprocates, "Thanks to a more equal and democratic political regime, our team has become our team as we learned to communicate"[75] (Anja, Case 4). For Ioanna, the becoming of the team is the result of Anja starting to "do something" and of the team having fun together again like early on, while for Anja it is more a reflection of how she freed herself from her insecurities during the long face-to-face session when, in her view, Ioanna relaxed her autocratic ways.

Even though there is a shared wish to be a more united team, the awareness that there is something missing, with two members in part sent to and in part locating themselves in the margins of team life, varies among the members. Ioanna is still frustrated during Case 4, as to her, the three "girls" have not realized that the "team has five members, not two," while Lorena and Elena, with no hard feelings and happy with the team results, leave the team somewhat bruised[76] for what has been a puzzling experience of partial inclusion in team life. Harry acknowledges the consequences of the issue of member inclusion and exclusion in the team, which he disguises as the team "not meeting its goals":

> *We were not really capable of working as a team . . . we did not work based on principles we had decided in the beginning, and from this point of view, we did not manage to meet goals set for the team . . . and from this point, our team was unsuccessful.* (Harry, Case 4)

Even with the divide, the team is still able to stick together and rally behind common decisions, even somewhat irrational ones as "a matter of principle."

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[74] Along the way, Ioanna repeats how close she is to Harry with statements like: *"Harry worked well, he really helped a lot, but Anja was again doing nothing."* (Ioanna, Case 2)

[75] Communication becomes easier with a more personal approach and relaxed atmosphere when the three local members get together for a six-hour joint work session. Ioanna relaxes her bossy, often critical tone, making it easier for Anja to feel like an equal partner. Trust and a sense of a team of equals builds between the three during the last case.

[76] Harry brings up the importance of Elena's presentation for Case 4 as a motivator for the others to keep on looking for good solutions and to push up the ambition level – even though the contents of her suggested case are almost entirely erased from the final case. This is never communicated to Elena.

During the last case, those teams still wanting to compete for tickets to the prized event were given a tighter deadline than the other teams. Even though by this time it was highly improbable the team would win, the members, inspired by Ioanna, still agree to try to stick to the team values they originally committed to:

> *We had a conversation on our Facebook group . . . and in the end, everyone agreed to do a last effort for our team to honor the values that we agreed to stand for in the beginning. To fight like 'warriors' that we pretended to be, that is.* (Ioanna, Case 4)

Together, team members make sense of Ioanna's suggestion as a return to its somewhat forgotten ideals – a sign that the team is still a possibility. Good results are clearly not enough for members to consider their team as a successful one. Harry is the one who articulates this lack of becoming a real team the best all along, yet he never acts on his situational understanding.[77] The team as an entity does not learn to use all its resources fully and distribute the workload equally, and often loses in efficiency because of a lack of communication. One part of the team – Ioanna, Harry, and Anja – discover how productive working together can be both in terms of task execution and social experience in their very last team meeting and working session, which lasts much longer than the previous ones. This means, however, that the team is not able to become a virtual one using communication technology and bridging the distance with its two remote members.

After the initial enthusiasm, already during the first case, team members view their team and its situation in different ways. Harry feels teamwork is "challenging." Elena echoes this view as she "does not feel overly positive about teamwork," but remains still hopeful, as she believes the team is "gradually learning to work together." For Ioanna, it is her responsibility to "make" all the team members see the world the way she does and is often stressed and disappointed over "not being able to involve others better and to *make* them participate . . . to *make* them aware that the team has five members, not two." She feels she needs to "be bossier and to remind others about their roles as they tend to forget what to do,"[78] and she does not consider the option that perhaps an open conversation and a less hierarchical organization than she is trying to impose would help for a better functioning team to emerge. Even though the team never becomes a real one, it still remains a possibility, even in the eyes of Elena and Lorena. Despite the obvious dysfunctions, Elena thinks at the end of Case 4 that "together the team would be able to conquer the world," and Lorena

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[77] This attitude has to do with Harry's personality. He is calm, factual, thorough, research and theory oriented, and not very sociable and never gets involved in arguments. In many important ways, he and Ioanna complement each other very well.

[78] For Ioanna, "bossy" means goal oriented and leader-like. Others tend to feel her bossiness is aggressive, causing fear and withdrawal.

mentions that she "could interact with her team members in the future." The overall mixed feelings over whether or not the team was truly successful are candidly expressed by Ioanna in the very end:

> *Success . . . for me it was to act as a team, to respect our values, to help each other to be responsible, to discuss, to create our identity, to have a common goal. In the beginning, I felt that we could do that . . . everyone was so enthusiastic. But something changed, and unfortunately, my feeling is that overall we failed as a team . . . but objectively speaking, I would say that we are a successful team.* (Ioanna, Case 4)

What that "something" is that changed seems to remain an unexplored mystery for the members. Team members seem to make sense of their team as a missed opportunity and an unfinished project; successful in its tasks but without building real teaming capability by truly including all members. This is toughest for Ioanna who perceives this as a personal failure. She interprets that she as "the leader" failed in truly bringing everyone together. The others do not blame any one person but seem to think that this type of teamwork is tough and challenging to begin with. They realize that the team was always striving to work towards the same goals without ever reaching a state of advanced collaboration.

10.2.5 Hidden thoughts and emotions

The hidden thoughts and felt emotions the team member's experience are not overly strong or negative, but still they shape what the team becomes in important ways. Ioanna is exasperated by her impression that without her, "nothing would happen," triggering her to judge others based on that assessment. She does not realize how her own behavior influences others by alienating or even demotivating them at times. Harry is aware of the increasing divide inside the team, the reasons for it, as well as the excess stress felt by Ioanna that comes out as expressions of bossiness and over-eagerness to control the team and the teammates. Yet, his disposition is passive, and he does not do much about it but "hopes" for a better future instead:

> *There seems to be conflicts between Ioanna and some of our team members, but I hope and think we can solve them together. It is possible members are not happy with the division of work of this type, but this is only speculation.* (Harry, Case 2)

Harry "speculates" quite accurately, most likely, but does not seek to establish shared meanings or share insights with others. Here, the virtuality of

the work context makes this difficult. He reflects on the motivational impact of erasing other teammates' work. Yet, he never brings this up to others:

> *It felt difficult to make the decision to cut a lot of Elena's material away. She had used a lot of time and effort to create a presentation with her idea, but in our opinion, we had to cut out most of it as it did not fully answer the question . . .'* (Harry, Case 4)

Anja suffers from a lack of self-confidence and is overwhelmed by the rather difficult tasks, which makes her seem more passive than she may be under other circumstances. Each time, she plans how to take more responsibility when it comes to choosing theoretical frames, creating the presentation, and doing the video, but somehow she always falls short of her own plans. Both Elena and Lorena try their best but often feel sidelined, as they are not part of Harry, Ioanna, and Anja's tightening local communication loop. They constantly see their contributions cut out or trivialized from the final case material, without fully understanding why. Yet, neither of them gives up, trying again with each case, although Ioanna, in particular, fails to capture these efforts. Lorena attributes her failures to make her voice heard to the assumption that "communication is easier for the collocated members," and is disappointed with herself because she has "so many ideas and suggestions but is unable to show this":

> *I can say that I am not the kind of person who pushes my opinions on others, so I added some things in Google Documents that actually did not go to the final version. So, I have to repeat myself and be bolder ;)* (Lorena, Case 2)

> *I have to be more confident when presenting my ideas . . . but I think it is sometimes wise to listen and cooperate with other team members to get the best result possible.* (Lorena, Case 2)

> *I found the basic information that we first focused on – suicide prevention. I spent two days building the slides, but the team decided to go in a different direction in the end . . . I do feel a little upset that I spent so much effort and it was not used, but I do like our final presentation, and as this was a team effort, I feel positive about the whole experience and outcome.* (Elena, Case 4).

As time passes, it becomes increasingly difficult to change roles, and it is hard for the two remote members to break into the team core. Ioanna, even though she laments the lack of involvement by the "girls," readily takes charge of the strategic direction and does not give others much chance or space. Harry is dominant in conducting research and likes this role. His failure to act on his accurate understanding of why the "girls" have a tough time pulling their full weight is as critical to what the team becomes as Ioanna's lack of situational dynamics and empathy. While virtual communication may make

communication more challenging, this does not explain communication failures by individuals. Blaming virtuality, instead of actively tackling personal difficulties and finding solutions for team communication and coordination problems, marginalizes Lorena and Elena for no insurmountable reason.

Ioanna, enthusiastic and eager to win, often feels that "there are only two people to solve the case," thus creating more stress for herself than needed. Her attribution of the others' seemingly inactive attitude to their "lack of responsibility," and the feeling that if she "does not do something, nothing happens" combined with the time pressure, make her try a bit too hard to be a leader. This tends to dampen the others' motivation and her detailed and direct interventions come across quite harsh at times. Plagued by her frustrations, she tends to be condescending in her thinking when it comes to her teammates, other than Harry:

> *Elena and Lorena tried to answer our questions to do the analysis, but it was not a success* (Ioanna, Case 2)/ *It does not seem to matter which platforms of communication we use because there is no implication or will to produce something that is of good quality; I really do not see the contribution of the girls in the team; I feel disappointed and resigned by now. I am getting used to the idea that the team only has two active members and the other three are just passive* (Ioanna, Case 2)/ *I asked all group members in our group on Facebook to think about the case study to put information in the common document as soon as they have an opinion. And, of course, nobody did that, except for Harry . . . and if it wasn't for me that pushed people to do something, they did not do anything, as usual.* (Ioanna, Case 3)

Sometimes, other members, with the exception of Harry, go silent all together, leaving Ioanna with the feeling that she is "building bridges where there is only water," referring to her frustration over vain attempts to build a true team and her self-awareness that she "would like to change her own attitude and be less stressed." When her local team members finally discover each other and form what Harry, Anja, and she consider a true team during the last case, she feels relieved, without giving much thought to the fact that the two remote members were only marginally part of the teaming exercise:

> *I had so much fun when we did the presentation with Anja and Harry. I wasn't so stressed because I felt that I was not alone on solving the case study. I saw encouragements, people who were willing to help this time, to have fun and make jokes.* (Ioanna, Case 4)

Anja shares Ioanna's feeling of excitement during the last case, and also seems to forget that the team has five members, not three:

We really became the team we wanted to be in the beginning. Yes, our work started awfully and was completely different from our dreams. However, we worked a lot and created the team in which we wanted to be. (Anja, Case 4)

Ioanna's understanding that others are there to "help," instead of being full team members combined with her assertive personality and ambition to "win," makes her over time a kind victim of herself, and a self-fulfilling prophecy forms. There is no indication that the others would not have been able to deliver equally outstanding cases without her or with her occupying a less domineering role. After the last case, both Ioanna and Anja conceptualize "their" team as the local sub-team, without taking seriously enough the fact that their failure to include the remote members makes the team fail as a social organization.

10.2.6 Critical events

The most critical events influencing sensemaking in this team are related to a need to improvise at the last minute when formal plans do not work out. In practice, this leads to the formation of fault lines in the team, and each episode makes these fault lines wider, setting the team on a path of division difficult to reverse. The team is able to work with these partly failing and partly functioning team dynamics, without developing open hostilities or pent-up anger, and deliver good results.

Work does not progress and the team is about to miss its deadline during Case 1. Soon after the team members, enthusiastic and motivated, diligently set out to work on their very first case, it becomes obvious that the team risks running out of time. The task is more complex than expected, and it is hard to define the problem and find solutions. Everyone working on everything independently to then build a shared understanding of how to build and execute the case is ineffective, given the tight schedule and the lack of discipline within the team. While having to improvise, the team shares the understanding that this way of working is not realistic, and that the team is not capable of progressing if everyone works on everything at the same time.[79] Together, the three col-located partners complete the analysis to speed up the work, while Elena agrees to organize and edit the final Word document that the case presentation, completed by Harry and Ioanna, is built on. From the point of view of sensemaking, with this event, a precedent of abandoning remote work to rely on a dominant coalition of local members who know each other best and who have

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[79] Harry expresses outright that *"the team was not able to work as planned,"* and Ioanna questions Elena's capability to be a project leader, justifying Harry's and Ioanna's decision to break the initial group decision "to work together on each aspect of the case."

a chance to meet in person and control the team is set as a "fix," a way to solve problems with team effectiveness.

Elena and Lorena miss an internal deadline during Case 2. The same pattern of Ioanna and Harry getting together to solve the case in a panic mode as stress accumulates and the deadline approaches is repeated during the second case, despite the change in leadership. This time, the team had divided in two to be more effective, and Ioanna took charge of the team without formal negotiations. Elena and Lorena were in charge of conducting foundational analysis – the more straightforward and less demanding part of the work – while the other three members handled the strategy. Again, they have problems meeting the deadline:

> *As our analysts missed the deadline and Anja was not able to attend group work that much, it meant that there was more work for Ioanna and I . . . in order to get the case solved and the video made.* (Harry, Case 2)

The question why the deadline was missed was not raised in the team. Elena and Lorena were overwhelmed by the task, and the questions outlined by Ioanna for them to answer were "too many and confusing," as Harry points out. Ioanna's strict orders and authoritative tone to have the case ready three days before deadline were not seen as helpful. This only added unnecessary extra pressure and seemed unreasonable to the rest of the team members, who interpreted this as an unreasonable demand doomed to fail, which then became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even Harry was not happy with Ioanna creating a "false sense of rush." Ioanna's sensemaking in this situation was rather that people are slow and not sufficiently time-sensitive, so rushing them was needed. The exaggeration had to do with her lack of trust in her teammates and the state of stress she was in, as she feared bad performance. Reasons for the analysis not being timely are many, such as uncertainties over the task, lack of confidence to solve the case, lack of time, general confusion, and the team's growing latent reliance on two team members that have become the most influential – Ioanna and Harry. Thus, the unintentional division between the local and remote members deepens.[80]

The local team becomes a "real team" during Case 4. Although all the members are inspired by the last case, once again, the team ends up in last minute confusion and rush to deliver the final presentation. Elena works on one solution and Ioanna on another – despite the shared platforms for virtual work, their efforts are only partially coordinated. Everyone appreciates the work done

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[80] By conducting a sort of *coup d'état,* assuming control and assigning the two remote members analytical tasks without any formal discussion, while securing the execution of the strategic ones onsite in Finland, creates a sort of implicit hierarchy in the team, further contributing to the divide.

by Elena, but her solution does not directly answer the research question, and she is unable to fully communicate its value to her teammates.[81] In a panic mode, Ioanna, Harry, and Anja get together and work a full day to deliver an excellent case – one minute to deadline. This time, Ioanna is happy with the teamwork and is grateful for the increased involvement by Anja to join her and Harry in their efforts:

> *For the first time, I enjoyed working in this team . . . people can be involved when they really want to . . . every member always has an idea or opinion even if they do not express it . . . Anja surprised me when we had our meeting; she had an opinion and expressed it this time, even some criticism.* (Ioanna, Case 4)

Here, Anja starts to feel safe and closer to the others. The case presentation emerges out of tight cooperation during which these three members "discover each other" and enjoy the experience. The problem is that this "awakening" excludes the two remote members, and the team is never able to build a bridge over the "virtual divide"[82]:

> *Our main strategy was created in the last meeting . . . and I do not even remember who suggested it. We just passionately talked with each other . . . and the solution was born . . . I feel proud . . . we passed from struggle and confusion to pleasant teamwork . . . but Elena and Lorena almost did not participate in the two last cases.* (Anja, Case 4)

> *Surprisingly, I can say that now I am glad about our teamwork. Finally I have what I was hoping for since we started. For the first time, we worked as a team. This was a surprise for me, because I did not expect all my teammates would be involved . . . more or less . . . it was not the perfect team, but at least there was more implications from all of us and a lot of fun when Anja, Harry, and I did the presentation.* (Ioanna, Case 4)

For Ioanna, Harry, and Anja, the "team" they are happy with is the local team, meeting face-to-face, and reaching a high degree of intimacy. While everyone is satisfied with the good end result, a beautiful "sand castle" in one corner of the "sandbox," once again, the two remote members are sidelined and do not have much to say about the way the team works and its outcome.

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[81] By this time, the team has abandoned the use of Skype and other synchronous communication tools to exchange ideas in a live environment.

[82] Lorena and Elena both participate in doing the analysis for Case 4 and Elena even tries to create a presentation. Since none of these contributions has much visibility in the final case presentation, the three collocated members readily forget or trivialize these efforts (with the exception of Harry, perhaps).

10.3 Summary

The members of the *Sandbox* hope to be a true team beyond getting the tasks done, but they are not able to establish communication platforms and practices fitting the team members' ambitions, schedules, personal styles, and the nature of the tasks they need to solve together. Learning to become a virtual team is too tough for them, and collectively they give up and enact a teaming-in and teaming-out process, in which the three local members find each other while the two remote members drift away. In their case, with three members being located in the core site, it is possible to organize most of the work to take place locally, instead of making a genuine effort to fully include all five team members and integrate the capabilities each brings to the team. Despite many difficulties and hurt feelings, the mood never turns permanently sour, and the team is encouraged over good feedback and results. The sensemaking process strongly influencing what this team becomes is triggered by one team member with a domineering disposition, who attributes quite normal difficulties in getting a team started to personal flaws in the teammates, thus enacting and reinforcing dysfunctional behavior and team dynamics – to which the others respond. It is only a question of time for a team this divided by the virtual wall that the members have co-constructed to break for good.

11   THE SCOUTS

Figure 8   The Scouts

11.1 The backdrop

All of us have heard about scouting – but what are scouts about, really? The Scouts movement began in England in 1907 with the publication of Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* field manual, inspired in the ways of the military and used for recreational and educational purposes. Today, with over 40 million members in some one million local community scout groups, it is one of the largest youth movements in the world.[83] Scouting should "give young people the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge, empowering them to take an active part in the movement and in their communities, and strengthen their capacity to face the challenges of tomorrow."[84] High ideals, a demanding task, and a broad mission, most will think. A team that is like a group of scouts is so perfect that it is almost sounds too good to be true. Yet, there is a hidden danger in a team like scouts: their loyalty to each member of the group may grow stronger than to the organization they are part of.

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[83] *"This day in history – the boy scout movement begins"*-website, http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/boy-scouts-movement-begins (retrieved on November 4, 2016)
[84] "*Scout*"- website, https://www.scout.org/mission (retrieved on November 4, 2016)

11.2 The Scouts from within

The *Scouts* is a true dream team with shared values – a place for all members to develop themselves not only when it comes to executing specific tasks, but also as a social organization and as individuals. Scouts value teamwork and understand that everyone must start somewhere, because a team is never ready, but always in the making. While it is important to strive towards perfection, life is complicated and there is no point in getting stuck with petty details or blaming others. Scouts look after each other – that is what they really believe in. They know that it is normal that in teamwork some members carry more weight than others, but they make sure all members contribute, have a place in the community and learn new skills. If the demands from the outside are unreasonable and it becomes hard to deliver the expected task, they stick to each other.[85] Their loyalty is to the other scouts first, and there is no question about it. When the team life ends, members express regret, because when it comes to teamwork, everyone wants to belong to a team like the *Scouts*.

11.2.1 Meet the characters

There are five members in the team:

    Marc, a Finnish man in his early forties based in Finland, has had a career in IT project management and virtual project work is nothing new to him. A self-described mix of a computer nerd and a business-oriented person, his practical experience is of great help to the *Scouts* team. His visions on the economy and the meaning of work are broad, and he believes that "innovation is essential in today's global economy, and the main emphasis should be on having groups of people work together to leverage their dispersed knowledge to solve multidimensional challenges that cross multiple disciplines." Although he finds it a bit unfair that the workload in the team is not distributed equally (Nila and Jia Li do less work than the others), he understands that this is the way life is and does not lose his calm and good manners over this, but actively tries to find ways to improve the situation instead.

    Peter, a German man in his mid-twenties based in Finland, is a driving force in the team – although he never refers to himself in any self-enhancing way. A

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[85] The team members consider the workload too high, the deadlines too close to each other, and the seven-minute limit to the video too short to do justice to the thorough analysis they were conducting. However, they never give in, until in the last case, when their video exceeds the formal limit by five minutes, resulting in them losing the challenge to another team, although their cases, overall, were by far the best quality. Peter describes this as an "enough is enough" situation where the whole team stood behind him knowing there would be a penalty for exceeding the allowed time.

person with a pragmatic nature, for him, in teamwork among peers what counts is that the most expert person for a given task takes a leading position, while imposing structures and hierarchies is counterproductive and unhelpful. Peter is ambitious and he has a strong sense of justice – for him, what matters most is to get the team to work as such, together.[86] When external demands grow tougher and time pressure becomes difficult to handle, he communicates this politely to the assignment owner without ever compromising his commitment and quality of work.[87]

Nila, a Tajik woman in her early twenties based in Russia, is a junior team member with high ideals and a "hot temper"[88] who wants to not only have an exciting career, but also to contribute to the development of her country. With a background in the hospitality industry, she plans to develop tourist services in her region, Pamir, when she returns home. She has serious challenges that would demotivate many: struggles with the English language, difficulties in getting access to a technology infrastructure necessary for virtual teamwork, affiliation with a different organization than the rest of the team members, and dependence on other team members to send her theoretical frameworks and the background information needed to solve the cases. Nila is fearless and does not get discouraged, however. She wants to maximize her learning and be a full team member, although being a junior is not always easy and speaking up is sometimes difficult.

Jia Li, a Chinese woman in her early twenties based in Finland, with a background in marketing, modeling, and as a leader in a student union, is used to socializing with people, but finds it sometimes difficult to communicate her point of view or ask for help, at least in the foreign environment she finds herself in. She describes herself as "a responsible and patient person with good time management skills," traits that are proven true over the team's lifespan. Regardless, her high motivation to learn and to do her best help her overcome initial difficulties, and in tandem with Nila, she learns to become more independent and execute tasks more and more effectively as time goes by.[89] Her

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[86]Although he does not occupy any formal leader role in the team, Peter's influence on the way the team works and how it becomes a team is important, especially when it comes to work morale: *"I loathe people who treat others disrespectfully, and I think I have relatively high moral standards towards myself that I also expect from others."* This disposition finds an echo in both Bao and Marc, the other two senior members, and is transferred to both Nila and Jia Li.

[87] Peter elaborates in the final interview that the team tasks were *"mainly a challenge towards oneself,"* depending on one's goals. In this team, the goal was to excel and win, so the workload was also excessive for individuals. This was a matter of choice, as much less work would have been sufficient to do "just fine."

[88] Nila's self-described "hot temper" is channeled in this team mainly as passion, perseverance, and almost child-like enthusiasm and she never triggers conflicts.

[89] Jia Li has a very strong learning orientation and she looks up to the more senior members as her mentors, which comes through strongly in statements such as these: *"I asked some of my team members to comment on my work so I could improve my weaknesses."* (Jia Li, Case 3)

knowledge of the Chinese market and culture are helpful to the team, and she takes pride in being able to contribute.

Bao, a Vietnamese man in his late twenties based in Finland, is an IT graduate with an engineering background who has worked as a web developer – very useful experience for the whole team as he can troubleshoot problems with technology and has proficiency in the use of software platforms. Bao comes from a family of entrepreneurs and plans to develop his own business in the future. He is interested in "technology, strategy, and management and to mix them to create value in business," and he values "effective teamwork, a comfortable working environment, supportive colleagues, and the possibility to learn and advance in his career." For him, learning to combine theory with practical applications and better understand how to work in a multicultural and virtual team are important drivers for motivation. The *Scouts* is a perfect place to practice these skills, and his open mind, helpful nature, and impeccable work ethic are excellent building materials for a team that becomes "perfect."

11.2.2 Shared views

Unlike so many other teams, the members' initial expressed commitment to the team grows stronger over time. Consistently excellent feedback for cases feeds motivation, and despite different levels of competence, everyone is learning new skills (although not necessarily the same ones) from teamwork and tasks, forming a virtuous cycle. There is a sense of a need to "constantly improve" team communication, encompassing clarifying how the team is supposed to work, what is expected of team members, and concrete actions to take so that every team member truly becomes a full member carrying their fair share of responsibilities.[90] Language barriers together with a lack of relevant work experience limits Jia Li's and Nila's participation in the beginning, and this is a true challenge for the whole team. Peter explains how he makes sense of and tackles this hurdle – in particular, how he and other seniors occasionally purposely withdraw to the background to give space to the juniors and encourage their participation, never attributing passive behavior to "laziness" or "incompetence":

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[90] What comes through strongly in the case material is that what mattered in this team was that everyone gave their very best, came prepared to meetings, expressed their opinions, and were active in all possible ways in helping the team move forward. Regardless of their level of competence or personal dispositions, all members found a place in this team and were able to evolve and make meaningful contributions. This type of team atmosphere did not "just happen," or the members were not just "lucky" to have "great people" in the team; it required a lot of conscious effort, sensitivity to others, and reflective thinking by all team members, although it is clear that some members were more "followers" and some more "leaders."

> *We realize that sometimes . . . conversations are hardly expedient. In order to enhance information processing, we in special cases have to switch to written communication, e.g. via Facebook. Furthermore, we feel like certain team members should be a little more expansive. In meetings, I often feel the urge to take a leadership role within the group, because otherwise there is total silence. I then try to address certain members directly and ask for their opinion. We do not want to push our opinion onto the team, but would instead appreciate a little more feedback and discussion. However, I think this is not a problem of abilities or motivation, but more due to cultural issues such as "fear of losing face" or "conflict avoidance." In order to encourage these team members to participate more actively, I decided to strive for a little more passive role in the beginning of our next case.* (Peter, Case 1)

Bao has similar thoughts:

> *If someone is silent in discussions, we will help that person to be more engaged in our group tasks by encouraging him or her to say something, because his or her idea will be valuable for our group work, and we need everyone's contributions to be successful. We always respect individuals' ideas to build comprehensive, reliable solutions, and we always try to create a friendly and constructive working environment.* (Bao, Case 5)

The more senior and experienced team members also share the understanding that it takes time to build a team and that everything cannot be perfect from the beginning – a team needs time to form and members must adjust to each other. Imperfections and misunderstandings are understood to be part of teamwork and they are best tackled by addressing them constructively:

> *In the beginning, you need time to sort things out, it is unavoidable. Of course, in the beginning, you can be more efficient, but it is all part of the learning experience of the group.* (Peter, interview)

An initial commitment is necessary but the team needs to work to maintain it, which can be tough when members have different levels of experience and do not know each other at all. In this team, an atmosphere of mutual respect was established as it was openly accepted that the members come from different backgrounds, and they are at different stages in their careers and learning. The more senior members' acceptance of the junior members' lack of knowledge and skills in many fields, and their willingness to help lift the team's competence level is key to maintaining everyone's commitment and allows for steep learning curves at both the individual and team levels. Nila here shows how she makes sense of her team in a "scout-like" manner; the team comes first

and communication is both task and people oriented because that is best for the collectivity:

> *We communicate not only to solve a problem but we help each other with ideas . . . we have a real team, and we look forward to the future that is the best for the team.* (Nila, Case 1)

Marc keeps on repeating "without communication, there is no team," and he along with Peter, is a driving force behind what becomes a complex, evolving, and nuanced team communication system. Team communication principles include "openness and a good atmosphere, not only to present opinions and justify one's points of view, but to listen carefully to what others say, check if others understand, and in general, find better ways to work" (Marc), "honest feedback in a way that no one will take any feedback or criticism personally, but constructively, so that it is all about the overall goal of the team" (Peter), as well as mutual assistance, "trying to help each other to do stuff" (Bao). Team communication is built around a sophisticated platform, including different tools with clear and specific purposes: Facebook group for ongoing conversations, Google Docs for working on shared documents, Skype for formal meetings, text messages for organizing logistics for team members located in the same site, and occasional emails to Nila when her other platforms fail. Formal team meetings are pre-scheduled and they are not long – approximately 30 minutes each, typically, with the exception of the more complex last case, when team members can gather on Skype for over 90 minutes for a single meeting. The team learns to adopt short and precise meeting agendas, write quick minutes of the meeting after each meeting to stay collectively focused, and in general, maintain frequent, quick communication links among the team members, despite everyone being busy and with pressing schedules.

> *All of us were very ambitious . . . and we had very close interaction loops. So we gave feedback to each other pretty often . . . we had meetings in really short time cycles in order to make sure we are all on the same page, on the same level, and working efficiently.* (Peter, interview)

As the members learn to know each other and teamwork gains some structure, virtual communication becomes easier and a better option when schedules are tight and difficult to match, and the team is able to drop face-to-face meetings altogether. The team learns to become more effective over time and in Peter's words, "*time-consuming misunderstandings are prevented and we collaborate with a high efficiency.*" As time goes by, many functions become routinized as each member becomes aware of what the strengths and weaknesses of the other members are, as well as what their own strengths and

weaknesses are in relation to others. Peter's sensemaking on the teaming aspect highlights that working on the team is more important than working on the task:

> *. . . the trend of a simplified teamwork due to experiences from the previous cases, which was already observable last week, continued. Our approach was much more structured, sideshows minimized, and efficiency increased. Responsible for that was on one side the functional expertise we had gained, an even larger amount, however, I think was dedicated to interpersonal aspects. We now know the individual traits of our colleagues, which improves our communication by a considerable degree.* (Peter, Case 3)

Team members increase their joint problem-solving capabilities week by week and develop individual areas of expertise without losing flexibility. Even though everyone routinely comments on each other's work and backup systems are in place, Nila and Jia Li specialize in location analysis, Bao in research, and Peter in conducting financial analysis and putting the video together, for example. A cycle of continuous learning builds both team capacity and strengthens a shared sense of commitment. Motivation, learning, and commitment are intertwined in various mutually dependent team processes. Bao explains how the execution of Case 4 was different from Case 3, triggered by what was perceived as a more interesting case coupled with better teaming capabilities as a result of the team learning to work together:

> *An interesting change between Case 3 and 4 relates to team motivation and learning. People were more motivated to find creative solutions to this case study with efficient resources so that we could get excellent results. For example, we applied the SECI model,[91] which is actually a good solution for us, and people found comprehensive solutions from different points of view, such as technology, system interoperability, human capability development, and inter-organizational flow of knowledge, for instance. This is actually impressive to me about our capabilities to building a customer solution.* (Bao, Case 4)

The absence of conflicts in this team does not mean there are no differences of opinion, but rather that the team is able to turn the talents of its diverse membership into an advantage. Whenever possible, members try to integrate each other's ideas in the cases, making team presentations rich and insightful. On occasions when the team is not able to progress due to different viewpoints, competing suggestions are given a fair chance, and after thorough consideration,

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[91] The SECI model refers to the framework by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996), which has become the cornerstone of knowledge creation and transfer theory. They proposed four ways that knowledge types can be combined and converted, showing how knowledge is shared and created in the organization.

team members vote for the best outcome, which is never disputed. Those whose suggestions do not "win" express happiness over the best solution being put forward and consider the chance to present their pitch to others as a valuable learning experience.[92] This team does not fall into the typical traps of teamwork of potentially conflict-laden situations arising, when people are working under pressure and personal disagreements surface. Case 5 is a good example. The problem scenario is more open-ended than in the previous cases, requiring extensive research and creative thinking, and the team members initially struggle to build a shared understanding of what the case is about and how to solve it. Here, instead of engaging in arguments, the team meeting is stopped and postponed so everyone can do additional research and think about options individually. The result is a quick agreement in the next meeting, and once again, the team delivers an excellent case. Together, team members do not make sense of their different opinions as a battle between individuals, but as a need for the team to secure the best solution from the team's perspective. Jia Li explains:

> *Firstly, we had really totally different ideas about what kind of business we need to build and what strategy we should suggest. Then we discussed it . . . but still could not reach an agreement, so we stopped the meeting and then everyone tried to find more information. Then, we had another meeting, and everyone talked about the advantages of different kinds of businesses and whether they would be suitable for the company or not . . . finally, we reached an agreement.* (Jia Li, Case 5)

With a shared sense of what the team stands for and how it should work, the *Scouts* reaches its extremely ambitious initial goal to "make sure all assignments are ready 48 hours before the deadline to allow for a buffer" in all cases but the last one, where the amount of research and work needed to create a quality solution was overwhelming. The team falls short not of its internal goals to do excellent work or to be on time, but of an imposed external goal to keep each case video within seven minutes. This is an excellent achievement, overall.

11.2.3 Forces of influence

Although "it is necessary that sometimes someone takes a coordinator role and speeds things up" (Marc, interview), there are no formal leaders in the team and everyone is expected to formulate and communicate suggestions and opinions, contribute, and take initiative. The three most experienced team members, Peter,

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[92] Jia Li, for instance, openly says that *"even if they did not adopt my idea, I was still happy that I tried."* (Jia Li, Case 6)

Bao, and Marc, act as the main coordinators. Decision making is consultative and collective and no one ever tries to impose his or her opinion on others without justification or a discussion. Team members are able to make decisions together as a joint effort, and to discuss openly and honestly each other's work, both its weaknesses and strengths.

When there are differences of opinion, the team takes a vote. What is best for the team is best for the individual members as well, and not vice versa. The work environment is democratic, and people are able to choose what they work on each time to a large extent, and collectively ensure all the tasks to complete the case have been addressed. Bao and Peter explain how work gets done:

> *We always want to work together in a democratic environment, so all decisions must be agreed with a high percentage of votes by team members. Everyone is encouraged to give his or her ideas towards solutions. After that, we gather all the team's ideas to find the best one for a reliable solution. We think that collective decision making is the best method. In my team, there is no team leader, so each member is encouraged to be active, creative, and task oriented.* (Bao, Case 4)

> *The most experienced person in a given field is usually able to make contributions in terms of leadership, so we just followed a routine that was established because that worked well, and we did not see a need to change anything or to appoint a certain leader, because it was just self-developing in a certain way.* (Peter, interview)

However, the way the team moves forward is not totally self-developing in a vacuum, but a result of consciously taken steps most often by Bao, and in particular, Peter who with his constant and small incremental interventions is the subtle driving force in the team. Readily followed by the rest of the team, he continuously reflects and acts on small cues to build a better team and ensure all team members are part of the effort. He never brings up his central role in the team or complains but takes action, for instance, to have Jia Li and Nila overcome initial insecurities and to help them build capabilities in team tasks. The result is a more and more evenly distributed workload and a rewarding and motivating team environment that improves over time. The team members take pride in respecting internal deadlines, and it delivers six excellent cases, each one on time.

Even though not all team members are equal in their capability, they are so in their effort. All members underline the importance of democratic principles and the absence of formal hierarchies as core values behind the team's success, and they avoid categorizing any one member as "a leader." What matters most is that everyone does his or her very best at all times and knowledge is shared. Bao describes this shared sentiment:

> *I do not think we had leaders. I think we just tried to work our best depending on our knowledge, and we shared our knowledge with each other.* (Bao, interview)

Team members make sense of their team as a place to share knowledge and to do one's best. Peter, Marc, and Bao are the most influential team members, and Nila and Jia Li are more followers, but they all find their place and fulfill a role they themselves and others feel is useful and necessary.

11.2.4 Unity of the team

How does this team manage to become the *Scouts*, united and gradually building a strong feeling of "we," a true team with common goals and shared understandings about what the team stands for and how to execute work? Despite the fact that this team had very similar difficulties as the others, these hardships did not drive the *Scouts* into conflict situations, which was the case of so many other teams. The team members tend to make sense of issues they stumble on along the way as hurdles for the whole team to overcome, and never pitch one team member against another. Marc insists continuous teamwork development is one answer. Peter elaborates on the importance of honesty and of systematically "putting the team first." Bao talks about dependability, respect, and collaboration:

> *Our teamwork is of extraordinary quality. The main driver is that we all put the interests of the team above potential individual interests. This helps us create a very good working atmosphere that is based on trust and honesty.* (Peter, Case 4)

> *I feel very happy with our teamwork, people are active, motivated, and collaborative with the tasks. They always finish work in a timely manner, and the quality of work is excellent. Team members try to build an effective, friendly, and collaborative working environment. We always help each other to progress together and respect individual ideas.* (Bao, Case 1)

There would have been no true team if the more experienced members had not been so successful at integrating Nila and Jia Li into the team and helping them gain the necessary skills to become full members. A strong feeling of inclusion motivates Jia Li:

> *Sometimes, when I am not familiar with some theoretical model, the others wait for me, explain it to me, and then ask how I feel about it all. That is really nice!* (Jia Li, Case 4)

Understanding each person's particular situation is important, and the team focuses on developing close ties within the team to learn to know each other.

Bao's role is central in helping Nila become part of the team, despite the distance and differences in institutional background, as well as language and technology barriers. He is able to help in many ways; he speaks Russian so he can translate parts Nila does not understand to a language she is fluent in; he is also able to help her with setting up her IT platforms and coach her in their use. Also, when she cannot attend team meetings, he sends her quick summaries so she can keep up with teamwork. The rest of the team is supportive by considering pulling Nila in not as her personal responsibility only but as a team duty. With time, the team works better and better as people become more active and involved in tasks. Bao speaks about Nila after the second case with a sense of personal pride as she becomes more daring:

> *Especially, our Russian member changed work attitude with the team when she was eager to take on tasks to make teamwork more effective. She submitted her task to us in a timely manner. I am really happy with this change, because it will help us to become a better team.* (Bao, Case 2)

The initial problems with the lack of balanced communication are solved over time, as the encouraging environment and the expectation for everyone to do their best motivates all team members. By Case 3, responsibilities within the team are distributed in a rather fair manner, including the coordination activities necessary to take the team forward, and "*team members are motivated, active, and collaborative, and try their best to finish tasks on time, and create an excellent quality of work*" (Bao), and "*every single team member dares to bring in own ideas, which increases team creativity significantly*" (Peter). In Marc's understanding, what is needed after the team has come together as such is to keep on nurturing it. Thus for him, the team is a constant process in the making and is never "ready":

> *I think we have a good group. Team members are committed, and everyone is trying to do their best. We have managed all challenges well, and I think our teamwork is good. Of course, we need to do some adjustments regarding task distribution and workload, but that is normal. In Case 2, our teamwork was still a little bit stiff, while in Case 3, it was easier and more efficient. I think our team has continued evolving. We work better as a team and gain better results. Now we just have to nurture our good spirit and encourage each other to work more efficiently as a team. I believe that continuous teamwork development is very important to all of our team members.* (Marc, Case 3)

Upon the team dissolution, some members express regret. Jia Li, for instance, openly says that she "will miss her team a lot," as she has learned so much about "theories, their application, and virtual teamwork" with this team, and Marc concludes having "enjoyed working with the other team members."

11.2.5 Hidden thoughts and emotions

In this team, everyone describes events in the same way and no one complains about each other. There are hardly any hidden negative emotions and thoughts like in almost all other teams. Instead, what team members do complain about is the instructions they get from their supervisors and what they consider unrealistic expectations: the amount of work that needs to be done in such short timeframes, and the shortness of the videos they are expected to produce, planting a seed for possible resistance and protest as we observe during the last case.[93] According to Peter, there was "much pressure, and the workload was . . . basically a lot" (Peter, interview). So, the team members make sense of the troubles they are facing as emanating from unreasonable "management" expectations, rather than from "incompetent" or "lazy" other team members, as is the case in most other teams.

   The biggest imbalance in the team is caused by the fact that the members' level of experience is so uneven, a concern raised by Marc, in particular, time after time. Yet, he interprets this as "the way life is," and considers this team (and any team) as a never-ending work-in-progress. He is understanding and mindful of the junior members' situation, and joins Peter and Bao in making sure everyone is increasingly part of the team effort and everyone's competence level is lifted up over time. Nila and Jia Li are grateful for the opportunity to learn and contribute. Starting from the very first case, they constantly express "happiness" and feelings of "luck" and "love" about being part of the team:

> *My team members are all very good and active. All of them try to do everything so well and on time. I learn many new things and this helps me evolve further . . . I look forward to the moment the assignments are divided . . . and I can always say my opinion and learn from my team members.* (Nila, Case 1)

> *I love our team . . . everyone is nice and efficient. For example, we had the first meeting as soon as we got the assignment, and before Friday, we even finished the most important parts. I am extremely grateful.* (Jia Li, Case 1)

   Being careful not to use the word "leader" or "leadership," Peter reflects on his main contributions to the team privately, never placing himself above others in any way in team communications or otherwise. His modesty about his actual highly influential role helps keep the team together and makes it easier for others to join. Talking about his own role, he thinks his greatest achievement is having helped bring the team together, and not his personal knowledge or individual achievements:

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[93] Here I refer to the moment when Peter, overworked, supported by the team, refuses to cut down the last video from 12 to 7 minutes, thus not following formal instructions.

My most important contributions to our teamwork are, I think, my coordination attempts. I am trying to include all team members in our decisions and am anxious to structure our working processes. In doing so, I hope to ensure a valid line of argumentation. (Peter, Case 1)

Bao, more than the excellent team outcomes, perhaps, cherishes the team as a platform for learning new skills in many areas, such as team organization, decision making, and effective intercultural communication. He observes that he is gradually able to see problems from a broader perspective, then narrowing down and focusing on what is essential from a new vantage point. He values the practical aspects of teamwork and looks forward to being able to use the skills acquired in the consulting cases in developing his own business.

11.2.6 Critical events

In this team, actions taken early on help set shared expectations of how the team should work as such. Peter has a key role in planning and triggering these actions, although this goes unnoticed by others most of the time. Here are some examples.

Jia Li and Nila come unprepared to the first team meeting for Case 1. There was confusion over what "coming prepared" to the first team meeting meant, and members' assumptions were unaligned.[94] While Bao, Marc, and Peter had thoroughly read all the extensive case material and done some initial research, Nila's and Jia Li's preparation was much more superficial. Peter immediately suggests shifting the purpose of the meeting from discussing alternative solutions to the case to more generic matters on case expectations, postponing any discussion on content to the following day without blaming anyone. He makes sense of this situation as a matter of a lack of shared expectations on how to prepare for a meeting, and not as a result of a lack of interest or freeriding. The meeting time is in part used to align expectations:

Our first initiative was, therefore, to set up a short introductory meeting via Skype on Monday, 6 pm finish time. Since not all team members were able to read the case in advance, we agreed not to discuss specific case-related contents. However, we were able to get a common understanding of what is expected from us, which

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[94] Nila and Jia Li and Peter, Marc, and Bao had different understandings about what the first case meeting was supposed to be about. In many other teams, this type of situation was not addressed at the root, and false assumptions about "laziness" or "lack of commitment" by "delinquent" members were made by those who had done more. In this team, the situation dynamics were captured in a more realistic way, and the team meeting was postponed to the day after to ensure everyone was on equal footing and no judgments were made.

> *aspects seem important to management, and to agree on a basic project schedule.* (Peter, Case 1)

This allowed everyone to be equally prepared to discuss case strategies and set a standard for what "being prepared" meant in this team, without blaming or embarrassing anyone, while impeding negative feelings from starting to accumulate. Other than highlighting the importance of junior (as well as senior) members' full participation and continued commitment, this relatively small gesture also prompted the team to start preparing explicit agendas for each team meeting and developing more sophisticated IT platforms for collaborative work where ideas could be shared and discussed anytime.

Some team members lack competence in IT platforms used for teamwork. A sophisticated portfolio of communication tools, including Google Docs for document storage and sharing, Doodle for electronic voting and scheduling, Facebook group for team discussions, Skype for meetings, Prezi for presentations, and tools to record voiceover video, facilitating virtual communication was put in place for teamwork. Yet not all members were equally proficient in the use of these tools, which significantly slowed the team's progress and made fair balancing of the workload difficult, especially when it came to the preparation of the team presentation for the case video. This problem was tackled with brief formal online training sessions to transfer knowledge, creating the "opportunity to have several team members working on the presentation at the same time, and thereby increase efficiency," as Peter explained after Case 1. Along the team's life, members collectively ensure everyone has equal access to and are able to use the IT platforms chosen for the teamwork, with Bao and Marc acting as subject matter experts that the others could turn to when needed. Instead of considering a lacking competency an individual responsibility only, this team extends this responsibility to the whole team.

There are differences of opinion on how to solve a case. Most of the time, the team members do not have problems coming to a common understanding concerning what the cases are about and how to solve them. However, on some occasions, differences of opinion arise that are hard to reconcile. Despite tight timelines, the team tackles competing solutions by Bao and Peter during Case 2 in a manner that is perceived as both fair and which ensures the best solution is chosen, setting a precedent for other similar situations in the future. Peter explains:

> *We decided to create two slightly different versions of the presentation video, and then to choose democratically, which of the versions should be the final one. However, we never saw this topic as a competition between individuals, but only as a step that will help us as a team to achieve the best result possible. Instead of challenging, we supported each other with our presentations*

> *both from a content-based and a technological perspective, once again working as a team. The final result, therefore, did not create any signs of disappointment or disharmony, but instead bound us together even more.* (Peter, Case 2)

Bao confirms:

> *Peter and I competed against each other about strategy to find the best solution for the team by votes, and then we combined different good points to make a comprehensive solution for this assignment. All team members were happy about this competition because it helped the team find the best solution and boosted the capability of each member.* (Bao, Case 2)

Here, team members make sense of what could be seen as conflicting interests as an opportunity to bond, to improve the quality of the team's work, and to learn from each other.

11.3 Summary

The *Scouts* demonstrate all the elements typically associated with well-performing teams: good communication, trust, collaboration, cooperation, motivated members, clear goals and roles, and a learning culture. They teach us how these states can be reached via complex social processes. The team members share an understanding of what these concepts mean at such deep levels that allow for them to act in concert, even though situations are fluid and tasks change. What comes through, though, is that members' meanings are continuously re-established and negotiated inside the team, and the team never reaches a static state but is a continuous work-in-progress. From the perspective of collective sensemaking, the team members, under Peter's discrete and invisible leadership, understand challenges that often prevent a team from forming as a collective responsibility, and establish systematically with each other what this team is about and how it works, thus facilitating effective team processes.

12   THE MASTER COOKS

Figure 9   The Master Cooks

12.1 The backdrop

"Too many cooks spoil the broth" is an old proverb of unknown origin, versions of which are used in many Western languages: German, English, French, Swedish, Finnish, and so on. Translated to the world of management, it literally means that when there are a lot of people working on a project, then that project may not be that successful, or that when there are many leaders or leader "wannabes," the results may be sub-optimized. In failing teamwork, it is not uncommon to hear a member say, *"I would be better off working on this alone*!*"* Indeed, sometimes one person does a better job than many, even when it comes to creative work – like composing a symphony. And teams too large, say of 20 people or so, tend to be less effective than slightly smaller ones, say of five people (but this, of course, depends on the task and many other things). This well-known kitchen proverb is efficiency driven – the underlying question being how to align resources to reach a goal without wasting them and while securing the optimal outcome. But what if the outcome is difficult to pre-define and available ingredients and demands change along the way – and there are many recipes or combinations of recipes to get to the result? Then, it could be more interesting to turn to a saying from a different kitchen culture, for instance, of

North-African origin: *"donne à la marmite, elle te donnera"* ("give to the cooking pot and it will give back"). So, it is a matter of perspective . . . do we start with the cook or with the broth? Master Cooks dedicate themselves to what they want to become the best broth ever, and all crew members are collectively in charge.

12.2 The Master Cooks from within

This playful team excels at improvising and adjusting on the go. Ambitious and hardworking, the *Master Cooks* are not in the business for task execution only; their purpose is also to have fun and enjoy the journey while getting to the destination. And they want to be the best, to win – no prisoners taken. These cooks have a chosen theme or a sort of background story they keep on developing while they work – to break the rules and be the "business pirates" of the Baltic region. This theme repeats itself and evolves along the team's life; it is reflected in creative team outputs and the team's daily communications. They do not fear taking risks and everyone is onboard, adding some spice to the broth and making it unique. Although some routines form and the team learns to be more effective and people find specific roles, there is no script or fixed ways of doing much of anything. Rather, the team reacts to the tasks and each other on the go, playing around the theme of pirates that helps the members stay the course and maintain a good atmosphere. When the heat is on, these people do not let go, blame each other or the circumstances, even though a brotherly fight may interrupt the team life from time to time. With no hard feelings, they take a sip out of a virtual bottle of rum, add some more chili, and sing, "*Yo, ho, ho*."

12.2.1 Meet the characters

There are five members in the team:

Ellen, a Latvian woman in her mid-twenties based in Latvia, is the creative genius of the team with a flair for adventure and a remarkable sense of humor. Her background in communications allows her to create professionally made videos that are a plus to the team and contribute to the pirate theme, which is visible in all the pitches the team produces, as well as everywhere in her own communications to the team and in her diary. She hopes that in the future she "may be more intelligent and live somewhere in a warm place with a large red parrot and greet the dawn under some palm tree," and skip working this hard. She has high standards for quality and integrity, her manner is playful, and she

likes to dig into things, right into smallest details.[95] In her words, others often say that she can look into things from different, sometimes unexpected angles and solve any kind of problem. In this team, she is a good team player, rather building bridges than creating divides.

Caroline, a Dutch woman in her early twenties based in Finland, likes to keep things organized and is pragmatic and practically oriented in all possible ways. It is difficult for her to stay idle, and she does not like postponing tasks as this makes her stressed – which happens quite easily. "I can always tell when I am only a minute late, and I like to work with people who are just like me," she says. Being active at work is a guiding force for her.[96] She values honesty and the will to try, and admires people chasing their dreams as "they get the fullest out of their lives." Her key role in this team is to keep things organized and coordinated so tasks are delivered on time. Her biggest sin seems to be impatience, a personal trait she is trying to work on.

Emil, a Finnish man in his mid-twenties based in Finland, is full of ideas about how to take theoretical information and build it into case solutions to solve practical problems. He fills up the team's documents and communication platforms with dozens of pages of background information and relevant articles to start solving the cases, which the others may or may not read. He says, in fact, that he usually comes up with 10 ideas, trashes them, and then takes the next 10 for consideration.[97] Personal values, such as loyalty, honesty, [98] respect for others, and the importance of keeping one's promises are high on his list. He dreams about a professional future with innovations and transforming people's lives, and plans a future career in entrepreneurship. A flexible mind[99] and a good team player, preferring to "avoid and resolve conflicts rather than to generate them," he is not afraid to bring up problems and tough issues to be resolved inside the team. He likes to carry responsibility and lead or manage, but does not mind being a follower either, depending on the situation. For him, it is rather easy to adapt to new situations and ideas, and he readily accepts others' contributions when he thinks they are superior to his, or when he thinks it is in the best interests of the team to cut short any lengthy arguments.

Aleksei, a Latvian man in his early thirties based in Latvia, is a very busy and energetic man with a job in finance who thinks quickly and likes to get straight to the point. He has experience in international business and is used to working

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[95] Ellen has a good sense of self-irony. She says that her *penchant* for self-improvement can become excessive when *"she gets crazy over one curved line among straight ones."*

[96] Caroline describes her work ethic: *"In my hometown, I worked at a bar, and I could not stand doing nothing. Sometimes, I was in the kitchen and I had to prepare snacks, but when the snacks were prepared and served and I had to wait for the next batch, the wait annoyed me."*

[97] Ellen characterizes Emil: *"Emil has a lot of ideas . . . not only a few . . . so we had a lot to choose from. Too much rather than too little!"*

[98] Emil says that he values *"even brutal honesty over white lies."*

[99] Emil does not easily describe things in absolute terms, but instead says something like: *"I am pretty sure that . . ."*

under pressure. His approach to life, as well as to the cases the team has to solve, is practical, partly due to his busy schedule. Caroline points out, also echoing other teammates' opinions, that *"Aleksei has the best ideas most of the time and is really valuable for the team."* So, even though all the team members are special in their own way, Aleksei still raises the standard a bit. Sociable and supportive, he really dislikes freeriding. Luckily in this team, he does not have to confront this problem. He is very quality oriented and "cannot stand sloppiness." When he starts a task, he does it in the best way he can and expects the same from others. Sometimes, he has a tough time accepting others' ideas, and for him, the challenge is more about taking enough time to convince others about his brilliant initiatives, rather than himself considering possible alternatives, an attitude that causes friction at times, particularly with Emil.

Cui Yu, a Chinese woman in her early twenties based in Finland, likes challenges – and to be part of this team really stretches her capabilities. A junior member in the team, this is the first time she has been abroad for an extended time. She struggles with English and has to constantly rely on a dictionary to take part in team conversations. Yet, as her team members point out, she is part of *everything*, braving the many challenges presented to her, starting from becoming familiar with what to Europeans are common digital applications, such as Skype, WhatsApp, Google Docs, and Facebook. She is a little shy, especially in front of strangers, and likes the quiet life. She values modesty that she identifies as "a long-cherished Chinese value." For her, it is important to prepare her work in advance "to avoid having to rush and to be more efficient," yet sometimes she has tough time copying, as reading cases and doing research represents a lot of more work for her than for the others.

12.2.2 Shared views

Like many teams, this team sets the goal high in the very beginning; they aim at winning the challenge. The members "click"[100] instantaneously, although their backgrounds vary and they do not know each other from before. The team motto is simple: "Wherever we want to go, we go"; and the aims are unambiguous: "Our goal is to pursue our freedom and treasure at all costs." The team members' self-confidence seems to have no limits: "There is no problem we cannot sink or board." This in essence serious and in part humorous attitude helps the members to remember where they are going and how this is possible when unexpected or difficult situations challenge their sensemaking capabilities. The team's shared values, such as *honesty, courage, adventure,*

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[100] Aleksei uses this expression in the interview, but how members got along well from the beginning is a recurrent topic in the team members' essays and other material.

loyalty, hard work, and *not giving up without a fight*, for instance, are a bit unusual perhaps, but they are consistent with the team's ambitions, the unstable team environment, and the social identity the members actively build.

The team routine is established quickly, although it remains flexible, and is built around frequent meetings, constant communication, and participatory practices. Everyone is part of writing the case scripts and making the case videos, a task that brings the team together and helps members make sense of this last phase of each project as a shared responsibility. They appreciate how tough it is to make a pitch presentation that includes all the needed parts and does not exceed the seven-minute limit. Emil, perhaps the most artistic and chaotic team member when it comes to discipline, outlines the team process very carefully:

> *We developed a good process, a structure to solve cases . . .We always had Monday meetings in our calendars . . . it was good to know that we had one routine meeting per week. We would then get together after two days to ponder ideas, take another two days, and then meet to really start solving the case, and then after that, have one more meeting to solve the case or go for making the script for solutions. And divide this task. Filming started always two days before deadline so we could have time . . . Filming really bound us together.* (Emil, interview[101])

Caroline emphasizes the team's collaborative working style from the very beginning of the team's life, and which becomes a shared expectation:

> *We worked on the project during the same hours, and we are not really separating and dividing parts. Everyone is thinking at the same moment, and everyone is virtually present at the same moment. We are discussing and checking with each other all the time, which is pretty time consuming, but this way everyone agrees and is on the same page.* (Caroline, Case 1)

Over time, however, the team builds capabilities to work together and "communication becomes faster in terms of everyone answering within minutes, more effective in terms of there being less topics under discussion, more responsible in terms of informing absent team members, and more productive in terms of setting goals and dividing tasks," as Ellen concludes after the last case is done.

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[101] This case relies heavily on the team interview. This is because all members were present, active in the discussion, and most of the time, the thoughts already expressed in individual essays were crystallized and further elaborated during the interview, as the members had a chance to candidly interact with each other. I hold this level of spontaneous interaction as another sign of camaraderie in the team and evidence of an exceptionally well-functioning team.

The team members do not underestimate the amount of work needed to work together and reach their destination. Their online meetings are extremely long, particularly during the first week as they learn to work with each other. It is the personal sacrifices everyone makes to stay up late at night[102] to collaborate that bring the members closer to each other, as they learn to sail in rough winds together, and to make sense of the team and each other as responsible colleagues and friends:

> *The team is warm, everyone is responsible . . . we have meetings at night . . . we always meet in Google Docs to discuss details . . . it takes sometimes even five hours at night, but finally we get through it, although it is a lot of work.* (Cui Yu, interview)

The team members rarely have conflicts and appreciate working with each other in general. Although they are able to "discuss anything in a civilized manner and really try to work together" (Emil, Case 4), tensions mount at times, in particular between Emil and Aleksei, over the direction the task should take. While Emil laments the lack of spoken contact and the difficulties with explaining and discussing complex issues in writing in Google Chat, Aleksei blames stress:

> *The root cause of the arguments was the stress we all felt to do the best we could, as well as the short time period we were given to execute the task.* (Aleksei, Case 4)

The interpersonal misalignments do not become interpersonal problems as both Aleksei and Emil make sense of them as resulting from the context – the virtual work environment or stress, and not from each other's shortcomings as human beings. Despite the occasional mini-crises, the team learns to work under pressure, which is highlighted by how fast the members are able to solve differences. There is almost blind trust between team members, and when things turn quite chaotic during the last case, which is quite complex and needs to be solved within a week for the team to qualify for the prize of the best team, only Aleksei seems to fully understand it and the others do their very best to support him. Still, the team members joke whenever possible, and the team atmosphere that Cui Yu describes as "happy, warm, and nice" carries the team over difficult moments. At the end of the team's life, the members have a shared story to carry forward:

> *I cannot help smiling at our interesting story, which is filled with memories during the four cases . . . things like 'Yo, ho, ho.' In this*

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[102] Cui Yu, for instance, says that "she has never worked this late in the evenings," but she "kind of enjoyed" the team meeting that took place from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. because everyone was busy, but "it was nice to say goodnight in the end." (Cui Yu, interview)

trip, we did not give up! We worked together! We encouraged each other! Wherever we want to go, we go! (Cui Yu, Case 4)

The meetings last so long, in part, because Google Docs with its chat window is the main platform for online communication.[103] Sometimes, the discussion slows down as questions and answers are uncoordinated, and it takes time to type one team member's ideas at a time, and the conversation sometimes goes "backwards," as Emil points out. The inefficiency of the meetings bothers some of the team members:

> *We had an inefficient way of communication as we were often hours and hours behind laptops . . . but sometimes we were effective . . . this was different from case to case and from meeting to meeting.* (Caroline, interview*)*

> *Sometimes, meetings just go on and on and people get quiet . . . someone goes to the fridge, comes back, and nothing has changed!* (Emil, interview)

When Emil and Aleksei are particularly obstinate about finding late night solutions, Cui Yu and Caroline tend to take the initiative to call it a day and demand a "time out" until the following day, as they make sense of these situations as ineffective dead ends. This strategy works well and the team is able to progress after a good night's sleep.

The team does not switch to Skype video meetings, even though there are moments when Caroline, Ellen, and Emil would like to be able to talk instead of writing to improve communication and speed up the work process. Not all is bad when it comes to working directly in Google Docs, and the time-consuming late-night meetings never become a big problem in the team, although towards the end, members are exhausted, like "zombies," as Ellen puts it. In Google Docs, unlike over Skype, the team members are able to work directly on the shared documents that form the backbone of the case solutions, express their thoughts clearly in writing, and have a written record of what is being said and by whom. Emil ponders the advantages of working this way, despite his occasional frustrations:

> *In Google Docs, our meetings were slow as we waited for responses, but on the other hand, the chat was a good filter as we did not have that many unnecessary things there . . . you had to consider what to put in there in a different way than when you speak.* (Emil, interview)

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[103] Other digital platforms the team uses are Facebook for ongoing conversations and meeting summaries
, and WhatsApp for urgent messages. The three collocated members, Cui Yu, Emil, and Caroline, rarely meet face-to-face and all key discussions are held online.

The key reason for the team not turning to Skype for team meetings surfaces in the last moment of the team interview when Cui Yu speaks up:

> *We did not use Skype because of me. I told my team I never used it before in the first meeting . . . when I come here (to Europe) there were so many apps: Facebook, Google Docs, WhatsApp . . . Skype.*[104] *I really like Google Docs so my group said, 'Okay, we use Google Docs.' I am very happy in this team.* (Cui Yu, interview)

The rest of the team members are all Europeans; yet, they are collectively able to empathize with Cui Yu being overwhelmed in an unfamiliar environment, and make sense of her difficulties as a reason to respect her extraordinary efforts to adjust, rather than imputing them to any attributes of her different culture or lack of skills. For the team, it is important to include all the members, so they make this sacrifice for her, never interpreting the situation as being Cui Yu's fault or thinking that she is incompetent – a gesture that makes her feel like a full team member welcomed by others.

The members enact their roles loosely adapting to what was agreed on in the very beginning, and here Ellen even gives her last words of encouragement to Cui Yu to boost her self-confidence in future projects:

> *We used a lot from what Aleksei wrote and thought. Emil produced a lot of information . . . it is really inspiring when you see in Google Docs about 40 pages of intelligence . . . it leaves you with ideas. Caroline was cool with administration, keeping her finger on the pulse of everything. Cui Yu is a wonderful girl who just needs to be more confident . . . you need to push yourself!* (Ellen, interview)

When time is tight and differences of opinion surface, the team tends to leave many pragmatic decisions about the solution content to Aleksei, as he proves to have the most experience in business. This is helpful for building quality solutions, and leaves the others free to integrate theory and frameworks into the solutions and build the video. This is perceived as a fair division of labor and everyone finds a place. Being the most senior member and having so much practical experience in comparison with his teammates, helps Aleksei make sense of his role in the team as the one who needs to push the team when needed:

> *There are differences in how we work. I feel I am more goal driven, I want to get to the point and produce the result without the theoretical part, because that is the job of a business consultant, but others wanted to work on theory as well . . . I did pragmatics, others theory.* (Aleksei, interview)

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[104] In China, these applications are not in use.

There is a positive struggle when it comes to the way the team solves the cases that surfaces from time to time between Emil and Caroline/Aleksei, in particular. While Emil insists on working on the cases together to increase quality, Caroline wants to divide the tasks early on to save time. Over time, some sort of compromise emerges as the members spend long hours collaborating in Google Docs and Facebook. Meanwhile, Caroline and Aleksei make sure the schedule is maintained so that the material is handed over to Ellen in time for her to make the visually appealing, and from a content perspective, polished case videos that distinguishes the team from the other teams.

> *With Caroline, I had the difference that I wanted to go through all of the case together, and she just wanted to divide the parts and then put it all together . . . I was the one who put too much info in Google and do not think everyone ever read it.* (Emil, interview)

Emil seems to feel a bit guilty for emphasizing the "working together and wanting to go through all research material" part with his mates. Here, the understanding of what is collaboration differs between the team members, but this never builds up to a conflict as both parties consider each other's position legitimate. Even though the work is complicated and confusing, the team does not bend under the pressure. Overall, the experience exceeds the expectations of the members, even though the task execution takes a lot more time than the members would hope for:

> *I am excited because I thought it would be even worse, this digital team . . . it was really nice . . . videos took a lot of time but it was worth it.* (Emil, interview)

> *Teamwork was time consuming . . . we managed pretty good, we planned, but it was still time consuming; we worked pretty good and everyone jumped in and joined. So that the biggest bonus in our team was that everyone pitched in.* (Aleksei, interview)

Here, Emil reflects on the fact that work in this team was not as bad as he had expected, based on his previous experiences and his prejudices regarding virtual teamwork. For Aleksei, what mattered the most in chaotic circumstances was that everyone worked together towards the team goals, and together they formed a real team where people could count on each other. The team is able to work even when some members are absent from most case meetings, like Cui Yu and Caroline during Case 3.[105] Decision making becomes easier when there are only three members and no complex voting/agreeing mechanisms are needed, even though this means more work is transferred to those able to participate:

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[105] Cui Yu is travelling and Caroline has family for visit. These reasons are judged as legitimate by the team members to be absent.

> *I learned that our virtual team can work quite effectively, although we could not have meetings where all members are present. I think that this means that we have become quite a strong and a well-functioning team.* (Emil, Case 3)

The absence of two members from meetings is made sense of as an opportunity to adjust, and the absent members are not cut from communications and decision making. Instead, intense chatting and information sharing are ongoing and life just goes on. No one is excluded or sidelined – and no one excludes or sidelines himself or herself.

12.2.3 Forces of influence

The leadership structure of this team is both leader-driven and democratic – and this seems to work. The Pirate Codex that constitutes the team's ways of working stipulates somewhat humorously, "Every boat needs a captain who is responsible for guiding his boat to success and a crew that helps the captain . . ." This statement is followed by assigning as many captains as there are team members. There is Aleksei – the Captain of Spy Service (thinker, hard worker, data collector, and analyzer); Ellen – the Captain of Arms (presentation editor, creative force, tools expert); Caroline – the Captain of Smugglers (logistics, administration, coordination); Emil – the Captain of Guerrilla Strategies (innovation, creative thinking); and Cui Yu – the Captain of Propaganda (sometimes invisible but always present when relevant). In addition, there are two rotating positions that "must be taken by any team member when there is a need": the Captain of the Obvious (responsible for stating obvious things and checking that everybody agrees on them); and the Captain of the Map (responsible for staying the course). This at first sight confusing and constantly changing leadership/followership role-taking/role-giving structure helps a team of equals make sense of their own role inside the team as a critical one. Thus, each team member must be always ready to step back or forth and take responsibility to assume roles of influence in the team when the situation requires to ensure all tasks are understood and done on time. This playful approach makes the stressful team life easier and helps people who are just learning to know each other to relax and trust each other, which lightens up the atmosphere.

The "not one leader but everyone is a leader" works for the team, although team members spend enormous amounts of time online working together, to discuss the cases, and build a shared understanding. Everyone making sense of his or her role and position as either leader and/or follower in a flexible manner speeds up work and helps build the shared team identity further:

There are no leaders or non-leaders; everyone brings in what they think and everyone does what they can do. (Caroline, interview)

We had similar roles, but different, but everyone specializing, so it was easier to do the tasks. (Emil, interview)

The "all are leaders and followers" policy does not mean everyone is equally capable or equally influential at each point in time. In Emil's view, after the first case is done, the work mode with flexible leadership functions well, although personal characteristics and limitations surface.

Caroline and I seem to typically take on a leading role in our conversations by suggesting what we could work on next, and usually we are the ones who are first to suggest how we could proceed. At times Aleksei has also taken some leading role and occasionally Ellen, but Cui Yu never. I suspect she might be struggling with our shared language, and for this, she might not be so eager to lead conversations. (Emil, Case 1)

To make flexible leadership/followership work requires that the more vocal members readily give space to the others, which is not always easy:

I must say that at times there is too much of that space, and even though I would like to cherish our equality, I feel that I should take on a stronger leading role . . . a few times there has been indecision, and after a while, I have felt forced to take action, if Caroline has not done already so. (Emil, Case 1)

The type of leadership roles people engage in changes over time, and the members' understanding of what it means to lead broadens. In particular, with time, Aleksei, interpreting that the team benefits from his pragmatic approach and work experience, starts taking a more visible role, without forcing too much, being rude, or crossing any "pirate" codes of conduct of collegiality:

We had different leaders at different moments. Caroline and I always summarized and spread information; these are also leader roles . . . but more like coordination. Later maybe, Aleksei became our leader because he could give us good information from practice and had adequate experience. (Cui Yu, interview)

Written rules such as "any man who falls behind should be saved by other crew members," and "any person who refuses to serve aboard the pirate ship must die," steer the team's life and help members make sense of their role in the team as a double bind; on one hand, one must do one's very best, and on the other, team members should be supportive of each other. The other leading force in the team is time, or the lack of it, that modifies some members' behavior, in particular, Aleksei's, over time:

Deadlines were the key driver for us . . . the main factor . . . if you needed to achieve your goal, if you had an idea . . . you had to

push it in . . . I just happened to have ideas . . . and Ellen had the knowledge to do the video. (Aleksei, interview)

At times, differences of opinion arise, especially between Emil and Aleksei when it comes to solution strategies. These are resolved through open discussions and sometimes both parties step back. Cui Yu explains:

> *I still remember the last case when Emil and Aleksei had different ideas. They tried to clarify them . . . so later, after our meeting, they sent a summary of what they spoke about so it become clearer how to think.* (Cui Yu, interview)

Aleksei and Emil, even though their ideas often clash, do not consider each other rivals or take offence when one of them offers competing solutions. Their interpretations of these situations resemble more a fair game where Aleksei often has an upper hand. Emil readily acknowledges how hardworking Aleksei is, and Aleksei confesses being bossy at times. Both share the understanding that when time is tight, getting successfully to the goal is what matters most:

> *Aleksei was the workhorse. He did most of the work[106]. . . he had the clearest ideas, and it was easy to build on those. Sometimes I got a bit frustrated that Aleksei was so strong, like 'this is the best we can do' . . . I tried to throw in something new and it did not stick that well . . .* (Emil, interview)

> *I understand that sometimes I come with these 'great ideas' I try to lobby . . . I have that thing . . . I may be bossy sometimes . . . but this work came with a schedule and I did not have that much time. I just wanted to get things done, I have so much work elsewhere as well . . . everyone had strengths, but not all can be goalies all the time . . . but they all made the team what it is.* (Aleksei, interview)

12.2.4 Unity of the team

Despite the members' different backgrounds, the team is a real team from the very first meeting – and everyone seems to agree. The five members are like-minded individuals: hardworking, adventurous, honest, playful, and ambitious – or perhaps the shared social identity they are able to create and maintain turns them into such. From the initial chaos, the "pirate brotherhood" theme emerges organically and keeps on developing over the team's life.[107] "Cheering each

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[106] Most team members refer to Aleksei doing a lot of the work during the last cases – but Emil's expression here, "most of the work," is an exaggerations. For instance, Caroline says that "we all worked a lot, but Aleksei may have done an extra 10 percent or 15 percent or so."

[107] When asked, the team members cannot recall whose idea it was to call the team "The Pirates." What they do recall is that everyone came up with a few suggestions for a team identity in the initial meeting, the team voted, and the pirate-theme won.

other" (with 'yo, ho, ho'), "helping one another," "working in a team," and "following the map" are core team values, just as "forgiving each other." The team drafts a Pirate Codex relying on popular stories on pirates for inspiration that guides the members to maintain and reinforce "pirate" values. This elaborate team identity helps team members to make sense of and orient themselves in a stressful and unpredictable environment when people do not know each other from before. Being a troop of pirates also boosts the element of fun, making the tough work environment easier to live in for every team member.

The pirate theme is visible in the team's ordinary communications in messaging platforms (i.e., the use of "yo, ho, ho" is habitual in WhatsApp to "cheer up, the mates"), in presentation videos (members dress up as pirates and insert comics referring to the pirate theme into cases), and in their individual reflective essays (most members tend to refer to pirate vocabulary at least occasionally). The team engages in small acts of collective creativity, inspiring each other with the ambition to take home the "booty" – the prize for the best team, a goal that the team reaches in the end. The pirate identity helps team members to make sense of what their team is about and how they should behave. Thanks to this, a sense of adventure and brotherhood where courageous behavior is rewarded and no one is left behind is reinforced.

The members build team-level trust early on. The initial positive impressions from the first team meeting are reinforced during the first case when members establish an understanding that they can rely on each other no matter what. The shared responsibility of everyone being "a captain" of something and the metaphor of all members being on a ship together to conquer other ships and ports, helps build trust further and facilitates the creation of effective team processes – and, in turn, a stronger team:

> *We were on a ship . . . and we were all captains of something . . . we could rely on each other, maybe not in the beginning but later . . . It was after Case 1. When we saw what everyone could do and what everyone should do and did do in time before deadline . . . it was then we built trust.* (Ellen, interview)

> *We all have different roles and strengths. We are the Pirates crew, taking different cities and plundering trade vessels . . . that were the cases we had to resolve... we would plunder the best way we knew how to. Not always the most known path or clearest answer, but we would try to do our best.* (Emil, interview)

No one seems to be counting favors or putting one's own contribution over the others', so even the least experienced member, Cui Yu, feels encouraged to participate to the best of her ability as the members live up to their "Pirate Codex," literally:

. . . sometimes I do not know what to say . . . in our team, no one says 'why don't you say or write something?' In our team, just if someone knows how to say or do it, they will write it in the Docs and others can add or say their opinion . . . we are a very relaxed team. (Cui Yu, interview)

We did a really great job with the grouping assignment, where we developed the team's identity and core. I think we have managed to stay true to all of the values, norms, and rules we agreed in our Pirate Codex. That exercise really helped us to develop a well-functioning team on the level I never thought possible for such a virtual team. (Emil, Case 4)

12.2.5 Hidden thoughts and emotions

There are no negative thoughts or emotions affecting team collaboration in any significant way, although each one has his or her own struggles. Cui Yu is often self-conscious about her lack of English skills, but since the others are encouraging and adjust to her situation and do not put her down for this, she feels comfortable in the team she "loves." Even with the practical problem of her having to check the dictionary during team conversations, she still manages to make contributions, helping her feel like a full team member. At least her efforts are not any less than the others':

Others are good English speakers but I am not . . . sometimes, I find it difficult to understand some words in Google Docs when they write some long sentences or difficult words . . . so I have to check on the internet or in the dictionary, but then I understand . . . and notice the conversation has moved on . . . I am happy that we always discuss together about strategy. With little details, I can help my group. (Cui Yu, interview)

Cui, despite her difficulties, makes sense of her team as a welcoming one. She considers herself an accomplished team member, even though conversations move too fast at times for her to keep up; thus, she tries a bit harder to stay with the conversation to the best of her ability, using the internet or the dictionary, while the online meeting is in progress. The others are respectful of her efforts. Here, Caroline sounds even admiring and reflects on how the teammates were not hindered by Cui's language problems, but rather, they improvised on the go and "never left a fellow pirate behind," like they agreed in the Pirate Codex:

Cui Yu was in the most disadvantaged position . . . not from Europe, difficulties with English, but we did not let that bother us . . . I was surprised how much you could do having that much difficulty at times. (Caroline, interview)

Of course, like in every group project, there is always somebody who appears and disappears or does not quite understand what happens around them, but I think the main reason in this case is internationality and problems with language. (Ellen, Case 1)

Her team members attribute Cui Yu's troubles to her situation, and no one questions her team membership or capability to work in it. Everyone makes sense of the situation as relative to her starting point – a Chinese person recently arrived in Europe and working in an unfamiliar environment. They respect the effort she is making and her courage, and they pay attention to her progress in language and technical skills, rather than to her shortcomings. Here, the teammates make sense of the "cultural difference" in a manner that enables inclusion, and Emil even laments the "lack of time to explain things properly" to her.

For passing moments, the idea-rich and creative Emil feels the more experienced and dominant Aleksei pushes his ideas, undermining his initiatives – and becomes somewhat constrained. Yet, Emil never blames Aleksei, but attributes these situations to the difficult conditions the team works under, particularly, when it comes to timelines. In his view, compromises must be made, and he readily accepts constructive criticism and then yields to pressure, always putting the team first:

I had shared my ideas and views earlier, too, but they had already worked on the other idea more, so it did not feel right to mess it up and present the case in a way that they were not comfortable with. (Emil, Case 2)

In particular, when the two men build drastically different understandings in the last case, Emil finds it easier to concede and adjust after the team gets stuck in a late night session and everyone feels the clock is ticking:

I just could not see any real structure in the case at all. I said all of this to my team and we managed to discuss the situation. I was not angry and I do not see that Aleksei was angry either. (Emil, Case 4)

Virtual communication, clash of wills, time pressure to solve cases when there are many ways to define the problems and many possible solutions are at the root of differences, but the teammates never blame each other, feel overly superior, or take personal offense. Indeed, Aleksei often praises Emil's work:

I think Emil did a really good job and made a really big contribution to the case and the solution that we have presented. (Aleksei, Case 3)

Aleksei, despite his strong position in the team, feels somewhat marginalized. For him, there is an imbalance between him and the rest of the team when it comes to professional experience, and even though he likes his team, he feels

he sees things differently from the others because of his experience. This is "the biggest negative factor" in the team, in his opinion:

> *One thing could be useful: that there would be another person that has the same sort of working experience as I do. I think that would help us reach even a better result.* (Aleksei, Case 2)

Over time, Aleksei is somewhat self-critical in his reflections regarding his bossiness, but yet he tends to overestimate his superiority when it comes to work experience vis-à-vis others. All of them have been part of work life and the only weakness in their cases is somewhat lagging theoretical insights – an explicit requirement from the "management" Aleksei consistently overlooks. More modesty on his part and a more sincere willingness to pay attention to Emil is what would have made the cases "perfect," although without any doubt, the team outputs were excellent as they were – best in a class of 26 teams.

Caroline is on a quest for self-improvement as she realizes that being impatient is not necessarily good when it comes to achieving good team results. So for her, the cases are a good way to learn to become more patient and she candidly really tries. She does not attribute the cause of her impatience to others' slowness or lack of competence, but rather to her own shortcomings:

> *What surprised me, actually, is the fact that I am really impatient. I did not realize until now, sitting behind my desk, and waiting for responses in the chat. For instance, sometimes it takes five minutes to wait, but if you are waiting, that is a really long time. I also have the feeling that because of this impatience, I want to make decisions faster than appropriate. This is something I have to deal with.* (Caroline, Case 1)

Ellen, extremely tired already at the end of Case 3, gives up on the idea of becoming a truly and fully effective team without ever losing her good humor, and develops a somewhat cynical attitude towards work life in general:

> *I would like to change some things in the teamwork since nothing is solved. I have learned that teamwork is always teamwork, and nothing will change even if a meteorite falls on our galleon . . . everything I have to do in life makes me not an adventurous pirate but a true zombie that never sleeps* (Ellen, Case 3)

> *In my opinion, my perfectionism and responsibility helped me learn that no one actually cares (in real life, too) how you do things and if you have time or not.* (Ellen, Case 3)

What keeps her going is her optimism and her sense of humor, which "helps me survive." So, she is both happy while waiting for "it" to end.

12.2.6 Critical events

This team has an ability to turn possible negative events around before conflicts start building up. The critical events in the team's life are not very dramatic, but they have far-reaching consequences for the team to become the fraternity of pirates it becomes.

Emil opens up the first team session by writing openly about himself. The introductory assignment requires the team to build a team charter and introduce each member in writing – a task that may be difficult and which can result in rather artificial and shallow documents, if the members do not share candidly who they are as individuals and how they see life to help the team formation. Emil's description of himself is unpretentious and candid:

> *I think we got an awesome start when we worked on the introductory case . . . I wonder how much it affected the others that I could share my almost ready individual part of the intro-case as an example, as my colleagues started to wonder how to do theirs. I'd like to think that my openness and the attitude I presented there might have had an effect and inspired our group to be open and take on some of the core values that we now seem to share.* (Emil, Case 1)

With his disarming and simple description about sharing who he really is, a mode of communication is set for the rest of the members to follow and virtual teammates become "real" people.

There is an embarrassing long silence in a late-night online meeting. During the first case, a long silence builds up as no one knows how to take the case forward:

> *Having discussed for four hours, maybe everyone was tired and minds were not very fresh, which might have caused a moment of silence when nobody knew what to say. Then, someone said, 'Maybe we can write a strategy at a personal level based on what we have discussed tonight and meet tomorrow afternoon again.'* (Cui Yu, Case 1)

Silence in a meeting with people who have just met can be excruciating and act as pressure, particularly when work is done in an online platform and each member sits with his or her laptop, not being able to see the others. Understanding this silence as a sign of exhaustion and interpreting the situation as, "it is time to stop and continue work the next day since everyone is tired," rather than a dead lock is what it took for the team to progress without latent feelings of inadequacy or incompetence.

Three members do not have time to go through all the material before a team meeting. The team is expected to deliver the second case within a week, much faster than the first case. Emil, Cui Yu, and Aleksei do not have time to

read all the case material before the first meeting. In this situation, the team had to take an extra half hour to go through the case again so everyone would be on the same page. Caroline gets upset but does not let that filter through to her teammates; instead, she accepts the situation:

> *I understand that Aleksei did not have time to read the case as he has a full-time job, but I was disappointed with the other two. I had to wait for another 30–45 minutes to actually get started!* (Caroline, Case 2)

For Cui Yu, Caroline's efforts to keep the schedule together are admirable, and she enjoys these small mishaps actually turning into positive events, "good negatives," as to her in particular, muddling through the complex English language case in a short timeline was too much:

> *We needed to pay attention to time . . . I think Caroline did this very well . . . our team is a positive team, even our worse behavior is always positive; we never have negative worse. Sometimes, we did not finish reading the case . . . then maybe after 30 minutes, we met again so all have time to read it . . . so this is positive.* (Cui Yu, interview)

Emil never captures Caroline's frustration but focuses on the team getting through even this type of situation together and in a constructive way:

> *We were not always able to be ready for the meetings, the schedule was so tough, but we always managed to do things . . . if you were ill-prepared, you would just tell the others that you did not have time to do all the case, but 'I have maybe checked out some parts and these are my ideas' . . . Maybe two or three team members were in this situation . . .* (Emil, interview)

12.3 Summary

The *Master Cooks* quickly establish a true team by creating a shared identity that guides the team and binds it together. Team life is not always without challenges, and there are misunderstandings, struggles, and conflicts, but the members are guided by what is best for the team. From a sensemaking perspective, the "pirate" identity and roleplay make it easier to work under pressure in a chaotic environment and to become creative and improvising "cooks" without a specific "recipe." The team manages to follow the chosen team charter and values over time, particularly when it comes to not leaving anyone "behind" and doing things together in a creative way. Advanced forms of collaboration and solidarity are formed. The "everyone is a captain" playful scheme sets the expectations for everyone to take roles of influence, be responsible, and ensure the team stays its course. The biggest underlying

problem is Aleksei's unwillingness to give up and let go of his own position, as Emil's ideas, in particular, are often undermined for no real reason, as Aleksei makes sense of his teammates as "people with less experience in business." Yet, everyone has a chance to make mistakes, learn, and good ideas are cheered. Late night meetings and a lack of sleep are accepted, as this is sometimes the only way to work together, and the members' loyalty to each other seems to have no boundaries. As Ellen says, "ideas flow from each corner," and the team is "a great example of international cooperation, although it was not easy to communicate all the time." The team members could be more time-conscious and effective, perhaps – but then the work would not be as creative and fun, most likely.[108]

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[108] The team is rather passionate about all kinds of things. Sometimes, members could spend less time "to decide unimportant things, like whether to use Dalai Lama's quote or Franklin's, and more on aligning goals." (Ellen, Case 4)

13   CLOSURES

What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails, and puppy dogs' tails,
That's what little boys are made of.
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice and all things nice,
That's what little girls are made of.
-- An English nursery rhyme

The quest of this study has been to take a close look at *teaming,* rather than at teams I have categorized, perhaps somewhat exaggeratedly, as "global." I have relied on theory frames of metaphor and sensemaking to help illuminate the phenomenon. Instead of focusing on variables and categories and how they are connected, I wanted to focus on the phenomenon: team evolution in situations when people work over digital means under pressure with socioculturally different others they have little chance to get to know personally.

Just like in the old nursery rhyme above, academic studies and project management manuals tend to give normative descriptions of what a successful global and/or virtual team is or should be like. "Collaboration," "communication," "effective leadership," and "trust," for instance, are often cited "ingredients" for effective teams, and "cultural differences" and "virtual work environment" are seen as challenges or moderators to be tackled. I am not disputing these important insights. Rather, and since human organizations do not work like machines no matter how tempting this view is for its simplicity, I focused on what is *behind* these building blocks and concepts from the point of view of teaming seen as a dynamic phenomenon constantly in the making when the whole world is considered to unfold as an ever-fluctuating process.

In the sections that follow, I will discuss findings and cross-analyze the teams I chose for this study. My intent is to bring forward the enacted nature of these teams and the mechanisms influencing their becoming, and to show how teams may at times form shared meanings and collective sensemaking, when at other times, rather the opposite is true. I will do this by performing cross-comparisons of teams at the level of generic teaming patterns, by looking at how individuals' sensemaking intertwine as team members interact with each other, and by

analyzing how similar events may lead to different sensemaking dynamics. First though, let's take a brief look at the outcomes of the teams.


13.1 Team outcomes

Well-performing teams are significantly different from each other when we look at what happens inside them. In this study, the best and most viable teams of all worked on the tasks to win without losing focus on the social dimensions of teamwork. They worked on the team itself in addition to its tasks. In comparison, a heavy social focus, but only on a surface level, and a heavy task orientation, both hiding problems in teaming, had a negative effect on team task results and social team outcomes.

As discussed in Chapter 3, it is difficult to compare different studies and draw conclusions on variables predicting team performance, since there are so many variables studied in a wide array of contexts and performance can be measured and understood in many ways. However, performance matters as teams are constituted for a purpose. This study created structurally similar teams performing identical tasks and froze the task performance variable to include only those teams that excelled in the quality of their sales pitch presentations. The main focus was on the variability of team dynamics instead. Well-performing teams created radically different social organizations that influenced the teams' viability and capability to deliver tasks, as well as the quality of tasks and member satisfaction in the team experience.

Figure 10 below organizes the five teams I studied on two teaming dimensions: whether the social dynamics of the team were organized around the task or the team's social relations – or both. The two best-performing teams producing the most consistent results from purely a task perspective, the *Scouts* (the best team of all based on task evaluations – see Appendix 6) and the *Master Cooks*, and despite their different ways of organizing their teams, had a strong shared focus on doing the tasks together as a social organization and a very strong shared ambition to win the challenge.[109] Members, despite challenges related to executing difficult tasks in a very limited timeframe and occasional interpersonal friction, took pride in their team and appreciated each other's work input and membership in the team. Even though some members entered the team with more skills than others, care was taken that those with less skills were given

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[109] It is difficult to determine which one of these teams was the better one in the end – it depends on the outcome criteria being prioritized. The *Scouts* worked diligently on every task and followed received instructions, while the *Master Cooks* produced the most creative outcomes.

tasks they were able to meaningfully complete and were given opportunities to learn via practice and training.
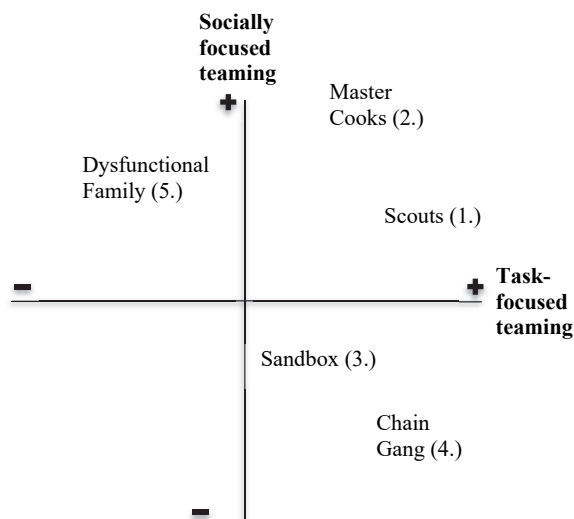
Note: The cardinal numbers from 1–5 here refer to a ranking of the teams purely based on task outcome evaluations

Figure 10   Teaming orientations – task versus social focus

The two next best teams when it comes to task outcomes, the *Sandbox* and the *Chain Gang*, both built team organizations prioritizing task over the more social aspects of teaming. In the *Chain Gang*, the relative success in task execution came at the price of destroying any possible feeling of a true team as a result of a deepening fault line forming between the domineering task-first and the weaker people-first oriented camps. In the *Sandbox*, the fault line was less deep and dramatic, as it was not based on personal orientations on teamwork but rather on institutional and geographic distance. The team that delivered the worst task results overall, the *Dysfunctional Family*, had a shared focus predominantly based on polite communication and civility, with mounting hidden frustrations and an excessive workload on two members, which towards the end also degraded team task performance.

Regarding the longevity of the teams, all team members in both the *Scouts* and the *Master Cooks* expressed enthusiasm or at least a positive disposition towards possible future work with their teammates. In the *Sandbox*, the three collocated members, who managed to find the missing social dimension in their

teaming in the end, were happy to continue while the two remote members were not really considered part of the local team. Both the *Dysfunctional Family* and the *Chain Gang* were about to break apart, and it is hard to say if it would have been possible to rescue these teams had their lifespans been extended. In any case, while all five teams did well and were able to develop at least some shared understandings over ways of working and routines, making the production of quality cases possible, the best teams managed to create a team that actively worked on both developing better ways of delivering the tasks and on the team itself as a social organization.

This study only focuses on the best five teams out of a total of 48. Despite their different orientations, all five teams were "real teams" and not groups (at least most of the time) as per Katzenbach and Smith (1993/2005) who defined a team as a "*small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose and performance goals,*" although whether they had "*an approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable*" at all times is more debatable, at least for the *Sandbox*, the *Dysfunctional Family*, and the *Chain Gang*. There were many teams in the rest of the sample that would have better fitted the definition of a "group" in that their goal alignment and commitment to shared tasks was not always given, and even though there were no organizational goals as such to follow (a skeptic may even doubt how often or to what extent individuals in firms *really* align themselves with corporate *or* team goals, rather than their own personal ones, particularly in times of turbulence), many people in many teams followed predominately their own personal goals (i.e., to get "the stuff done with least effort or pain"), rather than team goals per se. In many of these teams, the degree of teaming – either with the task or social orientation – was weak, and they would no doubt find their place in the lower left-hand corner in Figure 10 above.

13.2 Patterns of teaming

Teams are not static, monolithic entities, but change shape over time as they evolve from a tight form to a looser one that splits into subgroups and comes together again, for instance, over time. Some well-performing teams are better than others at inclusion work and teaming-in, and they are able to avoid team corrosion and harmful asymmetries leading to dysfunction. Not all members think about their teams in the same way, and these thoughts may evolve over time. In the same team, there may be people who "love the team" and who "hate the team." In any team at any given time, there are powerful teaming patterns and processes that both pull the team together and split it apart. These processes are not only directed at task execution, but at equally important team

social aspects as well. In the best teams, members engage in reflective practices and manage team social processes proactively. Team alignment on key concepts such as "communication," for instance, to be "open, honest, frequent, and welcoming differences of opinion" and team members enacting the concept as such, helps members to team-in and the team to be more successful.

When observed through a process lens, a team forming and evolving does not necessarily follow linear and well-demarked development patterns, as suggested by proponents of team lifecycle models (cf. Hertel et al. 2005; Tuckman 1965; Tuckman & Jensen 1977; Zander et al. 2013), or other goal-oriented time-based models that consider a team process as a *construct* to test relationships between input and output variables (cf. Marks et al. 2001). Rather, when studying teaming rather than teams, the meaning of the word "process" discloses a hint of another truth altogether. Team social processes are not geared to task resolution only (as suggested by Marks et al. 2001 and other input-process-output models on teams), but have sort of their own life altogether, bringing the members together or pulling them apart. In the same team, there may be ongoing social dynamics *both* tightening up the team and decoupling it again all at once. People in teams pursue all kinds of goals, both personal and work-related, and often these do not perfectly converge. This can be seen, for instance, in the *Dysfunctional Family* where the focus on politeness and consideration of others make the members find each other likable and interaction is smooth, but at the same time, the two leading teammates are increasingly overwhelmed by too much work but are unable to externalize these thoughts so as not to disturb the "on the surface" good team atmosphere. Beyond the dynamics of the task getting done one way or another, what can be seen across the cases I studied is that there are many possible patterns for a team to instantly develop, gradually develop, under-develop, partially develop, reverse-develop, or not-to-develop from its inception to its closure. In part, this patterning is due to challenges and ambiguities related to executing complex tasks in a fluctuating environment under time pressure with different others, and in part due to the added complexity of working with people in their different contexts relying on digital platforms. From here on, I refer to this phenomenon as the dynamics of *teaming-in* and *teaming-out*. Here, a team can be visualized as an elastic band being stretched and brought together again, not so much by external forces but by the ways team members think, act, react, and interact across time.

In the *Master Cooks*, the members instantly teamed-in, or in their own words, "clicked together somehow" from the very start, and stayed so until the end. They embarked on a team identity-driven adventure with a chosen theme that helped the team to hold together, guiding member actions to constantly fine tune

both collaboration and task execution as well as expectations over teamwork. Passionate, candid communication spiced with theme-related humor helped the team produce excellent and creative task outputs while adjusting to the changing requirements, stress, and helping to solve friction between members. The nobody-is-a-leader/everyone-is-a-leader decision made everyone try hard and feel responsible, although towards the end, time pressure led the member with the most experience and the least time at times to make task decisions that may not have always been consensual but still accepted by the others to get to the goal. In the *Scouts*, the gradual teaming-in did not happen instantaneously, aided by a shared explicit team identity, but as a result of steady, thoughtful, and disciplined communication work to pull everyone into team collaboration. Yet, the team does not emerge from "nowhere," but one person, willingly supported by others takes a subtle role of influence, guiding the team both in the constant development of its task and social processes to a well-balanced situation or a virtual cycle in which team members put the team's interest first in matters critical to the team's success. Both these teams are inclusive organizations and members often talk about the existence of a "real team," reflecting back on their experiences with how teamwork usually is. Even though individuals' personal goals often diverge as some are primarily interested in learning theory, others to collaborate over distance, others on how to lead, various team members' individual sensemaking processes converge when it matters most: over a shared team identity, goals, commitment, and capabilities, the members are able to build. As members learn to know and trust each other, speak up, and take action when they think it is necessary, the teaming-in processes just grow stronger and more refined, and resemble more a living organism in constant mutation and movement than a linear and organized team-development model.

In the rest of the teams, the teaming-in and teaming-out dynamics alternate, and teams are at times incomplete, partial, or regressive on important aspects. In the case of the *Dysfunctional Family*, the team fails to fully take off and remains incomplete due to a too strong emphasis on a shared understanding that team communication needs to be polite and the people "nice." There are various cycles of teaming-in and teaming-out, reflecting an asymmetry of efforts between team members. While some "team-up" and take on responsibilities not only over the task but also over motivating the rest, others "team-down" waiting for instructions or disengaging mentally, willingly taking a seat in the back, relieved they do not have to "drive." The not so effective and overly empathetic leader-elect sometimes manages to get everyone working as planned and as she would like to, but yet most often fails, and the not so effective yet voluntary followers too often fail to follow task execution plans, take initiative, and do not seem to even attempt to read situational clues. Yet, the team always comes back together when a new task is handed in. Those who work hard and "lean forward"

forgive time after time those who tend to "lean back." There is also a tendency for the team to alternately progress and regress. They manage to solve the biggest problem – pacing the work in the middle of the team life when their task performance is also best, but they revert to the last-minute style and the degrading performance of the last two cases.

In both the *Chain Gang* and the *Sandbox*, extremely ambitious individuals with high influence over others gear the teaming to an extreme task focus, leading, in both cases, to formation of more or less fixed fault lines between a more dominant and a more side-lined subgroup, and thus towards gradually deepening dynamics of teaming-out as cohesion forms between some members while leaving others out. Patterns of partial and incomplete teaming-in with temporal shifts can be seen in the *Chain Gang* in particular. In the first phase, when one of the remote members has difficulty finding time to attend team meetings online, the three collocated members interpret this as a sign of free-riding, so they team-up and give her the option "either to start contributing or leave the team." The other remote member making sense of the situation as difficulties to match competing priorities and synchronize schedules, rather than delinquent behavior, defends the "free rider," and an alternative solution to collaboration is found to accommodate conflicting schedules, thus resulting in a temporary teaming-in inclusive of all team members. The second fault line that forms is much deeper, more long-standing and destructive, and develops around totally opposed views on what teamwork should be like to begin with (task or socially driven). The team becomes a stalemate of sorts with a balanced state of unresolved and unspoken conflict between two members, resulting in a strong dynamic of pulling apart – or stretching – the "elastic band" to a breaking point. This conflict is independent of task-related rationality, and the team getting good results does not attenuate it or make collaboration easier. The team's shared commitment builds around the task exclusively as some members interpret that some others are not "worthy," and the human beings in the team become completely instrumental to each other, something one must endure for a short time in one's life. Even though the team is successful with its tasks, the infected social dynamics make work unpleasant and the members express relief when the team is finally "done with." Even this team has a brief moment of if not full cohesion and mutual sympathy, some level of togetherness in the middle of the team life, aided by a task everyone is motivated by, and no communication is perceived to be overly aggressive or behavior overly incompetent by any of the team members at that time. Yet, the team fails to keep the momentum, the subgroups slip further apart immediately after, and the team barely manages to hold together to finish the last task.

In the *Sandbox,* a geographic fault line gradually forms between the three collocated members on the main site and the two others residing in different

countries, resulting in partial teaming-in, yet managing to balance a sufficient level of continuous and shared efforts to complete tasks together. Here, the remote members are seen by the two most influential team members as less diligent or motivated to do the work, and they blame the lack of time to fully include everyone in team decisions and put metaphorical blinders on so as not to have to address the real issues. The remote members, initially, were equally committed to the team and more involved in the task than the collocated majority, and one of them was even appointed as the leader in the beginning due to her superior experience – and even though she was dethroned by another member later on. They never showed signs of intentional free-riding, but over time, teamed-in time after time despite occasional feelings of exclusion, marginalization, and rejection. The occasionally sluggish participation by the two remote colleagues was largely a consequence of the new leader's manners and behavior that came across rather brusque and thoughtless, impacting others' motivation and self-confidence.

In the teams I studied, the strong teaming-in processes characterizing the best teams working successfully on both the task and the team were based on explicit work by all or at least key team members on 1) *member inclusion*, 2) the *team as an end in itself*, 3) *alignment of understandings* on such concepts as "good communication," "collaboration," and "leadership" as well as 4) *reflective practices* questioning one's own initial assumptions and trying to understand others' behavior through alternative lenses and then acting on the most plausible explanation (i.e., is a colleague free-riding or insecure, or does she lack competence or having some personal problems?). Figure 11 below shows these dimensions as a continuum on which a team can "travel" over time. The *Sandbox*, for instance, started out with a sense of an inclusive collective attitude that with time eroded as members' understandings on "communication" and "leadership" became misaligned. The lack of reflective practices and/or will to act by members emerging as most influential contributed to this misalignment as did other members' self-marginalization. The team was united with a sense of purpose in the beginning, sliding towards a more instrumental status to "get the job done" in the middle of its lifecycle, and then the collocated sub-group recovered a shared purpose in the end once again.
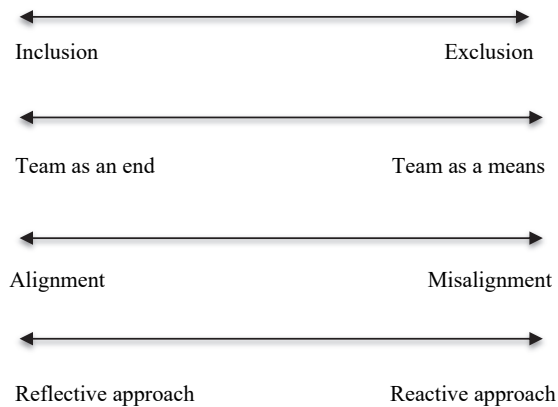
Figure 11   Key teaming dimensions

These different teaming dynamics as a whole help shed light on how well-performing global teams form and evolve. How members make sense of and react to situations thus either strengthening or weakening the team is crucial for a better understanding of the social processes of teaming. Besides setting rules and planning how to collaborate, communicate, and lead, constant team maintenance and adjustment work is needed to avoid the negative impact of events and processes leading to the disintegration and corrosion of the team.

13.3 Sensemaking dynamics

Teaming processes are triggered and enacted by individual team members on whose situational sensemaking capabilities, as well as decisions whether or not to act, ultimately determine how the team itself evolves and what it becomes. Sensemaking is a both a cognitively and emotionally driven continuous process in which members react and adjust to each other in the team context more or less successfully as the team travels on its journey. Sometimes, expressing eagerness and ambition can come across as aggressive behavior and insecurities can be misread as free-riding. Team members capable of actively re-evaluating their initial positions and understandings, and stepping back before making a judgment and taking action can be powerful sensemaking agents in teams with strong socially oriented teaming patterns. Appointing a leader, for instance, is an important sensemaking event that comes with as many

sets of expectations on what followership and leadership should be like as there are team members. When member understandings on key team dimensions such as how to take the team forward, how to communicate and collaborate, what the goals are, and how to make decisions are kept aligned, and the team is able to react to changes on the go without losing sight of the task, a truly successful, committed, and resilient team can emerge. Sometimes, teams build an identity from within that triggers a "sense of us." This collective sense of a team may be grounded in shared values or imagery or a team story that members build together. Teams with such an identity may be more successful and stronger than those that lack this capability.

Ambiguity, uncertainty, equivocality, and a complicated sociomaterial environment often characterize the life of a global team. An action taken, or a choice not to act at all in a state of confusion and ambiguity can both help solve the situation or make it worse. An individual or a collection of individuals being alert to cues, and critical of routinized and fixed expectations and pre-understandings is in a better position to enact a critical situation than if merely following set ways and procedures without questioning the underlying assumptions. How can the perspective of sensemaking help with understanding the inner workings of global teams? Groups of people do not become committed teams where individuals prioritize team goals more than their own agendas, and truly work together towards a common goal by a simple declaration or the creation of an organizational chart or a project specification. The extent to which individual sensemaking becomes collective on matters crucial to the functioning of the team is a key ingredient in defining the very degree the team becomes and remains a "real team," as opposed to just a group of people working together.

In alignment with Rafaeli et al. (2009), the cases I have presented show that both emotions and cognition-driven sensemaking processes influence what they refer to as a team mental model, and what I conceptualized more in line with my material and sensemaking literature as "shared identity" and "shared views." The cases also show that global teams with enhanced collective sensemaking capabilities may also have better and more consistent team outcomes (see also Haas 2006 for similar findings of collocated teams) when it comes to the tasks, team social aspects, and individual satisfaction, and that active team sensemaking about the material gathered and options available becomes critical for these teams (Maitlis & Christianson 2014). Now let us take a look at how sensemaking may influence some of the teaming-in and teaming-out dynamics critical to what the team becomes.

13.3.1 Alignment of understandings

A well-functioning team needs to establish *shared expectations* and a *commitment* (cf. Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010) regarding the team's ambition level. Although there were differences and fluctuations, all five teams took the challenge given to them enthusiastically, at least as expressed in words, and were committed to do well. They were also able to establish sufficiently well-aligned organizations and task-related communication to produce consistently good results. This meant enacting more or less functional team routines and clear enough roles and responsibilities to make the team able to work as such and the capability to manage unexpected situations, such as a sudden change in the type of task or an unplanned absence of one team member. When it comes to teaming-in and teaming-out dynamics that differentiated the seemingly well-performing teams from the very best teams, aligned understandings on the enactment of communication and collaboration between members were crucial.

Common sense suggests that with good communication practices, team collaboration can be smooth and the negative impact of differences of opinion and conflicts can be kept to a minimum by pre-emptive moves as can be seen in the case of the *Scouts* and the *Master Cooks*. However, what is "good" is not necessarily unproblematic. Establishing a shared meaning of what "good communication" is requires explicit work by members to adjust to each other, to the task, to the team context, and to the evolving team itself. Individuals' understandings of what communication should be can vary enormously, even between members with very similar backgrounds as seen in this study. Virtual environments set up for collaboration between people who do not know each other personally and the inherent lack of explicit cues is conducive to ambiguity and misunderstandings. "Good communication" means first and foremost good manners and face time to some, while for others it means immediate responses and a good command of digital collaboration platforms. Also within these overall meanings or criteria, what is "good" may differ, as what needs to be seen as "good" manners is not objectively given, but may vary between individuals and from time to time. It is easier for a person considered by others as a team player, hard worker, and knowledgeable person to be bossy at times than for someone without those credentials. It is up to the person in question to make the call on what is an appropriate course of action based on situational sensemaking. What is his or her position as understood by the others? What is the basis of his or her sensemaking and are alternatives considered? Is the team fighting a fire to crunch the numbers or just deciding whether to put a Churchill or Dalai Lama quote on the final page of the presentation? "Speedy response times" to an email may imply almost immediate answers to some, while for others a 24-hour delay is acceptable. Waiting for an answer for a full day when feeling time pressure

and expecting one within minutes can be nerve-wracking and lead to angry outbursts. In turn, angry outbursts as a reaction to a response time of 12 or 24 hours can be made sense of as rude, unreasonable, and despotic behavior if there is no shared understanding of what type of response times are the team's shared standard.

"A polite communication style" and careful choice of words not to offend teammates can be one element of what effective communication is and should be, but less so when good manners conceal hidden problems and mounting frustrations with last minute pacing of work or a low level of participation. "Honesty" is another element of effective communication, but too much honesty made sense of as inconsiderate or even "brutal" may offend feelings or have an alienating effect on some members, if they feel attacked or if the content of communication is considered unreasonable. When the team outcome requires sentences written in polished English, telling a fellow team member that his output is sub-standard and questioning his competence may be honest communication, but have a destructive effect and lead to alienation and teaming-out if the other party makes sense of this as a personal insult and not a legitimate concern over quality, gets hurts, and marginalizes himself, and the bad mood spreads to the rest of the team. Some may expect synchronized communication with video contact *in principle*, for others, this is a waste of time and offline work on one's own time is acceptable, while still for others, the mode can change depending on the situation, mood, time of the day, workload, the task, etc.

Establishing "good" communication practices for a team requires alignment among members, and that alignment is a key aspect of constant team construction and maintenance work as the team encounters unexpected situations and its configuration changes in time. Sometimes members change location, sometimes they are absent, sometimes they work face-to-face, and with time, they may get used to working offline with each other, and thus be able to cut online meeting time and so on. Of course, poor responsiveness may also be a signal of laziness and free-riding that gets amplified if other teammates do not directly address this behavior or consider being laid back a "normal" part of any teamwork, rather than a sign of disrespect of others. Planning helps but *ad hoc* reactions based on critical and reflective sensemaking to various situations, such as a sudden difficult problem, a conflict, or someone leaving the team unexpectedly, and adjustments of all kinds along the way help the team to team-in. If member expectations are wide apart, negative sensemaking of others' reactions or behavior to apparently mundane matters, such as response times to one single message, may quickly lead to a spiraling chain of teaming-out events and have a lasting corroding impact on the team. In such an unstable environment with stressful work, revising one's own pre-understandings and

sensemaking, searching for alternative explanations, imagining how other teammates may make sense of the unfolding events, and neutralizing budding conflicts with honest yet mindful straight talk helped to ensure member inclusion in the best teams, the *Scouts* and the *Master Cooks.*

On-the-go adjustments on members' expectations over the team's aspirations and goals may be necessary. If the team decides to "win" and the work goes smoothly supporting a shared expectation to be the "best team," then re-alignment may not be needed. However, if the same team receives negative feedback, tasks become too demanding, or the workload becomes too much, the team may need to adjust expectations to avoid misalignment, leading to teaming-out dynamics and corrosion. With some members pushing for ambitious goals while others pull back and relax expectations as a consequence of differentiated sensemaking triggered by unpleasant events, such as negative feedback from an authority or a heavier than expected workload to solve a task, the team risks falling apart.

13.3.2 Organizing for leadership

Any team needs to *move forward* to attain its goals.[110] In traditional literature and hierarchies reflected in organizational charts, role descriptions, and the like, this is typically a matter of "management" or "leadership." The slowly expanding global team leadership literature (see Chapter 3) seems to establish that leading these teams is a different matter than leading traditional teams, although there are important similarities. What comes through is that more modern relational leadership styles, like democratic and transformational leadership (Kearney & Gebert 2009) as well as shared leadership modes (Hoch & Kozlowski 2014; Zander & Butler 2010), need to be considered in the digital era of teamwork. In this study, the mode of influence was not pre-determined but of an emergent nature. Despite the structural similarities and similar membership profiles, considerable differences surfaced of how teams were organized in terms of forces of influence. In my sample of five teams, and to adopt Zander and Butler's (2010) vocabulary, single (*Dysfunctional Family*), paired (*Scouts*), rotated (*Sandbox*), and shared (*Master Cooks*) leadership modes were at least partially adopted, although the lines between one mode and another are somewhat difficult to draw, and due to team relational dynamics and evolution, these modes were not unambiguous and there were changes over time. For instance, in the case of the *Scouts*, at times Peter's single yet subtle

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[110] In my analysis, I try to avoid using the term "leadership" as I am looking into emerging processes that facilitate the act of organizing and moving the team forward, and in this way, distance myself somewhat from the leader-follower duality implicit in the concept of "leadership."

leadership position was clear, while at other times, he worked in tandem, in particular on team inclusion and coordination with Marc and Bao, depending on the situation. In the case of the *Master Cooks*, the mode was predominantly shared, but with time, Aleksei started to behave more assertively than the others, particularly on occasions when he perceived the team was stuck and time was running short. In the case of the *Sandbox,* the "leader rotation" was done in the heat of action, rather than as a result of an orderly and consensual negotiation.

One key decision for the teams to take following the initial turbulence of establishing the team was whether or not to choose a formal leader, who that person was, and how this choice of leadership was enacted. The collective choice of appointing a leader lead to divergent beliefs within the teams as members' expectations on what the leaders should do and how they should behave differed often radically. The mere decision to appoint a leader became a risky action as seen in the *Sandbox* and the *Dysfunctional Family*, even though the choice was apparently rational and even if the leader was the person with the most experience in managing projects and people. In those teams where everyone remained formally equal and no hierarchies were enacted along the way, like the *Scouts* and the *Master Cooks*, they remained more focused on the task and organizing the team to deliver, and not so much in sorting out the confusion that followed the appointment of a leader. In mainly task-focused teams like the *Chain Gang* and the *Sandbox*, special individuals emerged making sense of others as not being focused or being less capable and tried to enforce leadership by assertive behavior based on their own beliefs that without them, the team would not go much anywhere. In this sense, teams that evolved around the task had mainly already failed in one way or another to establish themselves as social organizations, a path teams fell on due to poor sensemaking and action by key members early on to which the others reacted by leaning back. Others tended to attribute what they considered social clumsiness or the inability to listen to others and see things differently to character flaws such as rudeness and despotism, and friction followed leading to teaming out.

The themes emerging besides the typology discussed above, are dynamics based on members' shared or differentiated sensemaking on issues related to power and influence. Examples of such issues are perceived *legitimacy* and whether the influence is *overt* and openly displayed or *covert* and more hidden and discrete. In the cases of the *Sandbox* and the *Chain Gang*, two struggling teams with tendencies for an overt use of power by influential team members, there were serious sensemaking discrepancies between team members in terms of what type of leadership dynamics were taking place in the team in the first place and whether or not there was really a leader. Aspiring leaders in both teams resorted to traditional overt leader behaviors, such as "bossiness," "control," and "telling the others what to do," basing their legitimacy on the

sheer amount of work they did, approaching deadlines that did not leave much room for socialization (or so they thought), and a sense of superiority, more or less grounded in their actual capabilities and skills. At times, the other team members accepted these behaviors and at other times not, which led to both hidden and open conflicts, bad feelings, and even self-marginalization of some members, triggering further anger and bossiness from aspiring leaders as well as frustration when the others did not comply. In the extreme case of the *Chain Gang*, the leader legitimacy conflict reached a deadlock when two opposing subgroups rallied against each other not over problems with tasks but with how to handle human relations. Often, the aspiring leaders were left wondering over and over again why they ended up doing so much of the teamwork and others did not behave the way they should. Regardless of the degree to which their leader position was accepted, these individuals were more or less tolerated because of their high work morale and task competence *despite* their perceived poor social skills.

As seen in these cases, for a legitimate overt or covert leader to emerge, not only is competence in task-related skills needed, but also social and situational skills. Otherwise, the most influential person eager to "lead" others may drive them to become more laid-back and passive than they would be in a different team environment. In the two most successful teams, there were no formal leaders, but the way to exercise influence was proactive and tacit rather than reactive and explicit. In the case of the *Scouts*, we see how Peter in particular engages in proactive and anticipatory sensemaking as a suite to small events followed by subtle purposeful corrective actions often not even perceived by others as such, gradually building a tight team of peers. For instance, noticing that Jia Li does not speak much in meetings and that he speaks too much, he purposely steps back in the following meeting, thereby giving Jia Li an opportunity and space to express her thoughts and take center stage. Thus, Jia Li's ideas are incorporated in discussions and solution work, giving her the signal that her work is appreciated, leading to a more active Jia Li, an observation Peter is happy to make later on. The *Master Cooks* built such a strong and inspiring team identity, and humorous yet serious rules documented in their "codex" that made it easier for the members to have a sense of direction and make sense of the frequent events that may have otherwise thrown the team into chaos and disagreement. When thinking of one's team as a "pirate fraternity," it was easier to be brave and break the rules of conventional teamwork to get to the "booty," not leaving anyone "behind" – nor disappearing "in the middle of the fight," or "otherwise risk walking the plank."

When adopting a view looking into the teaming processes dynamically, the established "leadership" concepts become more complex, ambiguous, and nuanced, and to fully understand the emergence of influence, we really need to

look into the forces that rock the team's boat and steer its course more broadly and over time. In these five teams, the more or less conscious choices of how to take the team forward, how these choices were enacted, and to what extent team members shared an understanding of what the team's system of influence was and their own role in it, had a huge impact on the becoming of the team. Rather than observing leadership through such boxed concepts as "hierarchical" versus "shared" modes, we can consider leadership in emergence through the practice of teaming. Here, concepts of legitimacy and illegitimacy, overt and covert manifestations of power, instability and stability of the team, as well as dynamics of member exclusion and inclusion come to the forefront as key drivers.

13.3.3 Identity work – team as an end or as means?

How united the team becomes is a reflection of to what extent a team succeeds at *teaming* or becoming a collective with aligned goals, putting the team before individual interests, and people collaboratively doing their very best for the shared "cooking pot," as in the case of the *Master Cooks*. Sensemaking literature refers to this as building a shared identity (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010). In practice, organizations often task themselves with creating corporate identities with the aim of helping employees assimilate certain values and principles to guide their work towards reaching specific corporate goals. At a more micro level, punch lines and kick off events are created to align project teams and give members a sense of pride and shared identity and destiny. These top-down identities can be more or less successful at reaching the imagination of the team members.[111] In this study, the more successful teams, the *Master Cooks* and the *Scouts*, were able to build an organization where people spontaneously and in comparison with other teamwork experiences they had had, talked about "us" and "our team" as an entity, as an end in itself. In these teams, a team identity was not transferred from the outside, but emerged from *within* the team as members together actively engaged in collaborative identity work. In the less successful well-performing teams, this pattern of forming a shared identity was much weaker, fluctuating or partial. It often applied only to some members (*Sandbox*), surfaced with positive team experiences and disappearing with negative ones (*Dysfunctional Family*), or was completely missing at least towards the end (*Chain Gang*). The team was sometimes seen

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[111] When working at Ericsson, I was often puzzled by how important artifacts, such as simple t-shirts and other paraphernalia with project-related often cryptic pitches, like *"TDMA CMOS 2.1 now 1,000,000 users,"* were to help create a team spirit and motivate team members working under stress to deliver an R&D project – at least initially.

by some team members as merely a means to get to the task goal while others thought of it as an end in itself (*Chain Gang*).

The *Master Cooks* chose a theme by a unanimous decision that from the team's inception everyone was inspired to hang onto, which helped gear the team members' sensemaking and action towards shared goals in the turbulent team environment. Over time, the theme became more sophisticated as the members reinforced and further developed this shared identity to the point that the team really became "pirates" that stayed up late, had no fear, and stuck together to win no matter what, a goal that they reached in the end. For the *Scouts*, this identity work was more gradual, less flamboyant, and centered on systematically, ensuring the inclusion of all the members in the team. Making sure everyone shared an understanding of what was expected gradually helped create a sense of trust and camaraderie, leading to a sense of "us." The proactive inclusion efforts were mainly executed by Peter but also by Marc and Bao based on situated sensemaking, and addressed apparently small issues, such as people being reluctant to speak up, lacking discipline to deliver their parts in time, or not having needed competence, in a constructive manner. This contributed to a shared sense of responsibility and a desire to do one's best – and to an emerging team identity as a group of people who are good at what they do, and are likable and caring people to work with.

As for the *Chain Gang*, despite the initial intentions to reach towards a true team, there was never a united team with a shared identity but rather the opposite – a group of individuals reluctantly working on the same project, some more frustrated and angry than others. Frederic and Ly, in particular, regularly referred to the team by its negative: we are *not* a team. Two subgroups emerged as polar opposites and in contempt of each other, one pushing for the task and the other for team social coherence, and the divide became even wider over time, condemning the group to remain as such with its unresolved conflicts. Compensatory personal bonding between the three team members on the "social coherence" and less dominant side of the team took place, helping two team members, who were discouraged by what they felt was a toxic environment or a difficult personal situation, stay in the team. Only once, when this team received a disappointing external evaluation in the team's mid-life did the members manage to rally together based on the shared sensemaking that the team was in trouble, "almost" becoming like a real team as Ly put it.

In the *Sandbox* and the *Dysfunctional Family*, the identity work was partial, either creating a shared sense of "us" within the collocated subgroup only or prioritizing conflict avoidance and social harmony, thus concealing troubles with task processes and an unequally shared workload. Both teams struggled with teaming, at times becoming a team and then again falling apart, a process usually exacerbated by pressure to deliver on time, hidden personal conflicts

and tasks considered challenging by some. Team identity work was never pronounced or explicit but rather reactive, unreflective, and circumstantial. This can be seen in the case of the *Sandbox*, for instance, when the three collocated members, stressed and united by the fast approaching deadline, get together during the last day of the last assignment and a "real team" finally emerges, or when in the case of the *Dysfunctional Family*, everyone seems to be motivated by the third and fourth cases and find a shared pace for work only to fall back with the last two cases requiring more intense collaboration and creativity. Here, two team members give opposite meanings to the team when they describe it as a "family" – Yoshi who tends to lean forward and be active refers to a hierarchical structure, and Gina who tends to lean backwards and be more passive refers to a flat one. Their diverging understanding of what their team is about makes it difficult for them to build shared sensemaking on events such as a suddenly tightened deadline or what to do and by whom in the event of a technological glitch, for instance.

While not absolutely necessary for good performance at least in the short run, an emerging team identity the members work on together seems to help build a basis to align sensemaking and actions in a way that makes the team stronger and more effective. To have a shared identity is not necessarily a dichotomy either – a shared identity can be partial and form suddenly in an already mature team building on existing loose relationships. As seen in the case of the *Sandbox*, such a strong identity can emerge as a result of a shared threat to miss a deadline, for instance, and join only a dominant subpart of the team while others are left "hanging." A negative team identity can also build over time, creating a deadlock and delegitimizing some members in the eyes of others. It is worth consideration if a team churning good results where members openly avoid each other and manifest their disrespect in more or less subtle ways to each other is a truly well-performing team – and if so, then at what cost?

13.3.4 The power of unexpressed emotions and thoughts

The original concept of sensemaking focuses on cognition as it is said to lie in the path of the action, so action precedes and focuses cognition. Later studies have brought in the importance of emotions in sensemaking and how felt emotions mediate the relationship between unexpected events and the onset of sensemaking processes (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010; Maitlis, Vogus & Lawrence 2013). Literature typically examines how individual or social sensemaking unfolds *after the fact,* triggered by surprising or unusual events, and rarely looks directly at the sensemaker and individuals in action as events unfold. In this study, I had a chance to follow the sensemakers – or the

individuals "doing" the sensemaking. Here, I use some examples from the case material to show how negative, unexpressed emotions as well as *thoughts* can build up over time and color sensemaking processes. Here, it seems to be more a question of a thoughtful expression of emotions and thoughts critical for teaming-in to succeed, rather than sharing one's own feelings uncensored with the others without thinking of the possible impact ahead of time.

Ly's and Frederic's "duel" or her "task only" and his "human relations first, then task" approach, and the emotions and thoughts they nurtured was the "motor" behind the *Chain Gang's* poor teaming dynamics. Ly, in a challenging life situation and with a personal preference towards online teamwork, was anxious to do well no matter what, even if that meant long hours and surviving infected team relations. Busy with many projects and a job, she was focused solely on the task and expected others to follow her plan and be sufficiently competent from the outset without much need for interaction and considering a lack of competence as an individual's and not the team's problem. From her perspective, an incompetent person like Frederic just needs to carefully listen to and follow the more qualified person's instructions. If someone did not do a task or behave (for her) in an acceptable way, she made a permanent negative assessment of that person's character, which she then allowed to transcend in her communication without trying to gain a deeper understanding of the situation or devise other explanations or solutions.

Frederic, with a less pressing schedule and trying to establish a true team, or a "squad," like when he had been in the army, expected the team to be a place where everyone has good manners, feels safe, is respected, and is entitled to get support if skills are lacking. He judged Ly on the basis of her rude tone and direct manner in email communications and on the Facebook group page from early on, and failed to see that behind the harsh words and clumsy formulations was a stressed and tired person eager to do well and get the tasks done, and not quite sure about others' intentions or the role they wanted to play, if any. Here, Ly made sense of the team as a temporary entity dedicated to solving tasks only, and considered forming a socially tight team with people she thought she had very little in common with as unnecessary and a waste of time, while for Frederic, forming a caring and solidary team was a prerequisite for task execution. For Frederic, Ly's communication style was disrespectful and rude despite giving credit to her task skills and hard work, while for Ly, Frederic with his bad formatting and spelling mistakes was "without hope," not competent enough to bring value to the team, yet still making claims on how things should be done, a dynamic gradually leading to mutual denial, disrespect, and an interpersonal dead end. Both of them were incapable of seeing each other as people with potential, and their sensemaking based on exaggeratedly spiraling negative thoughts and feelings of frustration and indignation, turned

them into enemies rather than teammates. People being swept away by their own quickly building radical positions, passions, assumptions, and strong negative feelings about others were at the root of the failure of this group to build a healthy team.

In the *Dysfunctional Family*, Nea, the leader-elect, was in large part both the problem and the possible solution to the team's struggles. She could not make up her mind whether the others were behaving like likable junior colleagues with their good and bad sides or lazy people incapable of independent work, and she oscillated between these moods along the way when the others at times met her minimal expectations and at times not. These thoughts were combined with her mixed feelings about her own capability to lead, as she ultimately kept on blaming herself when the others seemed to suffer from a lack of motivation. Hers was a personal battle between felt frustration and nurturing feelings towards the others, and she failed to dig deeper and take action to become the leader she was supposed to be. Gina was struggling with insecurities and expected to be reassured, Sam was passive in the absence of straight talk, and Lana who was in a different location found herself lost in translation and at times unsure of what to do. Yoshi, Nea's silent co-pilot, just grew silently angry, because to him, Sam, Lana, and Gina were not worthy people to work with, and not a team but a bunch of individuals forced to work together. As Nea did not say or demand anything clearly and remained polite and motherly, most team members thought everything was fine, even though they saw her take a large part of the team tasks and responsibilities. For them, since Nea "always knew what to do," everything was as it should be; otherwise she would tell, wouldn't she? In this way, Nea led the team into a vicious cycle of endless work hours and building frustration for herself and Yoshi.

Ioanna in the *Sandbox* team finds herself regularly wondering about "mysteriously silent others." Why do they not post answers online although I can see that they read the questions and the comments? Are they lazy? Incompetent? Free riders? Why . . . as they all seem to be such nice people when we speak and we had such a promising start as a team! Why do Harry and I do so much and they so little? What happened? Ioanna is impulsive, hardworking, expressive, and gets easily stressed. She speaks fast, a lot, has many ideas, and is not shy about speaking up if she does not like someone else's suggestions, or to delete portions done by others if she does not see the fit. For her, the pressure to do well and the lack of time justify all sorts of means. Her choice of words is not always the most diplomatic, even though she means well and she really values good social relations. Her felt frustration over others' lack of activity comes through in her manners and communication. None of these recurrent "efforts" helps the other "girls" to become more outspoken, hardworking, or bring forward their ideas. Although no one ever says anything or complains,

they are simply pushed back and intimidated by the over-eager Ioanna, a possible sensemaking path that never occurs to her during the life of the team. Receiving unpleasant comments is not motivating, even though everyone values her contributions to the team's excellent task outputs. She gets along well with the composed and silent Harry as their skills are complementary and temperaments do not clash. He works on analysis and theory and she keeps the cases together and communicates with the others, and together they plan for and execute what is the core of each case. For Harry, things work well enough as they are, and even though he has a much better understanding of the reasons behind the "girls" apparent passiveness, the only action he ever takes is in Ioanna's absence when he tries to show by example, filling the team's chat place with background information and analysis – a cue too subtle and insufficient to trigger the wanted response. For Ioanna and Harry, it is easier to decouple and break the team in two, than try to engage in more active sensemaking involving some tough self-reflection and subsequent action to truly team-in. For Ioanna in particular, the others are at fault.

People act and react in relation to others. Unexpressed emotions as well as thoughts and assumptions are powerful triggers behind individuals' sensemaking processes that inevitably influence collective sensemaking as well. In the cases of the *Chain Gang*, the *Dysfunctional Family*, and the *Sandbox*, their teaming work was negatively affected by patterns of sensemaking that were established early on in these teams' lives and that were all but rational when taking a closer look. In the *Chain Gang*, the negative impressions Frederic and Ly quickly formed of each other early on were only strengthened over time as both of them kept the other one accountable for their own frustrations, and each new incident was understood on the basis of shallow and emotionally laden first impressions about "the other" gone wrong ("she is rude" – "he is incompetent"). In the *Dysfunctional Family*, Nea and Yoshi bottled up their frustrations about the others' lack of autonomy and initiative, leading to a situation where they were more or less increasingly discontent with the teaming. Meanwhile, the others, lacking any visible sensemaking material indicating the contrary, were content with their team life, leading to an unhealthy lack of balance in the team. In the *Sandbox*, a very ambitious, expressive, and impulsive person, Ioanna, keen on testing her skills as a leader, drives herself to frustration over and over again as the "girls" do not react to her instructions the way she expects. It does not occur to her that her "ambition" comes across as over-eagerness, her "motivation" as pushy behavior, and her "feedback" as harsh criticism with personal overtones, pushing the others away instead of pulling them in. What is lacking in these cases is critical thinking and self-reflection, asking the questions, "What *else* can cause this behavior than what I may think

now?" and "What is it in me?" rather than by default blaming others for what seems to be unreasonable behavior.

13.4 Small events as triggers of sensemaking

Small events, such as a team member being late, overburdened, or producing output of low quality can trigger drastically different sensemaking patterns and responses in different teams. These events and the sensemaking they trigger can send the teams on totally different teaming paths, depending on how members react to them, thus influencing how they evolve and what they become. There are endless options and paths for a team to take; any small incident presents a missed or taken decision point of some sort in the team's life. The difference between failure and success, a good and a bad team, is often minimal

The examples below are chosen to show the importance of what could easily be dismissed as trivial and marginal incidents on the *becoming* of the team, or teaming. Taken together, these are mini-stories of team member *inclusion* and *exclusion*.

13.4.1 Issues with timeliness and quality

In teamwork, it happens frequently that someone has not read material sent out before a meeting, delivers what some others may consider below-standard quality, or is late with deliverables. Often, this creates tension, especially when working under stress. Patterns form quickly and teams' paths, once chosen or drifted into, seem difficult to reverse.

In the *Scouts*, two junior members come to the first team meeting not having fully read and analyzed the case material. As soon as Peter notices that they have not fully read the case, he politely suggests moving the meeting to the following day to "allow everyone to be ready" without ridiculing or pointing the finger at anyone and even though time pressure is significant. He does not blame anyone, take on the job for himself, or get upset, nor does he attribute the cause of the delay to character flaws or laziness, but sends a clear message that everyone needs to chip in and "hiding" behind the team was not an option. In this way, even the juniors understand that everyone's input was equally important as a *matter of principle*, although not everyone's work was necessarily of the same quality. The juniors, rather than being guilty of intentional free-riding, were just overwhelmed by what they considered a difficult task and were worried about coming across as unworthy and

incompetent in the eyes of others. From that moment on, "not being prepared" was not a big problem in the team as everyone's input, no matter how trivial or marginal or off, for that matter, was respected and taken seriously. It was subtly established that in the *Scouts*, everyone was expected to try and push their limits, for which they deserved respect in turn.

In the *Dysfunctional Family*, lacking to be properly prepared (or rather, what it *means* to be prepared) is never openly discussed. Nea and Yoshi, who do not want to stir the apparently good team atmosphere, automatically pick up the slack from the first case. Quickly, this becomes a "normal" practice and a habit in the team. Two people take the responsibility and the others engage only to a certain extent. The reasons for not being prepared are many: other priorities in life (Sam), insecurities (Gina), or a lack of perceived knowledge, capability, or understanding about what is going on (Lana), but in all cases, the "delinquent" team members fail to understand that something is wrong – there are no signals pointing in that direction. In a sensemaking dynamic very different from the *Scouts* where "inclusion" was a team priority, for Nea and Yoshi, the situation is such that they cannot wait for the others to "wake up." Hence, they end up doing more than their share while the others learn to be passive since everything seems to be working and the tasks get done.

In the *Sandbox*, a similar problem occurs when the clock ticks for the first case, and the team's solution outline remains in a chaotic state in Google Docs with two days to the submission deadline. The time pressure triggers Ioanna to take over the case together with Harry without much discussion with the other members. The incident is never openly discussed but the message is clear: the others' work is of questionable value and they can run over the deadline. This, together with Ioanna's habit of nagging, tends to marginalize others further, although they still try to contribute the best they can but without the initial enthusiasm and spontaneity. Unlike Nea, Ioanna is not shy about speaking up and expressing her emotions. She tends to get overly emotional and point out shortcomings, thus alienating others further.

13.4.2 Issues with competence

Teams are put together to combine skills needed to deliver specific tasks. It happens frequently though that some team members lack knowledge in key areas to the team's success. Sometimes, it may be a question of a soft skill like proficiency in a language or a technical skill like the ability to use a certain communication platform.

In the *Chain Gang*, Frederic's lack of proficiency in English and business theories (he had a background in a different field) was unacceptable to Ly, who

openly questioned whether he was qualified to be in the team to begin with – a decision that was not hers to take. For her, unlike for Frederic who was expecting support from his team to increase his competence, a team like this is not a place to learn what she considered obvious, and she was incapable of seeing the value in the content of many Frederic's good suggestions due to the sometimes poor language and the form his ideas were often packaged in. The *Scouts* made sense of a lack of knowledge at a team level rather than an individual level. Seniors invested in formal knowledge transfer to teach the juniors how to use Google Docs and the Prezi platform, for instance, both basic skills needed to be part of the team. Peter and Marc coordinated short training sessions online and referred to other available sources and facilitated knowledge transfer as one-on-one training, if necessary. Nila had problems with following English language meetings online that were often conducted in a quicker pace than she was able to follow. Bao, proficient in both English and Russian, a language Nila mastered well, stepped in as a bridge builder, taking time offline to make sure she understood the team goals and her tasks. In the case of the *Master Cooks*, the knowledge transfer took place ad hoc in "endless" online meetings, and a careful inventory of members' skills was conducted so everyone became a specialist in what they knew best and also learned new skills. Here, the team became an important platform for learning for all its members.

13.4.3 Issues with passive attitude

Being perceived as passive in a team may be a matter of temperament, a personal disposition or life situation, or a myriad of reasons related to the task and team environment. Taking a back seat may also be a consequence of lacking a specific skill and/or not being prepared, situations presented in the two previous sections. Yet, some members' passivity is not an ingredient in good teams, and a truly good team is inclusive, capable of "picking everyone up." Often, what is perceived as passive behavior leads to negative labels such as "free-riding" or "incompetence," while in reality, passiveness can have many causes as well as solutions.

In the *Dysfunctional Family*, Gina, with experience in IT, fails to solve the team's IT problems during the first case, an event that for her is a personal failure, as in her view, she has let her team down. She becomes careful and self-conscious and often does not speak up or defend her ideas, even when she believes in them and thinks that they are of value. At times, she thinks her teammates are selectively discriminating against her suggestions just because they come from her. The others do not signal to her in any way that they are upset, disappointed, or consider her as a lesser member, a feeling she seems to

develop as she reflects on who she is and what she can do in relation to others – which is less than she thought in the beginning. Her heightened self-consciousness as someone coming from a modest community in an African country and no background in business *combined* with the perceived initial failure makes her hold back and contribute less than her true skill level would enable her to do. Others failing to capture this dynamic and pulling her back in marginalizes Gina for no real reason. In both the *Chain Gang* and the *Sandbox*, leading team members' sometimes harsh and even aggressive communication style and feedback alienated others, as they felt unappreciated and feared further humiliation and a lack of appreciation if they were to make "mistakes" or deliver work that would be deemed not good enough, making the leaders believe they were passive – when, in reality, they were not.

In the *Master Cooks*, Cui Yu does not start with the best possible cards for team inclusion either. She has problems with English, understanding the Western lifestyle and her new school in general, and she has no experience with Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, Google Docs, and other applications commonly used in Europe. However, she is open and enthusiastic about her new life situation, which she thinks is a learning opportunity and an adventure, and not a source of shame. Her teammates seem to be well aware of her struggles and respect her for her efforts; they even agree to hold meetings in Google Docs instead of Skype to make it easier for her to follow (since communication trails are stored and discussions are in written format in Google Docs). She may be behind or misunderstand at times, but she never gives up, and with her efforts and hard work, Cui gains the others' respect as they consider her learning relative to her starting point rather impressive.

Here, we have seen how different sensemaking processes and team dynamics can lead to inclusion and exclusion of individual team members. For senior team members, it may be tempting to just do the work and take the lead without much consideration to pulling everyone in. Yet, what drives teaming is allowing everyone to take part with the assumption that they will learn, although this may require some patience and foresight from those whose competence level is higher. The team's metaphorical dance floor belongs to everyone. What drives people towards and away from the team can be something obvious, like a technical skill or language issues. Other times, these dynamics are more subtle. Someone's more or less rational insecurities may be difficult but not impossible to spot, as we saw in the case of Gina from the *Dysfunctional Family* and the juniors in the *Scouts*. While in the case of the *Scouts* there was someone, a sensemaker, asking the right questions and finding the right solutions to avoid teaming-out, in the case of the *Dysfunctional Family*, this "someone" was missing.

13.5 Closing the circle

What do well-performing global teams look like from within as human organizations? How do these teams form and evolve? These were the questions I set out to answer in the very first chapter. To answer the first question, in Chapter 7 (in particular the section 7.1.), I highlighted with an ethnographic example what the same team may look like when seen as a unit of production (a fixed entity) and as a human organization (a processual phenomenon). The difference was significant, and as a result, the very understanding of what is meant with "success" and " a team" had to be problematized. This question was further explored with considerable depth as I built narratives of five teams based on my empirical experiment in Chapters 8-12 to show what these team "look like". Based on these narratives, I replaced the "machine" metaphor implicit in the mainstream research on global teams with alternative metaphors idiosyncratic to each team.

To answer the second question, I would like to take a common economist's stand and say, "it depends", but with a twist. Instead of speculating with variables (i.e. communication, trust, task, motivation, leadership, etc.) that may interfere with a certain probability and be captured by statistical modeling and hypothesis building, my finding is that the way teams form and evolve, depends on team members' capability (or lack of it) and willingness (or lack of it) to think and act and to proactively make sense of what is going on in the team, both as individuals and in interaction. When those variables studies on global teams usual focus on, such as team diversity, member dispersion, task type, external team conditions and team outcomes are kept constant to the extent possible, and a number of teams is followed from within over time, commonalities between these well-performing teams are strikingly few. Each team takes a different shape that is not static but changes over time. Team members may experience their team in radically different ways. One may think of a flock of birds or a school of fish changing shape as it moves ahead, sometimes with speed, sometimes slowing down, sometimes pulling together and then pulling apart, and sometimes disintegrating or stopping. At times the reason for the variation is known and visible (such as in the case of an external shock – a change in task or in project schedule, for instance, or when a team member becomes suddenly unavailable), but often the logic of what is driving these teams is not easily unveiled to an outsider, and at times not even to the team members themselves.

There are no simple answers to these questions. All I can hope for is that the reader has patience to read the stories of the five structurally similar well-performing teams executing the same tasks brought forward in this study, take inspiration from them and reflect on what possibilities process sensitivity,

member reflexivity and agency, team narratives and metaphors may bring when facing teamwork challenges in the many organizations "out there" in the real world.

13.5.1 Learnings

I would like to consider that rather than a well-contained "circle," this study constitutes a small forward movement in a spiral (or an arc, as suggested by Ricoeur) towards a better understanding of modern teamwork. The main ambition of this study was to explore alternative ways of understanding global teams to uncover complementary or different "truths" deviating from the largely positivist research tradition on global teams. Instead of looking at teams as composites of multiple variables leading to outcomes, I wanted to look at them through the lens of a process worldview in which teams are always in a flux and transformation, just like the world they are embedded in. This meant "opening up" such established constructs considered essential for effective teamwork as "communication," "cooperation," "conflict handling," and "leadership" to see what "good communication," for instance, means to team members and how (and if) a team reaches shared understandings on matters important to becoming a good team.

What I found (see Figure 12) is that "to be a global team" is more a matter of degree than a static condition. Sometimes and in some teams, members are committed to the task in the same way and truly collaborate and cooperate to reach shared goals. Yet often, even in well-performing teams, this is not the case. People in teams constantly engage in processes of teaming-in and teaming-out. A well-performing team can be task-focused, but the best teams of all work equally hard on the team itself to keep it together, to ensure member inclusion, and to help create shared understandings and a team identity, a sense of "us." Sensemaking is one mechanism and a point of reference of how these team processes are capable of pulling the team together, to team-in, by forming and maintaining shared understandings and team identities can be understood. At the center of team sensemaking are *people*, team members and active (or passive) agents, reacting and acting (or not) on their thoughts and emotions for team interactions to take place on which teaming processes build. The interaction loop is continuous, altering the team throughout its lifecycle. Events, small and large, external and internal, are sensemaking opportunities for individual team members to interpret and act upon. The way these processes unfold and the events are handled by the team members influences what well-performing (and other) teams look like from within: *Chain Gangs, Dysfunctional Families, Sandboxes, Scouts*, or *Master Cooks* – or something else.
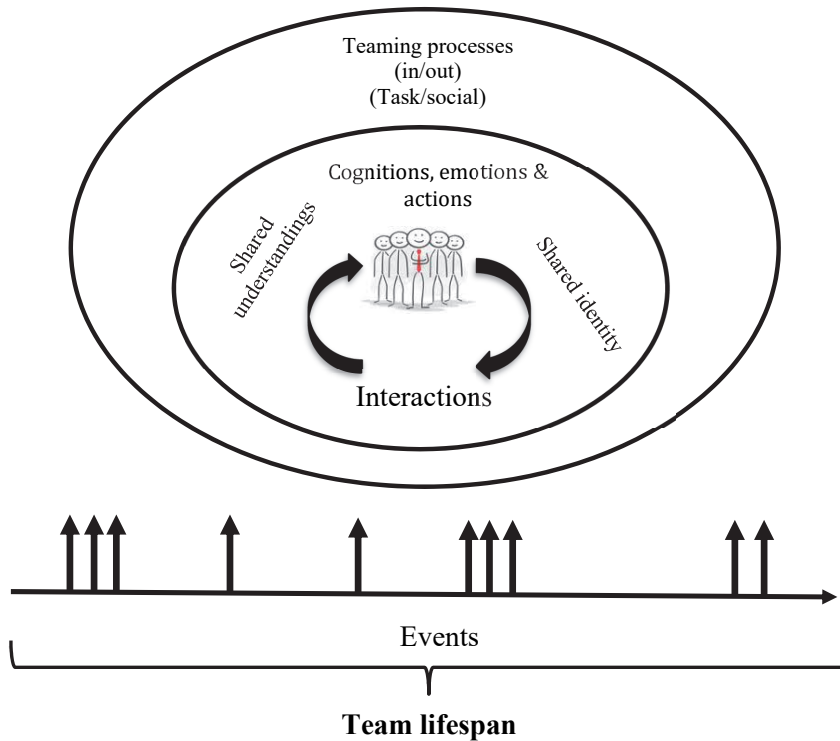
Figure 12   Process approach to teaming

At this point, it is useful to go back to a key difference between *homo economicus* and *homo capax* discussed in the introductory chapter. A team member following purely economic rationality and linear logic pursues more or less passively given goals following pre-defined processes and has faith in the system (the machine), more or less like in the ethnographic stories I told in Chapter 2. Instead, a capable human being is a competent yet fragile and resilient entity who is prepared to live in chaos and embrace complexity, to take ownership of his or her own and the team's fate in a turbulent environment, which formal plans, blueprints, input-output processes, and "success recipes" have so much difficulty capturing. This type of dynamic was present in the *Master Cooks* and *Scouts* teams and give us an idea of what truly well-performing global teams are "made of."

What can be learned is that successful teams work on both the team task and the team itself as a social organization as intertwined yet independent ends in themselves, rather than considering human processes as serving the tasks and performance goals. In the best teams, members are active agents capable of improvising and adjusting means, goals, and the team itself as the situation

requires, and building a social organization with a feeling of "we" from within. Seeing teams as metaphors by combining analytical rigor, insight, and imagination may help with making teams' challenges more tangible and suggest possible fixes. Further scholarship on teams as a process answering "how" questions and a more imaginative and pluralistic use of existing, tremendously rich philosophical wisdom, as well as more varied methodological approaches are necessary to accrue knowledge on topics such as teaming and agency in different team contexts.

Cultural and virtual aspects are the two dimensions on which global team literature is often differentiated from the traditional team literature. I suggest that mechanistically insisting on focusing the study of global teams excessively on these dimensions and following what may be outdated theoretical paradigms may lead to some unfortunate blind spots. Further integrating the vast literature on teams in various fields and the current scholarship on "global virtual teams" is one way to progress the field. As I mentioned in the Introduction, and contrary to expectations, I was surprised to find practically only a few references to "cultural differences" as causes of problems in teams. What team members talked about at times was trouble with language, accents, and the lack of equal access to a virtual work environment. This did not mean that people were unaware of individual differences due to teammates' diverse backgrounds, but rather the contrary. Many participants took extra care in how they presented themselves and interpreted their colleagues' behavior so as not to make erroneous interpretations. There are, of course, many possible explanations for this. International business students and practitioners in the age range of 22 to 45 may be used to interacting with people from different countries, and they expect this from an international strategy course to begin with. They may also be greater believers in the positive effects of diversity than people, in general, thus enacting positive outcomes. This, however, should not reduce the significance of the insight of considering "culture" as a rather neutral "input" when it comes to team success.

There were some perhaps anecdotal counterintuitive findings when it comes to cultural diversity/similarity and the expected impact of people's national culture on their behavior, raising questions to what extent "culture" is constructed and enacted and to what extent it is a phenomenon "out there" to be objectively studied. In the case of the *Dysfunctional Family*, for instance, Yoshi (a Japanese man in a follower role) and Nea (a Finnish woman in a leader role) got along best, while Nea and Sam (a Finnish man) struggled the most to communicate. In the case of the *Chain Gang*, a young Vietnamese woman, Ly, behaved rather dominantly and aggressively ("male behavior"), while a French man, Frederic, took a more submissive position ("female behavior"). In fact, and as I found out much later, these counterintuitive dynamics with regards to

gendered stereotyping were reinforced and probably amplified by the fact that Ly thought all along than Frederic was a woman and Frederic that Ly was a man (their names have been changed). The Ghanaian Esam's team (which was not part of this study, but this case is discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.4) got into a severe conflict needing intervention due to the negative effects of cultural stereotyping in which his Northern European female colleagues accused him of behaving like an African "macho" male, disrespectful of women. In his own view at least, he was a practicing Christian with a pro-equality upbringing and was merely expressing his points of view in a passionate manner and was deeply hurt by the accusations.

When it comes to the virtual dimension, some further reflections are also needed. My study shows how structurally almost identical teams solving the same tasks in the same environment, actually build very different and often complex idiosyncratic communication systems to collaborate. Sometimes these work better than others and often teams adjust on the go for better – or for worse. The *Scouts* and the *Master Cooks* reduced synchronized online meeting time as the team matured for greater time efficiency, the *Chain Gang* dropped Skype meetings to avoid having to face interpersonal conflicts and because of real or imagined difficulties finding time slots for meetings, and the *Sandbox* dismissed Skype as ineffective when the problem was rather in the way the team ran their meetings and not so much in the tool. The most creative team, the *Master Cooks,* relied heavily on the not so very interactive Google Docs, the *Sandbox* split in two with the core team meeting face-to-face and the remote members "hanging in" the best they could, and the *Scouts* based their collaboration on frequent yet quite short Skype meetings. There was no specific communication mix defining the best teams, other than those who were able to create tools and ways to collaborate that worked for the team and all the team members to ensure both inclusion and task completion.

In general, to the team members, the virtual component was not an unfamiliar situation to be dealt with in comparison with their normal work life and teamwork, but rather a natural extension to their lives with the added component of working under stress on a new type of difficult tasks in a competitive environment with people they did not know before. Frederic in the quote in the Introduction eloquently expresses how challenging this type of teamwork can be, and how people far away can feel so near and people close to us can be so far away. The matter is no longer only how to find the best set of tools and routines for virtual work in business firms, but the quest is part of a larger set of profound changes in our society that philosophers such as Zygmunt Bauman and Hubert Dreyfus discuss in their work, covering themes such as trust, commitment, risk, and shared concerns in the digital era – topics also central to global teams.

These are merely anecdotes and brief examples from my material, but important indications that a fresh look and new angles at ways "culture" and "virtual" drive people's behavior are needed. The still widely cited theories on cultural clustering from the 1970s and the virtual world being a new and disruptive phenomenon in teamwork from the 1990s have come of age and the world has changed. One way to progress is to study what people actually do in teams, and how and why they do what they do in their contexts, rather than to deduct gaps from existing studies that inevitably reflect prevailing mainstream assumptions that may have limited potential for new, significant discoveries. New insights and ongoing change may go undetected due to shifts, such as the gradual entry of new generations into the workforce who have lived in a "global" world all their lives (Gilson et al. 2014; Myers & Sadaghiani 2010).

This study also reached out to the *sensemaking theory framework* to help access the rich process material I had. I first looked at this stream of literature at its original roots in crisis literature, and studied its later expansion to literature on turbulent organizational events in general, to then include my work on global teams or *teaming* in this large family of studies. Work in global teams frequently presents ambiguous and surprising situations with little formal guidance or clear sensemaking material on which team members can base their decisions. Teams capable of harnessing members' emotional and cognitive sensemaking powers as well as their pre-understandings and previous experiences to build and maintain shared views are in a better position to do well, than teams in which views on key matters essential to its success are conflicting or unclear. How (and if) team members make sense of their environment and their subsequent decisions to act or not to act on what may seem insignificant or trivial events at first glance do matter, just as how members are able to externalize negative emotions and take action on hidden thoughts when these matter to the team's success. However, it is demanding to study what is hidden (e.g., individual and social sensemaking), and how and why people interact the way they do as events that often look quite mundane at first unfold. Perhaps much more so than when analyzing how and why airplanes crash or how and why firefighting crews make fatal mistakes, contexts in which the sensemaking framework was originally developed and applied. Narrative and discourse analysis and traditional ethnographic studies may offer some alternatives for further research in this field, especially considering often rich trails of electronic communication that may be used as research material.

Despite supposedly constraining elements embedded in the global team context such as a lack of presence, reliance on technology, and multiple demands placed on team members, team members are actors and agents in co-creating their environment and the team as such, as well as the processes necessary for the accomplishment of the work they are assigned to do.

Becoming a team, just like organizing in general, is often an iterative, ongoing, messy process of trial and error where "best effort" and "good-enough" are a matter of fact, and "confused" and shifting goals a regular state, rather than an expression of "well planned," "best possible," and "rational," and an immutable course of life by people fully in control of their fates and the life of the team. Without some level of shared meanings and collective sensemaking, and members "hopping off the machine" and relaxing mechanistic thinking, there will be fewer chances for *teaming* to occur in the true meaning of the word.

13.5.2 Limitations and inspiration for further research

There are limitations in this study I want to bring up here. The *most serious one*, in my view, is the fact that this study and the insights it brings are not replicable "as is" to any other context, the root cause of which is nested in the very explorative approach I have chosen. I have given this shortcoming a lot of thought, and through my reflective approach and with many examples in this book, I justify the choices I have made, while keeping in mind the positivist frame of reference most people hold about research and international business theory and practice in general, perhaps without realizing it most of the time. *The other obvious one* is that my empirical setting is anchored in an experimental student context. Along the way, I have kept this matter in my mind and mirrored my thoughts as they emerged against my experience in firms and other organizations I am presently involved in (such as academic and vocational teams), and also discussed the study and its findings with many of my practicing colleagues in business firms regularly in the past years. The truth is that I would have never been able to conduct a study of this scope and depth in a company setting. This study is not about variables leading to performance but about human beings bringing teams to existence, two phenomena with entirely different dynamics. Thus, I propose to transfer the responsibility to determine to what extent and in which ways this study is relevant and inspirational to other organizational contexts to the reader. *Also,* I only look at very homogeneous project-based teams, somewhat neglecting more stable types of permanent teams nested in organizational structures. These matters can be addressed with additional research in different contexts and team types. I would also argue that although employees and managers "stuck" with teammates in organizations over the long run may have different motivations that drive their behavior, many of the principles I discuss here also apply to teams with longer lifespans.

In this study, I have used a very broad paintbrush to illuminate some aspects of what apparently similar teams may look like from within, and to gain some understanding of their teaming patterns. I have also used an innovative

methodology and relied on *any* source of knowledge I could access to bring this study forward, including what I have called my own pre-understandings. I would encourage other researchers to throw themselves at less conventional study settings and research designs for us to better understand key organizational phenomena, such as international teamwork. Any field of science that does not progress and change with times, weakens and risks becoming a pseudo-science detached from the very phenomena it tries to inform. There have been recent voices that the academic field of international business may be at some sort of crossroads at this time.

13.5.3 Practical insights

If I knew what I know today and life could take me back to the Ship Without a Captain (Chapter 2), would I do something differently? Would I be wiser? Spontaneously, a few things come to mind. I would let go of most impulses and ambitions to fully control "everything" with Excel spreadsheets and tight processes, but rather try to cope with the flow of things as they present themselves, and accept uncertainty and deviations from goals as part of the way things are rather than consider them anomalies. I would readily try to embrace complexity and act on small cues on the go, and task myself with changing standpoints and giving events many possible meanings. I would also play the "metaphor game" with my teams to understand how and why members' sensemaking paths differ, to think of what type of metaphor best represents the team, and then to think of possible actions to change the not-so-good patterns of teaming or to make sure the existing good processes are kept alive and enhanced. I would also recommend other practitioners do the same. And this would be only a start – without forgetting that reality in the heat of action would be somewhat different.

Building honest, shared sensemaking in the *Jester, Jokers, and Buffoons* team (Chapter 2) would have taken some courage. I would have had to sit down with Stian and the representatives of the other two functions/locations and candidly go through the situation after the first team meeting; we had next to no chance of succeeding with the project. Openly stating that the business unit's pet project had no chance of survival to the somewhat naive upper management seems to have been the right course to take. Or maybe, after all, under the looming collapse, *pretending* everything was under control was a bizarrely legitimate alternative route in order to buy some time to make the product ready for the market. But in hindsight, we just lacked courage and agency even to have a one-on-one discussion. In the case of the *King's Court* team (Chapter 2), where for me nepotism and favoritism won over diligent task execution and company

interests, I could have had a neutral discussion with the "king," although we were all busy with our tasks and rarely in the office at the same time. I dug my heels in instead, and isolated myself under what for me were the effects of constant negative gender-based stereotyping. Nor was I particularly surprised when no one asked me why I left the company in the end. To some extent, it must have made sense to the "king" (and the company) to staff his team with his friends, given the tough task and external pressures. I was just an insignificant and replaceable "casualty of war." In any case, the trouble these teams faced had not that much to do with the virtual environment or culture, but rather with matters concerning the substance of the work or collaboration practices that just happened in a context where working over distances using digital means of communication was business as usual.

In general, firms underestimate the challenges of modern teamwork, and thinking about team effectiveness is typically not a high management priority. Rosen et al. (2006) found a significant gap between the training provided for global teams and the fast increase in the reliance on these teams. This is surprising given the many troubles teamwork represents and the high failure rates of teams (see Chapters 1 and 3) that admittedly often get camouflaged as non-failures in practice. It takes more than clear goals, processes, roles, familiarity with the latest leadership trends, and certified project managers to "make" successful teams. Structural aspects such as resource configuration of dispersed members is often still considered more important for goal attainment, than actively questioning what enables or limits commitment, actual capacity and team expectations. Employees and team members should be better prepared to deal with the unknown, uncertainties, and how to deal with anxiety (Brandl & Neyer 2009) and complexity. Scholars offering insights on *how* to do this would be doing valuable work. Individuals with tacit skills to navigate complex environments accompanied with sensemaking capabilities and the ability to influence others seem capable of making the difference between a more and less successful team. For instance, Peter in the *Scouts* was such an individual and there were some others in the total sample of 48 teams.

The realization that teams are not static but require continuous work just as the shared tasks do, and that the responsibility to make them work lies in large part with the individual team members, has important practical implications. Teaming as a concept needs to be brought where the work is done, and when it comes to building successful teams, the emphasis on managerial work and leadership needs to be relaxed. Teaming skills are not automatic; they need to be learned and continuously fine-tuned. What makes one team work may lead to failure in another team with different members in a different context. Often, small details and events that escape an unreflective team member are what matter the most. More research into people's interactions in teams is needed to

help Nea, Ly, and Ioanna make sense of what is wrong with their modes of influence, Sam to understand why and how being laid-back has much wider ripple effects than he may think, and Yoshi to see why it is important to speak up when negative thoughts and emotions start accumulating.

14   EPILOGUE

Going back to Umberto Eco (cf. Chapter 3), a rare author mastering both the world of literary and scientific expression, there are no simple answers to difficult questions. The world we live in is not about to become any simpler. The challenges organizations face in general and teamwork in particular are not going to get any less complex than they are today. As practitioners and students of international business environments, embracing this rather than hanging on to ways of working from the past without expanding our minds and understanding would seem like a reasonable route to take. I have tried to make small steps in this direction by exploring alternative ways to study the ways global teams work. This has involved adopting the process worldview, creating an alternative methodological approach, and incorporating ingredients from the fields of philosophy and organizational science into what traditionally is a rather positivist research tradition on global teams. I have also added some spice from arts and literature along the way.

Well-performing global teams are not all alike, and teams when studied from within are dynamic phenomena rather than static sums of their parts. They engage in continuous processes of teaming-in and teaming-out. I am not disputing what successful global teams are "made of" – trust, communication, collaboration, conflict management, good leadership, good staffing decisions and project plans, and so on. I am rather proposing innovative ways of looking at these teams. People, team members, can be considered active agents, capable human beings on whose sensemaking paths and daily decisions to act or not to act depends on what these teams become and how they evolve over time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Sample team assignment

ASSIGNMENT #6
Client: A Syndicate of Investors

A group of private equity investment management firms ("The Syndicate") joined forces in order to capture opportunities in the field of alternative energy. The Syndicate argues that different key technologies in **energy production**, **transmission,** and **storage** have been advancing rapidly, and that it is time to create economies of scale and scope to generate and capitalize on European-wide opportunities. The syndicate has considered a combined fund of €2 billion and has commissioned a number of consulting firms to develop alternative projects on how to become a major mover in selected areas of alternative energy.

We as Management decided that we are putting committed efforts into this project because selected projects will be awarded the management contract of these projects. We are hoping to make several successful pitches for projects in the range of €50–200 million investments.

Your assignment, therefore, is as follows:

(1) Choose one area in the sphere of alternative energy technology that appears to be at a stage of technical and commercial viability on a large scale. There are no limitations in terms of what technologies (solar, biofuels, hydro, wind, conversions, etc.), approaches (energy production, saving, storage, network technologies), or combinations you chose, but they need to be developed in a systemic and integrated way, and they need to take the form of a clear business concept (who is the customer, the revenue streams, etc.) and a business plan (e.g., budgets, cash flows, ROI) within a "risk investors or venture capitalists'" frame of time. Pay attention to clarity and that the main estimates and numbers connect well with the "story" (business concept).

(2) About the key strategic decisions: Because we like to have a clear signature in our consulting projects, we would like you to emphasize the following conceptual ideas to build the core strategic elements of your project proposal:

  a. Ownership-specific advantages (what capabilities and resources should be built at the core of this project; which firms out there have relevant knowledge; and should we win as partners in a project, suggestions to create such ownership specific advantages).

  b. Location-specific advantages (What locations do you consider? What advantages do they contribute to the project? Select locations after considerable analysis of the institutional, economic, strategic, and other criteria, such as using Porter's Diamond, New Institutional Theory, etc.).

  c. Internalization advantages (how to structure the relationships between partnering organizations, utilizing transaction cost economics).

  d. Strategic positioning to utilize economies of integration and standardization on one side, and effects generated by being decentralized and close to the customers.

(3) This is a sales pitch. Remember you have only seven minutes to show that your team is the one that should win a major contract with the Syndicate.

Make us proud!

Appendix 2 Case video evaluation criteria

	EVALUATION CRITERIA	LESS 0	Not Good! 1	Satisfactory 2	Good 3	Very Good 4	Excellent 5
1.	Assignment (video) contains evidence of through contextual or situational understanding of the case						x
2.	Assignment has been well structured utilising research questions						x
3.	Analysis is utilising a clear theoretical framework or theoretical base, providing a clear picture on the challenge						x
4.	Powerful arguments are developed based on analysis, drawing on concepts or frameworks and by synthesising available and new information into feasible solution trajectories					x	
5.	The presentation is creative, professional, and convincing, overall providing good value to the client						x
	Overall summary:						x

Feedback:

Appendix 3   Teaming exercise

GROUP/TEAM ASSIGNMENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS
SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS:

- Due date: **Sunday, 20th September 2015 by midnight**
- Submit via email to: katja.m.einola@utu.fi **AND** danijela.majdenic@utu.fi
- Submit group/team assignment **AND** individual assignments as **ONE DOCUMENT**
- **MS Word document**
- Name the document by following the example: KVS1-Team**358**-**The Moomins** Intro
- Replace the **RED words/numbers** with YOUR team number and team name

(1) Find a **name** for your team.

(2) **Develop a statement** that describes what your team intends to stand for, what it aspires to, how it wants to conduct its projects, what values it honors, what motto it follows, which common frames of reference it may use. **An example** (taken from a previous student assignment)**:**

The legend tells us that there is something more powerful, more beautiful and most of all more reliable than the unicorn. They are born in the depths of the Baltic sea, were conquering the most hazardous underwater animals and are responsible for the waves near the rough coastline. But this September they rised to the surface, to change the way people live, breathe, but mainly to change the way firms handle their business.

1. Creative!
2. Reliable!
3. Punctual!
4. Dynamic!
5. International!
6. Team players!
7. Cooperative!
8. Honest!
9. Innovative!
10. Quality-oriented!
11. Versatile!
12. Reactive!

(3) **Formulate an agreement/contract** between all team members on what you want to achieve together and how.

(4) **Describe the resources, capabilities, and connections** each member brings to the team.

(5) **Define the rules** by which your team works. How to gather information/knowledge; how to share/communicate it; how to make decisions.

(6) **Define the roles for each member.** How do you structure your team? How do you order processes? Which routines do you put in place?

NOTE: Every team member needs to be involved in this!

Individual Assignment

As an appendix in your team assignment, include the following individual reflections:

Your picture:

Name:

Surname:

Team number:

Team name:

(1) Who are you as a person/professional?

(2) What is important for you in life & work?

(3) What are your future goals on a personal level? What or who do you want to become in 10 years?

Appendix 4   Guidelines for individual reflective essays

Task: Write a reflective essay answering the following questions. Please try to give examples.

- Describe in detail what actions or steps you took as a team to solve the case?
- Describe how your team functions (who is doing what)?
- How did you as a team come to an understanding of what the case is about?
- How did you communicate with each other to get the work done? What communication platforms did you use?
- How did you make decisions in your team?
- How do you feel about your teamwork right now? Why?
- In your opinion, what are the strengths of your team? What would you like to change?
- What are the biggest differences in how your team worked on Case 1 compared with the first assignment (teaming exercise)?

Appendix 5   Team interview guideline

1. What does it feel like now that you are done with the cases?
2. Can you describe what your team is about, what it stands for?
3. How did team roles and responsibilities evolve over time (who was doing what)? Why do you think this was so?
4. What factors helped your team accomplish its tasks? What difficulties did you experience? What did you do about them?
5. Can you please discuss your team's weaknesses and strengths?
6. If you had to coach a team like yours next time around, what would you tell them? As a team? As individuals?

Appendix 6   Team task evaluations

Task grades*/ Team name	The Chain Gang	The Dysfunctional Family	The Sandbox	The Scouts	The Master Cooks
Case 1	4	4	5	5	4
Case 2	3	4	4	5	5
Case 3	5	5	4	5	5
Case 4	5	5	4	5	5
Case 5	4	3	-	5	-
Case 6	4	2	-	5	-

* The scale is between "0" and "5."

Note: The *Chain Gang,* the *Dysfunctional Family, and* the *Scouts* cases are from 2014 when each team delivered six cases. The *Sandbox* and the *Master Cooks* are from 2015 when the teams were only asked to deliver four.

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