Cultural Diversity and Knowledge Sharing in Multicultural Virtual Teams

Master's Thesis

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Contents

Abstract

By examining the emerging topic of cultural diversity and its relationship with knowledge sharing in more detail, this master's thesis explores the four factors that influence this relationship, as outlined by Adi & Musbah (2017), 'Team Trust,' 'Team Innovation,' 'Team Learning,' and 'Team Language. By considering the thoughts and perceptions of participants in multicultural virtual teams, this thesis seeks to explore and examine the gaps in the existing literature. The research question has been answered using qualitative research, where 14 semi-structured interviews with 13 participants from two different virtual multicultural teams have been conducted. As a result, the findings showed that language has been the most challenging for team members to overcome, creating miscommunications and affecting the other factors. Moreover, this research presents other elements identified as more impactful than cultural differences in causing obstacles to knowledge sharing in virtual multicultural teams. Finally, this master's thesis provides an in-depth understanding of how surface and deep level cultural differences differ, which is essential concerning the outcome of this study.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Knowledge Sharing, Multicultural Teams, Virtual Teams, Cultural Differences, Team Trust, Team Innovation, Team Learning, Team Language

1. Introduction

1.1 Problem Description

Working in virtual teams has increased tremendously over 2020 due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. In late 2019, many pneumonia cases were observed in Wuhan, China. Later, the causes of this disease were identified as a result of the virus SARS-COV-2, giving rise to an epidemic in China, which ultimately evolved into the global pandemic on March 12, 2020, as defined by the 'World Health Organisation' (Ciotti, Ciccozzi, Terrinoni, Jiang, Wang & Bernardini, 2020). The pandemic is still ongoing at present as this research is being conducted. The commonly known COVID-19 pandemic has altered how many industries perform worldwide, leading to international disruptions to the workforce and synergy of many industries. As a result, many organisations have been forced to adjust their infrastructure by implementing the 'Virtual Work' model. That being said, virtual global teams are not an invention of the past few years. Kerber & Buono (2004) stated in their article that globalisation has increased pressure in many industries. This existing pressure of higher competition has prompted organisations to use their most competent employees around their various departments internationally by allowing them to work together (Kerber & Buono, 2004). Teams consisting of multinational employees across countries and working on global projects have become a more viable option for many organisations (Neeley, 2015). Consequently, technological advancement has allowed for more diversity in the workforce of many firms, which has led to virtual teams of multiple nationalities. The ever-growing use of global virtual teams creates the interest in understanding how people from different cultural backgrounds, with different nationalities, living in various locations with diverse native languages, succeed in working together in virtual teams.

Cultural diversity has proven to have two outcomes regarding knowledge sharing in teams. Literature suggests that in many cases, cultural diversity benefits and disrupts the knowledge-sharing process in organisations. While connecting cultural diversity has increased in popularity recently, there still exists a gap when it comes to actual knowledge-sharing processes in culturally diverse organisations (Lauring, 2009). Moreover, there exists little knowledge regarding cross-cultural experiences in working in virtual teams (Han Soo Jeoung & Beyerlein, 2015). In a recent

article by Henderson, Stackman & Lindekilde (2018), it is mentioned that the cultural aspect regarding global work has been under-researched in management literature.

Furthermore, Gilson et al. (2015) analysed the majority of literature existing at the time on virtual teams. They observed many findings around the research topic emerging from in-depth analyses of transcripts. This shows promise in the possible generation of further knowledge by addressing the role of cultural diversity in virtual teams from a more in-depth research approach. One qualitative research focused on the cross-cultural perception of knowledge sharing (Niedergassel, Kanzler, Alvidrez, & Leker, 2011). This study by Niedergassel et al. (2011) mainly focused on the differences in perceptions regarding knowledge sharing between German and Chinese scientists. Furthermore, in the article of Jyoti et al. (2019), the results show that cultural intelligent managers allow more knowledge sharing between employees. That being said, this research also focuses on the cross-cultural aspect, which the authors include in the limitations of the research (Jyoti et al., 2019), as it examines the relation of specific cultures. Thus, the authors state that, given the analysis of other cultures, different findings might arise concerning knowledge sharing between employees in a cross-cultural setting (Jyoti et al., 2019). This is also evident in the article of Al-Qadhi et al. (2015), where the authors state that especially in culturally diverse workspaces, cultural differences of employees along with other factors like languages, beliefs, and experiences could all affect knowledge sharing in multinational organisations.

Considering the above, there is a gap in the literature regarding the perceptions of members of global virtual teams on cultural diversity and how it affects knowledge sharing. Moreover, Cummings & Dennis (2018) argue that some of the challenges that virtual teams face are unique to them. Alaiad et al. (2019) mention that multicultural challenges that virtual teams have to engage with have not yet been studied from a deeper perspective. To gain a deeper insight into knowledge sharing and cultural diversity, a focus on the beliefs, experiences and thoughts of the people participating in multicultural teams has to be set (Dube & Patrick 2012).

1.2 Research Objective:

This research will contribute to the emerging literature regarding cultural diversity by developing new knowledge regarding cultural diversity in a virtual team context, by exploring how members of virtual teams perceive the role of cultural diversity regarding knowledge sharing and the factors that influence this relationship.

Research Question:

'*How do members of multicultural virtual teams perceive cultural diversity and its relation to knowledge sharing?*'

1.3 Relevance of the Topic

Addressing the issues stated above would demand the implementation of a qualitative research methodology, as it will allow a more in-depth analysis around cultural diversity and its impact on knowledge sharing from the perspective of the members of global virtual teams. In the article of Kauppila et al. (2011), the authors address an issue regarding existing literature around virtual teams: the lack of attention regarding barriers that virtual teams have to face with knowledge sharing. Similarly, in a more recent article by Olaniran (2017), the author states that researchers have neglected to explore factors that cause interferences in organisational teams regarding knowledge sharing, especially when tacit knowledge is the focus. This paper is scientifically relevant as it adds to the emerging literature around virtual teams and knowledge sharing by exploring how members of such teams experience the barriers and problems derived from cultural diversity factors in the workplace.

In addition, this report is socially relevant as it explores a topic influencing a growing amount of the global workforce. As of the present virtual teams have become an essential platform for employees throughout the globe. As mentioned above, with the rise of the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the existing workforce in corporations have been forced to settle with working virtually. Further, Jimenez et al. (2017) mention that many multinational virtual teams do not accomplish their strategic goals due to complex problems that follow virtual working. Besides, in the article of Pangil & Moi Chan (2014), it is stated that leaders, if given the opportunity to select for themselves, would avoid managing employees remotely, as the level of difficulty, in their opinion, was higher than managing employees in a physical environment. Aside from that, the authors stress the importance of the fact that effective teams consist of members that have the capability to share knowledge with each other (Pangil & Moi Chan, 2014). Thus, this paper is socially relevant as it attempts to generate deeper knowledge on these complex issues that virtual teams face regarding knowledge sharing.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

Throughout this section, a summary of the chapters of this thesis will be provided. After the introduction, the second chapter examines the literature review, which discusses the theoretical background of cultural diversity and the sharing of knowledge in multicultural virtual teams, as well as other factors that influence this relationship. In the third chapter, the methodology, research design, strategy, and data collection and analysis are elaborated upon. Chapter Four will compare, summarise, and present the data findings to familiarise and understand the interviews conducted for this thesis. In the fifth chapter, the results of the study will be discussed, interpreted, and compared to the literature on cultural diversity in relation to knowledge sharing, which is discussed in chapter two, as well as other research that has demonstrated similarities to the results of this study. This thesis concludes with an explanation of the findings and the answer to the research question.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global Virtual Teams

Jarvenpaa & Leidner (1998) define global virtual teams (GVTs) as "temporary, culturally diverse, geographically dispersed, electronically communicating work groups." "The multicultural context in which GVTs operate introduces problematic challenges for intercultural communication" (Glikson & Erez, 2020, p. 1). While GVTs have many benefits, such as cost reduction and distance management, recent literature shows that they face many difficulties, especially in collaboration. Zakaria (2017) states that virtual team diversity creates communication and coordination barriers. These barriers are depicted in the article as separation of physical space, cultural differences, and language barriers and can disrupt the ability of the team to perform effectively (Zacharia, 2017). GVTs face daily hindrances in the workspace connected to managing multiple identities (Eisenberg & Mattarelli, 2017). As this research faced limitations with finding participants of global virtual teams, the participants selected were members of multicultural virtual teams that were based in Europe.

2.2 Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity is prevalent in global virtual teams. In the existing literature, there has been evidence that teams can either benefit from cultural diversity or be a detriment. This outcome has been characterised as a 'double-edged sword' (Nederveen Pieterse et al., 2013). The cultural differences derived from cultural diversity in teams commonly occur subconsciously (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). Stahl & Maznevski (2021) state that the influences of cultural differences might not be identified as a result and claim that cultural differences might affect teams more significantly compared to other diversity differences.

Moreover, Stahl & Maznevski (2021) look at cultural characteristics in two ways: the 'Surface level characteristics' and 'Deep-level characteristics.' The first are defined by Staples & Zhao (2006) as characteristics such as nationality, language, birthplace etc., while the latter are defined as characteristics such as values and cognition.

Furthermore, Yagi & Kleinberg (2011) state that multicultural people benefit from multinational team processes. Backmann et al. (2020) have provided similar outcomes in their research,

as they have proved multicultural individuals have taken part in building team connections when considering cultural intelligence as a mediator. According to Ott & Michailova (2018), 'Cultural intelligence (CQ) is an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse situations and settings.'

2.3 Knowledge Sharing

According to Okah-Edemoh et al. (2011), knowledge sharing is the procedure of passing knowledge to other organisational members in a manner fitting for decision-making. Moreover, in more recent research by Shamsie & Mannor (2013), knowledge sharing is regarded as a reciprocal interchange of ideas and information that could shape the course of action on how teams learn in firms. Ipe (2003) states that an organisation's people are highly involved in determining if knowledge is to be utilised effectively, as they are the ones that develop it, share it, and make use of it. Knowledge sharing is considered an essential organisational competence necessary to preserve a sustainable competitive advantage (Witherspoon et al., 2013). In the more recent article of Asrar-ul-Haq et al. (2016), the authors suggest that knowledge sharing, similar to Witherspoon et al. (2013), demands attention concerning the ability of the organisation to survive in a globally competitive environment. Although managers seem to have an understanding concerning the essentiality of knowledge sharing to the success of an organisation, the literature around knowledge management shows that organisations face barriers, such as communication issues and information exchange and reception. These barriers hinder their ability to successfully implement strategies for effective knowledge sharing (Santos et al., 2012). Furthermore, according to Wang & Noe (2014), multinational or multicultural corporations do not possess universal practices that they can employ to counter the knowledge sharing problems they face. Multicultural project teams face barriers, such as language, or differences in conceptual understanding, that are enhanced by cultural diversity on several different factors (Adi & Musbah, 2017).

Adi & Musbah (2017) suggest four factors that influence the success of knowledge sharing in multicultural organisations and are affected by cultural differences. Trust, Innovation, Learning and Languages. The article suggests that these four factors are observable in the existing literature and stymie knowledge sharing when cultural differences are present (Adi & Musbah, 2017). Thus, in the literature review, the four factors of Adi & Mushbah, as mentioned above, will be further investigated.

2.3.1 Trust

There exists quite extensive literature around 'Trust.' A vast number of definitions can be found in the existing research for trust (Costa, Fulmer, Anderson, 2017). Moreover, many of these definitions revolve around team trust, which is relevant to this research, as the subject is global virtual teams. Breuer et al. (2016, p. 1152) define trust as 'the aggregated trust in the team shared among the team members.' While Fulmer & Gelfand (2012, p. 1174) define trust as 'a shared psychological state among team members compromising willingness to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations based on positive expectations of a specific other or others.' The latter definition is developed from a pre-existing definition in an earlier article by Mayer et al. (1995). The examples above show a larger body of literature around 'trust' and 'team trust', but without a 'one fits all' definition. After examining the literature, the definition that seems to fit more with the purpose of this research derives from the very recent article of Breuer et al. (2020). Breuer et al. (2020, p. 4), combine some of the previous literature around team trust and define it as 'the shared willingness of the team members to be vulnerable to the actions of the other team members based on the shared expectation that the other team members will perform particular actions that are important to the team, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the other team members.' In existing research for more than 40 years, Costa et al. (2017) claim that trust in teams is observed as essential for work relationships to operate appropriately. Furthermore, de Jong et al. (2020) state that current research indicates that trust helps teams avail different ways. These benefits, as they call them, are both enhanced attitudinal and behavioural (de Jong et al., 2020).

Much of the existing literature discussed above focuses on trust as a general notion in teams. The literature is not specific to virtual team trust. Moreover, when it comes to virtual teams, building fundamentals of trust proves to be a difficult task (Alaiad et al., 2019), with O'Leary et al. (2014) stating that multicultural virtual teams suffer from building trust; as a result of 'perceived distance.' Furthermore, Jarvenpaa et al. (2004) stated that trust minimises the ambiguity that virtual team participants experience when these individuals do not have pre-existing social contact with each other. Following this, trust can then influence knowledge sharing. Pinjani & Palvia (2013) found that mutual trust has a positive relationship with knowledge sharing in their research regarding virtual teams. Killingsworth et al. (2016) support this statement in their research claiming that most of the existing literature leans toward the same assumption, which is that there exists

a positive relationship between trust and knowledge sharing. Besides, Pinjani & Palvia (2013) established that 'deeper diversity' had adverse outcomes on mutual trust and knowledge sharing. With 'deep diversity' in this case, including the degree to which members of a team have different individual traits from their co-workers in the same team.

Thus, this research will further examine in-depth the perceptions of members of virtual teams regarding the relationship of trust and knowledge to provide a further understanding of the term trust in multicultural virtual teams.

2.3.2 Innovation

Innovation is recognised as an essentiality when it comes to gaining a competitive advantage for firms (Madrid-Guijarro, 2009). When it comes to organisational innovation, there is not a clear understanding of a specific consensus around the concept (Santos-Vijande and Alvarez-Gonzalez, 2007). The idea of innovation in business studies is connected to the notion of doing something original and different (Garcia and Calantone 2002). Moreover, the success of innovation is significantly associated with the ability among employees to exchange knowledge (Castaneda & Cuellar, 2020). Rivera-Vazquez Juan et al. (2009, p. 266) state in their article that both "knowledge production and sharing has been recognised as the key to innovation." Kamasak & Bulutlar (2010) mention two different strategies regarding innovation which is found in the literature. 'Exploration' is the first strategy and is defined by the authors as 'the search for new opportunities' (Kamasak & Bulutlar, 2010, p. 308), while the second strategy 'Exploitation' is the first strategy and it is defined by the authors as "making use of existing opportunities," (Kamasak & Bulutlar, 2010, p. 308). Furthermore, the authors state that successful knowledge sharing is critical for both strategies' effectiveness (Kamasak & Bulutlar, 2010).

Knowledge sharing and innovation are connected, as it is essential for project members to perform and come up with creative ideas that will allow them to adjust to complex and uncertain situations that might occur during a project (Davidson & Voss, 2002). Unsuccessful knowledge sharing hinders the innovation process of teams (Davidson & Voss, 2002). In a recent article by Ganguly et al. (2019), the authors state that knowledge sharing, and knowledge quality positively enhance innovative capabilities in organisations. As for team specific knowledge, according to Hu & Randel (2014), knowledge sharing, and team innovation have a positive relation with one another. While multicultural teams are observed as a source of creative and innovative outcomes,

according to Bouncken et al. (2015) there is a lack of in-depth studies concerned with challenges that might emerge in these teams. Especially with international corporations that seek to include insight from different employees that have different cultural backgrounds from each other (Bouncken et al., 2015).

The literature shows that knowledge around knowledge sharing, and team innovation is still in an emerging phase. Thus, this research will seek to get a deeper insight on the experiences that virtual multicultural team members might face regarding challenges with team innovation.

2.3.3 Learning

"Team learning is a dynamic process in which team members take actions, give/receive feedback, and adjust, improve, or change their behaviours" (Yang & Chen, 2005, p. 728). It is necessary for organisations to depend on work teams that can learn, to succeed (Edmondson et al., 2007). Team learning is essential, as it allows members to cooperate with each other effectively, while enabling organisations' assessment of their agile environments (Decuyper et al., 2010). In many studies team learning is positioned among "individual learning, communities of practice, and organisational learning literature" (Knapp, 2010, p. 287). Wilson et al. (2007) state that team learning is influenced by the level of detail and the scale of involvement by team members. Team learning has been viewed in the literature from various perspectives. Knapp (2010) in his review of team learning refers to 4 different models, that are outcomes of varying consensus around team learning. The author also aligns these four models to their respective concepts of learning from which they have derived from (Knapp, 2010). Thus, there exists a large body of literature around this topic of team learning. As a result, this research collected data around team learning by focusing on feedback inside the multicultural virtual teams. Team members' perception of feedback determine how vital, precise, and valuable feedback is, as well as, how well the members understand it and receive it (Gabelica et al. 2012).

In addition, Chao & Pardy (2017) report that although cultural diversity can enhance team productivity and creativity, it can also result in problems such as conflict and inefficiency. Further, the authors argue that organizations should be cautious in integrating intercultural activities regarding team learning, since cultural differences may create other barriers to the success of the team (Chao & Pardy, 2017).

As a result, there is a substantial body of literature related to team learning. There is, however, a lack of literature on team learning and its relationship to knowledge sharing when it comes to virtual multicultural teams.

2.3.4 Languages

As teams have become multinational, another aspect of knowledge sharing has risen to consideration. The understanding of language has become essential as multilingual working environments have become more frequent (Ahmad & Widén, 2018). According to Ahmad & Widén (2018), people that share cultural characteristics in language might, in some cases, bring them closer. This could cause feelings of exclusion on behalf of other individuals that do not speak the same language (Ahmad & Widén, 2018). The English language has been established worldwide as the 'Lingua Franca' by corporations (Lønsmann, 2011). For this reason, this study will focus on the perspective of language called 'sociolinguistics.'

Ahmad & Widén (2018) mention two practices under the above-mentioned perspective: 'Code-Switching' and 'Convergence.' The impact of these two on knowledge sharing is significant, according to the authors (Ahmad & Widén, 2018). Code-switching is defined as "a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse" (Carter & Nunan, 2001, p. 275). Convergence is defined as "the speaker's attempt to attune positively along major sociolinguistic dimensions to the characteristics which they believe belong to the speaker receiving their message" (Gallois & Callan, 1988, p. 271).

Moreover, Tenzer et al. (2014) refer to issues regarding language and successful knowledge sharing as language barriers. The authors define language barriers as "obstacles to effective communication, which arise if interlocutors speak different mother tongues and lack a shared language in which they all have native proficiency" (Tenzer et al., 2014, p. 509). Ahmad & Widén (2018) seem to have a similar approach regarding issues with language, as they state that without the presence of rules in multilingual organisations around the usage of language, some parties might take advantage of the situation, which could result in the development of a hostile environment. In addition, Santos et al. (2012) mention that teams that are focused on transnational projects face language barriers as a result, along with cultural diversity issues.

Tenzer et al. (2014) recognise an absence in the literature regarding understanding language barriers and how organisations overcome them, despite it being an issue that international

corporations face daily. Thus, this research will attempt to provide a better understanding of challenges derived from language by having an in-depth discussion with team members of multicultural virtual teams that are exposed to this problem in their workspace.

2.4 Conceptual Model
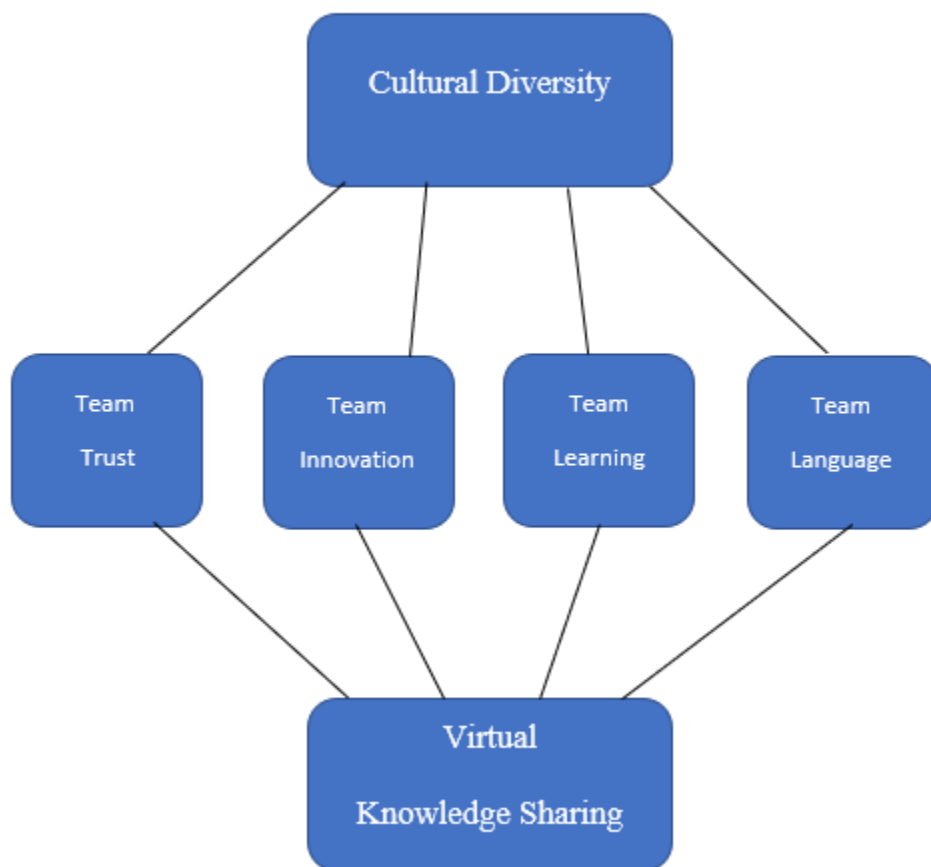
Figure 1: Conceptual Model

The above conceptual model will be discussed in this literature review section. This conceptual model was derived from the literature review conducted based on answering the research question of this report. As discussed, existing theory suggests that cultural diversity seems to cause difficulties regarding knowledge sharing between virtual team members. The literature review noted that this occurs through the four factors: 'Team Trust,' 'Team Innovation,' 'Team

Learning,' and 'Team Language.' First, it appears as if there exists an emerging body of literature on team trust and its relation to cultural diversity and knowledge sharing, with the majority stating that team trust has a positive relationship with knowledge sharing, but cultural diversity causes issues with this relationship. It will be intriguing to observe if similar results also appear in the virtual team context. Second, there was no clear body of literature examining their relationships to knowledge sharing in a multicultural virtual setting for team innovation and team learning. Thus, exploring these aspects, no solid assumptions could be made. Finally, expectations for team language probably would be that, in some cases, discrimination exists against people who are not proficient in the language that the majority uses. It creates a very interesting topic that will be looked upon and discussed after the analysis of the data.

3. Methodology

This section will provide an argumentation regarding the selected research methods that have been chosen to answer the research question of this study. Examining the methods will allow for clarification and rationality behind their choices in this research.

3.1 Research Strategy

The nature of this research is qualitative, following abductive reasoning. To understand the nature of this research, it is first essential to analyse its purpose of it. The purpose of this research is to gain insight into culture regarding virtual teams' perception of cultural diversity and knowledge sharing. Moreover, this report is concerned with exploring the relationship between cultural diversity and knowledge sharing, along with gaining an extensive understanding from the perspective and the experiences of virtual teams involved with knowledge sharing processes. Thus, the 'Phenomenological Approach' seems more fitting for answering the research question and fulfilling the purpose and objective. According to Gallagher (2012), phenomenology focuses on the science of individuals' experiences and how things are acquainted through these experiences. To follow a 'Phenomenological Approach,' it is necessary for the nature of this study to be qualitative as "Qualitative research is characterised by an interpretative paradigm, which emphasises subjective experiences and the meanings they have for an individual" (Starman, 2013, p. 30).

Given the above information, both the 'Phenomenological approach' and the 'qualitative nature' seem to suit each other in what they represent. As there exists knowledge around cultural diversity and its relation to knowledge, this research's purpose is not to confirm this relationship. The goal of this study is to focus on the experiences and thoughts of the members of virtual teams regarding the challenges that they face in their multicultural teams. The interview questions have followed a structure based on the literature review in the above chapter of this report while attempting to extract deeper information from the participants of this study. This deeper insight information has been compared and analysed to achieve a better understanding of the cultural challenges that virtual teams face.

3.2 Research Design

The research design of this report has been based on the 'Comparative Case Study' method. According to Crowe & Cresswell (2011, p. 1), "The case study approach allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings." This approach fits well with the purpose of this paper, which is to gain insight into complex issues, in this case, knowledge sharing in virtual multicultural teams. Moreover, this research has followed the comparative case study method. According to Goodrick (2014, p. 1), "comparative case studies cover two or more cases in a way that produces more generalizable knowledge about causal questions." The cases that have been compared are the two different virtual teams and their experiences regarding knowledge sharing.

Moreover, this report has followed abductive reasoning. According to Żelechowska et al. (2020) 'Abduction' is a form of intricate reasoning performed to make sense of unexpected or vague phenomena or fill the gaps in our assumptions. Reichertz (2014) describes Abduction as a form of reasoning in which researchers have some knowledge or idea regarding the thematic, allowing them to set expectations for the findings while providing agility for new results and concepts to emerge. According to a recent article by Conaty (2021), as an approach to research, abductive reasoning is considered a method of inferring a new idea or developing an existing theory. Thus, the theory provided in the literature review around cultural diversity and knowledge sharing has been operationalised to derive dimensions and indicators that have guided the analysis and the construction of questions for the interviews.

3.3 Data Collection

In qualitative research, according to Symon & Cassell (2012), there are four types to collect data: interviews, documents, observations, and focus groups. As this is a master's thesis with limited time and resources, this qualitative research was initially designed to collect data using semi-structured open-ended interviews and a focus group. Semi-structured interviews allow the interviewees to express their thoughts on the topic and experiences along with follow-up questions that provide in-depth data (Adams, 2015). Each team member from the different virtual teams taking part in the study went through the interview process for this research, expressing their experiences and perspectives on how cultural diversity has affected knowledge sharing in their virtual team.

The interview time should be close to approximately thirty-sixty minutes, along with incorporating a five-minute pause. This small break would have allowed the interviewees to rest; however, though offered by the interviewer, none of the participants accepted it. More than sixty minutes could cause fatigue for the participants and furthermore create problems later in the analysis of the research, as the information gathered could become very different to another and thus cause issues in the comparison of the data (Adams, 2015). In addition, Jacob & Furgerson (2012) state that interviews longer than an hour could cause problems. They suggest, if needed to conduct more than one interview with the same individual (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). As the interviews have been designed to be in-depth, the interview structure for this study has been designed to come close to sixty minutes. Regarding the number of interviewees, as this research follows a phenomenological approach, Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that it should be close to ten interviews. This report has successfully conducted fourteen interviews with thirteen participants. The time range of the interviews has varied, as some participants have been more elaborate in their answers, with the majority being over forty-five minutes. In the case of one interview, more context on the themes discussed with the virtual members was necessary. Thus a second interview was requested and provided by the participant with his consent in a different time frame. In addition, one participant's interview was interrupted due to an emergency, and the participant expressed that he did not have the time to finish the interview on a different day as he was going through some personal problems.

The interviews have been collected and transcribed and the research was initially designed to continue with an assessment of the findings in a discussion of a focus group. According to Kamberelis & Dimitriadis (2013, p. 1), "focus groups are collective conversations or group interviews. They can be small or large, directed or nondirected." In the case of this research, every team leader, along with some of the team members, would join the focus group simultaneously to discuss the findings of the collected interviews regarding cultural diversity and knowledge sharing. This would provide further explanation and insight into the findings. That being said, an issue identified by Nyumba et al. (2018) regarding focus groups would be taken into consideration. The authors, while conducting multiple focus group discussion, recognised that some dominant individuals caused intimidation among the other participants, thus affecting the discussions (Nyumba et al., 2018). Considering the above findings, this could also be the case with including the leaders of virtual teams in the focus group discussion. To solve this issue, the team members that would voluntarily participate in the discussion will be first asked if they are comfortable with team leaders

being involved in the discussion. The possibility of moving on with the focus group has been determined by the interviewees' willingness to join the discussion. Unfortunately, not a sufficient number of participants that took part in the interviews were willing to be involved in the focus group. Many of the participants expressed that due to time limitations, it would be difficult for them as working professionals to be involved in a process that could possibly last more than two hours. In addition, as the research had limitations and parameters to follow, it would be very difficult to assess that amount of information in one research if the focus group and the interviews were examined in the same analysis of the findings. The above circumstances led to the decision of the focus group not being implemented.

3.4 Research Unit

As this is a qualitative study, according to Flick (2007), the research unit should be identified based on how well it fits the phenomenon. Flick (2007) argues that the respondents should be determined relevant to their experiences with the situation that is concerned. Thus, for this study, the participants have been selected with regard to their involvement in knowledge sharing in multicultural virtual teams. Furthermore, to fit the criteria of the comparative case study method as mentioned above, the participants were selected based on two different professions and ares of work. The first team was a 'Human Resources (HR) Operations' team based in Poland which included three nationalities that were, providing support from Poland to other markets. The second team was a 'Financial Crime Team' also based in Poland that had six nationalities, with the focus on tracking financial crime for a Scandinavian bank. At the time of the interviews being conducted, both teams were performing their vocations almost only virtually.

Moreover, as this is research conducted by one student, another factor that came into place was personal relationships since the participants belonged to the researcher's circle of individual associations. Thus, as this research faced limitations regarding resources convenience, in finding participants was also considered.

3.5 Data Analysis

As this qualitative case study research follows abductive reasoning, the best tool to examine the data seems to be the 'Template Analysis Method.' The focus of the template analysis lies in identifying essential statements while interpreting them in a logical way (Symon & Cassell,

2012). By comparing the data from the different teams in a structured manner based on the opera-tionalisation, the findings can be in-depth while at the same time holding a structure that can be adjusted if necessary. As for the fit with the phenomenological approach, e.g. (Realism/Positivism, Constructivism, Interpretivism/Phenomenology) according to Brooks et al. (2015), the template analysis is not restricted to any epistemological approach. Its nature allows the template analysis to be an agile and flexible technique that can adapt to various needs of a range of epistemological positions (Brooks et al., 2015). Brooks et al. (2015) further mention that template analysis focuses on providing precise guidance regarding the construction of the coding frame. With the use of the template analysis, this research will be able to follow the phenomenological approach, as state-ments regarding thoughts and experiences that the interviewees possess will be coded and com-pared together using the operationalisation from the literature review as guidance.

Using the articles by Brooks & King (2014); Brooks et al. (2015) as guidance, the author of this study has thoroughly reviewed all the interview transcripts after the data is collected. With the aid of the operationalisation of the literature review, a priori themes have been established from dimensions and indicators of the operationalisation. This study has followed the steps six step model to template analysis provided by the article of Brooks et al. (2015). In the first step, after collecting the interviews and transcribing them, the researcher of this report continuously famil-iarised himself with the data by reading every transcript multiple times to understand the partici-pants' perspectives as much as possible (Brooks et al., 2015). In the second step, the transcripts were coded, where statements were highlighted according to the prior themes that have followed in the operationalisation of the existing literature and new clusters that the researcher had observed (Brooks et al., 2015). In the third step, the statements that were relevant and related to each other were summarised to provide further knowledge and development of the established prior themes (Brooks et al., 2015). According to Brooks et al. (2015), the fourth step revolves around the 'Initial Coding Template', which the authors state that the timeframe of its construction might vary. In the case of this research, the initial coding template was conducted after the first step with the famil-iarisation of the data. The fifth step involved the modifications to the initial template as some themes identified in the operationalisation were not observed as relevant to the research question as the interviews progressed (Brooks et al., 2015). Lastly, (Brooks et al. (2015) mention the final step of the template analysis is finalising and applying the template. Pragmatically, the authors state that the finalisation is based on the subjectivity of each researcher, as available resources

might differ for every research. This step was thus not finished as this is a student study with limited resources and time. However, future implications for further research have been provided in the discussion part of this research.

3.6 Quality of the Research

According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), there are four quality criteria regarding qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

'Credibility' according to Lincoln & Guba (1985, as cited in, Korstjens & Moser 2018, p. 121), is defined as "the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings." It concerns whether the data collected are actual interpretations of the initial thoughts of the people participating in the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). There are some strategies to ensure credibility, according to Korstjens & Moser (2018). The first one, 'triangulation' is achieved using different sources of data, along with different methods of collection (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In this case, data triangulation has been achieved as the results of participants of two different virtual multicultural teams have been interpreted, along with different perspectives gathered from various positions in these teams, such as managers, senior coordinators, and associates. In addition to triangulation, another strategy that researchers can employ to ensure credibility according to (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) is 'member checking,' which occurs when participants of the analysed group have the opportunity to reflect and provide a second perspective on the findings of the group clarifying any misconceptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Unfortunately, being the focus group did not occur for this study, its absence did not allow members of the teams the opportunity to reflect and clarify the meaning of the information gathered in the interviews. Nevertheless, the criterion of credibility has been met by following triangulation.

The next criterion is 'Transferability,' which focuses on the ability of the researcher to provide sufficient detail about the topic in question to the readers (Symon & Cassell, 2012). By doing so, the researcher allows the readers to come up with their own thoughts on the findings of the study (Symon & Cassell, 2012). This research provides a literature review in chapter two explaining the topic of knowledge sharing and cultural diversity, along with going deeper into the factors that affect their relationship from recent findings in other studies.

Moving on, the following quality criterion used commonly in qualitative research is 'Dependability.' Lincoln & Guba (1985, as cited in, Korstjens & Moser 2018, p. 121) state that "dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study" This criterion has been met in the final chapters of the study, as a reflection part dedicated to research limitations, along with theoretical implications for further research and practical implications for virtual multicultural teams, has been conducted.

The last quality criterion that was considered for this research is 'Confirmability' which is defined according to Lincoln & Guba (1985, as cited in, Korstjens & Moser 2018, p. 121) as "the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers." This criterion ensures that the data collected are not made up by the researcher. In the case of this research, all interviews and focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. These recordings and transcripts will be made available to the supervisor of this research Dr. Joost Bücker.

3.7 Ethics Paragraph

This section will discuss the protection of the participants' personal data and privacy during the research. All participants will remain anonymous throughout the interviews. Moreover, consent will be required by all participants of this study before making use of any data provided by them. In addition, if the participants further request more privacy, the researcher will request for this master's thesis to not be added to the university's library files. Furthermore, the interviews will be recorded by consent of the participants and transcribed. These recordings and transcripts will be kept safe by the researcher of this thesis and stored in a cloud platform to which only he has access. The transcripts and recordings will only be shared with the supervisor and the second reader of this thesis if necessary.

3.8 Operationalisation

This section will provide an operationalisation of the literature review to create a structure for the analysis of the data collected from the interviews and the focus group. In addition, the operationalisation will allow the emergence of indicators around which the interview questions will be formed.

1. **Cultural Diversity:**

Operational Definition: The virtual teams consist of people from different cultural backgrounds.
Sub-dimensions:

1a) Surface Level Cultural Differences:

Operational Definition: Cultural differences in the virtual teams that are clearly observable
Indicators:

- Nationality
- Language
- Religion

2a) Deep Level Cultural Differences:

Operational Definition: Cultural differences in the virtual teams that are not clearly observable:
Indicators:

- Values
- Cognition
- Perception

2. **Knowledge Sharing:**

Operational Definition: Knowledge sharing in virtual teams regarding information and ideas is reciprocal.

3. **Factors:**

3a) Team Trust

Operational Definition: Virtual team members' willingness to trust in actions of other team members from different cultural backgrounds, based on shared expectation that these vulnerable to the virtual team actions will be performed accordingly.
Indicators:

- Entrustment of Vulnerable Actions

- Shared Willingness
- Mutual Trust

3b) Team Innovation

Operational Definition: The ability of members of virtual teams to create original ideas while sharing knowledge with each other.

Indicators:

- Involvement
- Idea Sharing
- Knowledge Production

3c) Team Learning

Operational Definition: The dynamic process in which members of virtual teams give and receive feedback, adjust, improve, or change.

Indicators:

- Reciprocal Feedback
- Shared Willingness to receive Feedback
- Involvement

3d) Team Language

Operational Definition: The way that virtual team members use language to communicate and perceive language.

Indicators:

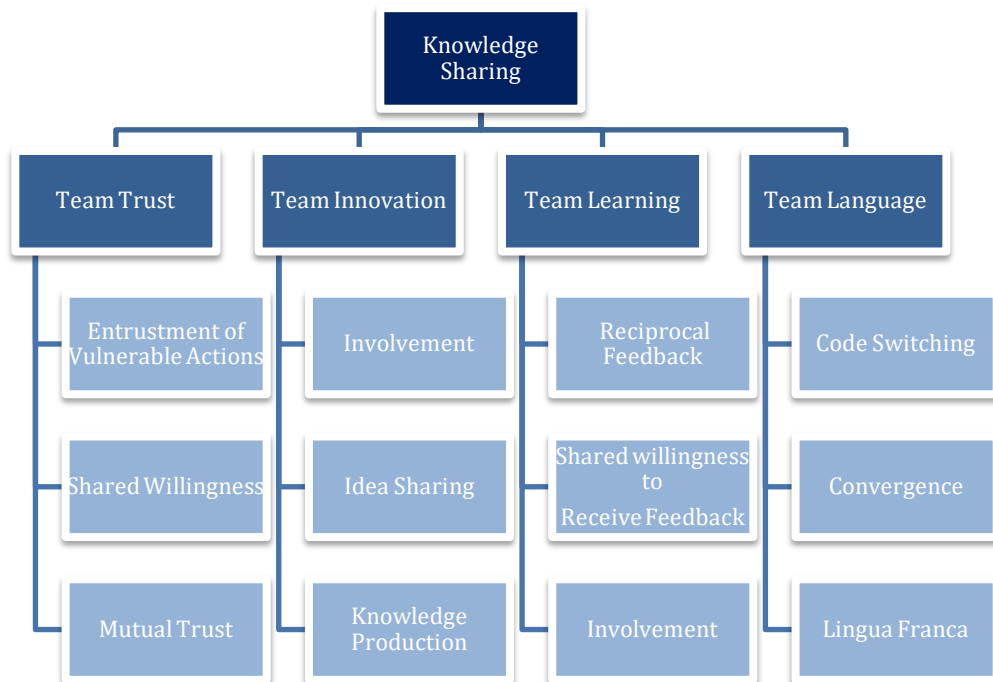- Code-Switching
- Convergence
- Lingua Franca

Figure 2: Operational Tree

4. Research Results

4.1 Team Trust

Mutual Trust

The first dimension that will be discussed is the one of Trust, precisely, how the members of both teams perceive Trust in their respected teams. The first indicator that was defined in the operationalisation in the earlier chapter is Mutual Trust.

Regarding the HR team, Participant 1 reported that mutual trust was not high and that achieving it has been difficult. Participant 3 stressed the importance of mutual trust within the team as the team manager. He stated, *"I see that they prefer first to look for support, for example, within their people from their own country, and only then they go out and reach out to other people."* As he proceeded to elaborate on his thoughts concerning this situation, he stated that he considered it to be a natural behaviour by people in general. Additionally, Participant 2 mentioned that their team's trust was divided based on cultural differences. He stated, *"Some team relationship is ultra good, we are backing up each other. We are supporting each other. But for other cultures. You know, I cannot say that we are so supportive to each other."* He followed by referring to mutual team trust, being divided into two groups based on culture. Participant 3, as the manager, stated:

> *"It's very important for me. So, I have to tell the truth, in my opinion I would not like to work, and I would not feel so comfortable in an environment where I cannot go to the office and meet people face to face. So, this is something that I really believe that the people who can build more private, more personal relationships between themselves, they can work much better as a team in the future."*

There are two main points to be discussed in this statement. It is essential to build personal relationships in the first place. According to Participant 3, teams with intimate relationships are successful in the long run, and not maintaining them could create uneasiness for some team members. According to participant 2, the only people he had personal contact with were Turkish speakers in his team, whereas his Polish teammates were strictly business relations. Aside from this, he also stressed the importance of personal relationships. Continuing with the statement, *"But we are not able to build this relationship virtually with other cultures."* Participant 2 then added:

> *"When I was working physically in my old company, everyone was inviting each other."*
> *"But virtually, there is a wall."*

Moreover, he reveals a deviation in two subgroups based on personal relationships, a pattern that has been repeated throughout this analysis. This virtual environment has created a 'wall,' as Participant 2 described it, that has made it difficult for him to develop friendships with people from other nationalities outside of work. His last statement demonstrates that he overcame that wall with others in the team who had similar cultural backgrounds to him.

Continuing with the Financial Crime team, Participant 13 stated, *"I would say that definitely there is no general trust among people. People like to cooperate with certain individuals. So, in that sense, I would assume that they trust them more than others"* Participant 10's statement was very similar *"I don't think there is such a thing like mutual trust. I trust some people much more than others, and I think that… That's just a general feeling among the team."* Following the interview flow of Participant 13, subgroups of trust can be identified in the team itself. According to Participant 13, these subgroups can be divided into two: local polish employees and the group of expats. She stated, *"I really found myself unaccepted by anyone, like being a newcomer not really fitting in any of the groups because I'm not belonging to any completely. So that was pretty hard."* The subgroups seem to be established due to different social settings that the team members are undergoing. Participant 9, although speaking positively about mutual trust in his team, further followed by saying that during meetings he had in his leisure time with his colleagues, the ones that joined the team in after-work activities were mostly the foreigners in the team. He argued that the reason was social, stating:

> *"Of course, people who are from here, they have already their lives set up. Foreigners they come, they don't know anybody, and they find themselves in this position for which they are already in the need of meeting somebody who is also new."*

Participant 10 stated, *"I tend to see that the foreigners feel some sort of solidarity, and Polish people feel their own solidarity on them. So, I think that's also affecting the trust."*

Examining all the statements, it can be observed that mutual trust exists in the team. That being said, this trust, according to the majority of the team, is unequal between two subgroups, local team members and foreign team members. The participants that have expressed mistrust and the existence of these subgroups have mainly explained it as a result of societal differences and not cultural.

In both teams, subgroups that shared mutual trust could be identified. According to the HR team, it was due to cultural differences. In the financial crime team, however, the interviewees claimed that the subgroups were based on differences in the members' social settings. Also, it was observed that the virtual environment prevented the HR team members from developing personal relationships with colleagues from other cultures. Lastly, both teams predominately shared that personal relationships were important for building mutual trust.

Shared Willingness

Regarding the indicator of Shared Willingness, the participants were questioned if the role of cultural similarities was endorsing shared willingness to trust each other with some team members.

Starting Participant 6 stated:

> *"I think we are more relatable, a person that speaks the same language with you that you have similar interests, from the same cultural background. It's a more relatable person to you. So, you feel more comfortable, confident speaking about things, and you have the same interests, so it's easier to talk about things."*

Likewise, Participant 2 mentioned that coming from the same culture allows trust between people to avail. Participant 5 acknowledged that cultural similarities make it more accessible from his perspective to communicate with people and have small talk, but he elaborated by mentioning that this was only in the beginning as a means of introduction between people. He stated, *"I don't mind cultural differences. It's more about knowing the personality of someone,"* showing that sharing a cultural background with someone is not enough to establish relationships of mutual trust (Participant 5). Participant 1 shared similar thoughts regarding cultural similarities, saying that as a first step, sharing cultural backgrounds does help establish a better relationship. However, continuing,

he mentioned that relationships with people are not solely based on shared cultural similarities. Participant 3, when asked about his thoughts regarding cultural similarities and team trust, shared that he thought it was natural. Despite that, he added that this did not hold for everyone. He followed:

> *"I see that the people who are able to overcome such cultural boundaries and limitations, they can surpass this border and approach a person from a different team, different country, different language and so on. They are generally more successful in this environment because they are faster, they can find solutions faster, they can build easier relationships. So, this form of communication is very crucial here."*

Continuing with the financial crime team, when asked if cultural similarities support building shared willingness between colleagues to trust each other, Participant 9 answered:

> *"I mean, it seems as though it's usually easier to corporate with somebody who has a culture similar to yours. At least for the beginning, it might be helpful. In the long term, I think that it's more a matter of interest on work related stuff."*

Participant 8 stated that regarding work, she did not think cultural similarities were relevant as she trusted people she considered being engaged with their profession. Participant 12 expressed, *"most of the friends I've made from the team are foreigners. And yeah, I don't think it's directly a cultural thing, but it's more so that we moved here without knowing anyone."*

Participants 10 and 13 both stated that cultural similarities did not affect them in building bonds with colleagues. Both argued that they were culturally more connected to the local Polish people, being Greek and Serbian, respectively, despite their deeper connection with Scandinavian colleagues in the team. Participant 13 stated:

> *"The life circumstances are something that can bind people more than, let's say, cultural aspects, definitely like having people not from the same background, but with the same, let's say, problem in life or, you know, the same position in life where we are all foreigners without the same background, but with the same problem, and we are all being treated*

more or less the same by the country that we are living in… That aspect is binding people more than the cultural similarities.”

Participant 10 stated, *“I sympathise to the foreigners more than with the locals because we have more in common.”* When asked if cultural similarities were important to him for building better relationships, he replied, *“I find myself enjoying cultural diversity”* (Participant 10).

The statements of both teams indicate that cultural similarities facilitate the formation of bonds at the beginning. However, most individuals have shown a willingness to develop long-term solid bonds of trust and relationships based on social and personal factors rather than cultural similarities.

Entrustment of Vulnerable Actions

For the next part, the participants were questioned on entrustment of vulnerable actions in the team. Starting with Participant 5, he mentioned that he entrusted his team members with essential tasks based on their professionalism towards the job. Participant 1 similarly stated:

“I would say I work harder than them, and they don’t show respect to my work. I would say, and I believe they don’t care about their work, so they don’t take it too seriously. That’s the reason why I don’t trust them, like I don’t trust their work.”

The two previous shared perspectives by Participants 5 and 1 show that entrusting vulnerable actions to their colleagues is based on values such as respect for their occupation and professionalism. Participant 3, as the team manager, had an elaborate statement covering the previous comments by the other participants in a border way. Besides, his statement showed additional values that affected his entrustment of vulnerable actions on his team. He stated:

“I trust the people who have experience, I trust people that I see that they are independent, and they are self-driven, self-motivated” (Participant 3).

The team manager entrusts people who have experience but, more importantly, are self-driven and do not need a lot of direction or do not lack the motivation to invest themselves in their profession. Participant 6 remarked:

> *"The Turkish speakers usually take the most important tasks. I've talked about it with management that it's not the fault of the non-speakers. Definitely, but it's an actual problem within the team and unfair to the speakers as well, both sided, because speakers have more work while non speakers have less work and there is no imbalance. Everybody says that it is unfair for them."*

The statement illustrates an essential issue critical to the team's success and a cultural difference that is also a practical problem the team faces. As the team focuses on supporting the Turkish market, there is a dynamic between people who speak Turkish and those who do not. Furthermore, participant 5 shared an observation where a native Turkish colleague was uncomfortable working with a Polish colleague that did not know Turkish due to a language barrier. He stated, *"She's (Turkish colleague) not trusting that much because x is Polish, like you said that there's a language barrier."* And further adding, *"Even though x is doing her job good, it's because of the translation."* Thus, there is evidence that the tasks were not fairly allocated throughout the team, and some of their fellow Turkish-speaking colleagues did not entrust those non-Turkish speakers as a result, which created frustration among some colleagues *"I guess like when they don't perform as well as a Turkish person, then they get devastated a little bit"* (Participant 1).

In the financial crime team, regarding entrustment of vulnerable actions, Participant 7 stated:

> *"Everyone is doing their part. I mean, most of the work is the same for everyone, although depending on the size of the seniority, like what's your time spent at the company, then you will be assigned more like tasks that require more expertise or more… like responsibility."*

Participant 12 as well mentioned the same type of task delegation, following with, *"I think, like the more experienced co-workers trust the newcomers a bit, but not as much as we (newcomers) trust them, or they trust each other."* Participant 8 also expressed that she entrusted vulnerable

actions to people that had shown competence in performing their job. As for the critical tasks in the team, she followed with:

> *"So, in my team, we have a team leader and then a junior team coordinator, so these are the most important relevant figures in this team. And of course, they get the most important task, and everything else is kind of distributed equally"* (Participant 8).

This statement shows that hierarchy is also an essential factor when considering the delegation of important tasks. None of the interviewees mentioned the influence of culture regarding entrustment of vulnerable actions. This is also clear in the statement of Participant 13 *"It's mainly based on competencies."* The HR team and financial crime team appear to entrust vulnerable tasks differently. Due to the language barrier, non-Turkish speakers are not able to participate in the first team. In contrast, in the second team, members are able to rely on each other based on their respective competencies.

4.2 Team Innovation

The next theme that will be analysed is the teams' perception of innovation in their team. The interviewees were first asked questions regarding how innovative their teams were and how involved every member was.

In the HR team, most members explained that they were providing a service, so they had minor adjustments to their work which they considered innovative, but they explained that the majority of their tasks were repetitive, as Participant 6 explained, *"I would say it's like a really repetitive job and doesn't have a lot of space for creation. Yeah, at least to my eyes. I asked to bring ideas in, but I think we lack the means a lot of times."* She further explained that they did not possess the resources (technology, time etc.) to implement their ideas.

Participant 1, as well mentioned, *'There are some parts that are routine,"* but he further explained that they were a new office, and their tasks were adapting each month.

Participant 3, the manager of the team, explained that the team was near a transition and that *"real innovation"* had not occurred up to that point. He also explained that the team did not have the time to get involved with innovation:

"I see that people who have learned certain processes and conduct tasks, due to the work-load they also not always have time for looking for innovations and improvements, and that is also something that differentiates those top contributors from average employees that they can still arrange some time, and they can still allocate some time for innovations, for ideas, for changing ways of working" (Participant 3).

It becomes clear from the statements above that the HR team, for the most part, performs repetitive tasks, and even though innovative ideas are welcomed by management and the team, they lack the resources and the time to put them into practice.

Similarly, the financial crime team Participant 10 explained, *"There is this attempt for improving the work we do. But uh, in general, it's a bit repetitive, and it is very much based on following very specific instructions."* Participants 11 and 9 argued that the nature of the organisation as a bank made innovation slower and more challenging to implement. Most of the team argued that the job was, for the most part, repetitive but still with some room for innovation, *"There is definitely some innovation"* (Participant 12).

Knowledge Production

The first indicator that will be observed is Knowledge Production, precisely the team's awareness regarding the topic. The interviewees of the HR team provided information on how new knowledge is produced in their team. Participant 6 mentioned that the team was encouraged to produce new knowledge in various ways:

"We do have meetings. We do have like unofficial calls, besides the meetings with more managerial stuff. We do have a portal that we can send new ideas. So, we are encouraged to do so. I feel free to do so."

Most of the HR team had a similar opinion about the open environment surrounding innovation in the team and the production of new knowledge.

As for the financial team, the team expressed that they as well had an openness to innovation and even had a designated time of the week for it, although short, as mentioned by Participant

12, *"we have like a part of our morning meetings if anyone has an idea of improvement."* Further-more, some team members shared that there were various ways to share new knowledge *"You might announce work in progress, but yeah, mostly just write an E-mail or talk in the meeting."* The previous statements establish that the team is providing opportunity and the freedom for the team to come up with new ideas. Even though most of the tasks addressed by the teams are repetitive, based on what the participants shared, it appears that the financial crime team has more space for innovation and the generation of new knowledge. It can be assumed that both teams are encouraging innovative thinking.

Inclusion

Which creates a transition for the next two indicators, Inclusion and Exclusion. Despite being advocated to get involved with the production of new knowledge, the HR team made it clear that not all the members were involved in this process, with the manager Participant 3 stating, *"It's maybe I would say 20% of the people, 15% something like this. And most of the people, they are just conducting the job, they have to be forced to look for some improvements."* The manager also followed by mentioning that the ones that were actually involved were the Turkish-speaking members, which he considered a coincidence, *"I would not say that the reason is culture rather the personal attitude and personal abilities or skills."* This statement from the manager provides two arguments that influence involvement in innovation. The first "Personal Attitude" can be broadened to personal characteristics. Participant 1 explained the unequal involvement in innovative tasks by stating: *"Maybe some people have more talent, to improve stuff or see what is not OK, than the others."* As reviewed before, team members who did not speak Turkish were at a disadvantage. The team is performing tasks and services for a specific market (Turkish), so the absence of a surface-level cultural characteristic of language, as mentioned, could result in them not being as involved. Moreover, another issue for the non-Turkish speakers is their understanding of the deeper culture of the market they are operating in. When asked why he is more involved and more successful when doing so regarding introducing new methods of working, Participant 5 replied, *"I know the Turkish mindset."* Summarising the information provided by the participants of the HR team, it can be argued that most of them did not explain the absence of their co-workers from

innovating as a result of cultural differences inside the team. The interviewees expressed that abilities, skills, language, cultural awareness, and personality are the ones that affect involvement in innovation.

As for the financial crime team, it was clear that not all the team members were involved in innovation *"There are people who have a lot of ideas all the time, and there are those who are quite passive. They don't want to participate, or they think it's worthless or just don't come up with ideas"* (Participant 10). According to most of the team, the fact that some of his team did not participate in innovating was a consequence of various factors. Participant 10 first mentioned that some lacked the motivation or did not see the value in investing time for innovation. Second, he followed by saying that some of his colleagues did not hold the knowledge either from their educational or professional background, *"That might have to do with how knowledgeable someone is or how much experienced someone is"* (Participant 10). It is evident that almost all the participants of the financial crime team felt that the main reason why people were not involved in innovation was due to their personality and how engaged they were in their jobs.

Exclusion

After that, the interviewees were asked to reflect on their experiences with exclusion within their teams during the innovation process. As mentioned above, the HR team reported that not all team members were equally active when it came to innovation. However, the entire team agreed that no member had ever been excluded from the process. Innovating discussions were open to all participants, and none were excluded for any reason, including their cultural background. Half of the participants from the HR team stated that they would act immediately if they encountered exclusion based on cultural differences *"If I would observe something like this, that somebody is excluding another person because of cultural difference, I would have to jump in"* (Participant 3). Additionally, participants were asked to reflect on their feelings if this were to become a reality, and the consensus was that it would be unpleasant *"I would feel very bad about it because myself, I was involved in projects that were promoting cultural diversity and inclusion"* (Participant 6). The presence of cultural diversity in a team would also benefit innovation, according to some participants:

> *"I really deeply believe in that, that only in diverse and complex environments, you can get the best ideas"* (Participant 3).
>
> *"I believe we should always embrace it and take the best out of it"* (Participant 6).

Consequently, it can be concluded that the HR team members did not observe any instances of individuals being excluded from the team and that some members perceived cultural diversity as a catalyst for innovation within an organisation.   Likewise, the financial crime team did not exclude any of its members from the innovation process:

> *"So, there's no point where somebody is excluded?"* (Interviewer).
>
> *"Yes, exactly"* (Participant 13).

There was an acknowledgement among some participants that some ideas might be rejected as a result of them not suiting the situation. Though always with a reason for the rejection. *"It's just not being regarded as a usable idea or implementable"* (Participant 13). It was also requested that the participants in the financial crime team reflect on the possibility of cultural differences being a reason for exclusion from innovation. As a result, they all expressed their displeasure, stating they would be upset if that occurred. The participants noted that some local colleagues would first discuss ideas within their subgroup of Polish locals (locals and foreigners) before bringing them up to the rest of the team; however, they also expressed that this was not of concern to them since it would likely be more comfortable to discuss ideas in their native tongue *"Some people who are much more comfortable speaking in Polish maybe would rather talk or discuss in polish, which I don't see as a problem"* (Participant 11). Some participants stated that cultural diversity would enhance innovation within the team, with Participant 10 expressing that innovation in the past had been a problem for the team but has improved by hiring more foreigners:

> *"It's dynamically changing. So, more foreigners are being hired. So, uh, eventually that kind of helps to bring more innovative ideas. So, I think it kind of lacks innovation when it comes to not being as diverse, I think when the company is hiring more foreigners, it just helps more"* (Participant 10).

In line with the HR team's responses, the financial crime team also expressed concern about the idea of exclusion from innovation and an understanding of the benefits that cultural diversity can bring toward the creation of new ideas.

4.3 Team Learning

The next dimension to be discussed is 'Learning.' Specifically, the interviewees were asked to reflect on the process of 'Feedback' between them and their teams, with the first indicator being 'Reciprocal Feedback.' In both teams, methods of exchanging feedback with one another were inquired about, with the HR team stating that they had official feedback meetings with their manager and also unofficial meetings between them:

> *"As colleagues, you know, we talk with each other, and we comment about things. And with more like official meetings, you're having on to one with your team leader and with team meetings about operational stuff. So, this is your space to talk"* (Participant 6).

The participants stated that feedback was exchanged regularly in the team, but they could notice that some colleagues did not receive feedback as well as others. The interviewees mentioned that they did not think that it was due to cultural differences but rather a personal characteristic, with Participant 1 mentioning *"every person reacts differently"* and following with *"Yeah, I think it's personality, and I don't think it's a cultural thing."* In addition, participant 5 noticed that his feedback was not valued as much by one colleague, despite them both being from the same country, whereas it is valued more by a colleague from Poland. He further stated that he also thought it was a personal characteristic and not cultural:

> *"Why would you think that S does not value it? Do you think it's a cultural thing?"* (Interviewer).
> *"No, it's a personal thing."* (Participant 5).

Contrary to the statements mentioned above in the HR team, the manager mentioned that he did think that culture was affecting feedback *"I have a feeling that there are cultures that are more willing to share feedback, because it's something that is, let's say, welcomed in their culture"*

34

(Participant 3). According to Participant 4, his culture's approach to feedback is straight to the point without excessive politeness and less common to be provided when it comes to positive feedback. Therefore, a dichotomy in the team's consensus regarding the exchange of feedback and whether culture affects it can be observed.

The financial crime team also followed an openness regarding feedback exchange *"I mean, we can just talk to each other, or we have this feedback tool in our system where we can ask for feedback or just give feedback to other people either negative or positive or constructive"* (Participant 8). Participant 13 agreed that, in theory, feedback was available to everyone but that the team was struggling to use it. She identified a cultural difference between her Scandinavian colleagues and her Polish colleagues. She mentioned that Scandinavians were reluctant to give any feedback; on the other hand, she stated that Polish were very willing to provide positive feedback. Regarding constructive feedback, she stated, *"Constructive feedback is definitely something common with everyone. Like not really wanting to engage, but I think it also has to do with personal traits"* (Participant 13). Participant 10 also noticed that feedback from foreign colleagues to him was more constructive and that feedback from Polish colleagues was solely positive. He further stated *'When the Polish people give me feedback, it's just positive stuff. I guess what they expect from me when I'm giving the feedback is also positive stuff.'*
So, it can be established that from both teams, there was a consensus that feedback is influenced by culture.

Shared Willingness

The next indicator that will be examined is Shared Willingness. Both teams were asked if they had noticed that feedback was exchanged more between the subgroups that were identified in the Trust chapter of the analysis. Participant 1 stated, *"Yeah, for sure. Like especially with the Turkish part, the people who speak Turkish, I think they communicate more, and they see more what mistakes happen or why a problem arose then."* Which was also confirmed by Participant 6. While Participant 6 thought it was a natural action by the members, Participant 1 stated, *"It's a bad thing. Because you work as a team and some of the team is excluded because of differences, let it be language."* In addition, participant 6 stated that the team was unable to do anything about it since the Polish colleagues had no opportunity to participate in all tasks performed by the Turkish

colleagues due to a lack of knowledge of Turkish, *"It's normal that we would interact and comment and give feedback about the things that we share, as a sub team."*

Therefore, this situation of feedback being exchanged only between sub teams was unavoidable, based on the HR team's configuration, leading to feedback exclusion.

There was also some form of feedback between the subgroups for the financial crime team, although not to a greater extent *"At the office I would say there is a bit more feedback between the Polish-speaking colleagues"* (Participant 12). It appeared that most of the feedback was shared based on tasks that people were involved in *"It's usually related to the process"* (Participant 8), or between people that are more familiar with each other on a personal level *"I think it's more on a personal level, whoever you become more friendly with is the one you will ask for feedback I don't think it depends too much on the nationality or cultural differences"* (Participant 12).

So, some differences are present between both teams. In the HR team, the subgroups were again mentioned, while in the financial crime team, members did not observe feedback shared among subgroups due to cultural differences.

4.4 Team Language

Code-Switching

Both teams seem to have problems regarding the topic of language, as seen in the previous parts of the analysis. The first indicator defined for language was 'Code-switching,' which the HR team members were aware of, *"Of course, that's happened"* (Participant 1). The members were asked to reflect on how they felt when they noticed that people were switching to a language they did not know. According to most of the members, this made them feel distant:

> *"Of course, we were feeling excluded from the team."* (Participant 1).
> *"I didn't feel comfortable because I had this feeling that maybe they're, you know, exchanging feedback on what I am talking about."* (Participant 3).

Additionally, some members experienced intense negativity when their colleagues switched languages:

"That makes me feel angry, and that they don't respect me. Because if they know that I do not understand that I am not able to be a part of the conversation, and they simply talk, so they don't need me." (Participant 4).

Similarly, the financial crime team also reflected on their experiences, and the majority felt excluded as well *"I felt like they don't treat me like someone who is a full member of the team"* (Participant 10). On the other hand, there were members who thought it was natural in the out of work context *"I think people do it just sort of, you know out of convenience"* (Participant 7). The team showed some understanding when their co-workers spoke in their mother tongue, whether the conversation was personal or work-related. Regardless, the feeling of exclusion persisted:

"I think it creates a sort of more private bond." (Participant 13).
"Do you think that others might get excluded that do not speak that language?" (Interviewer).
"Yes, definitely" (Participant 13).

Participants in both teams exhibited negative emotions when their team members switched to a language they did not speak. Therefore, exclusion was the dominant emotion, and anger and disrespect were sometimes expressed.

Convergence

A discussion was also conducted with interviewees regarding the following indicator, language convergence. Almost no participant of the HR team shared a situation where they had been required to change their manner of speaking based on who they were conversing with. In their response, the team expressed that some members sometimes learned words from the other culture, which they considered to be a positive practice *"I had situations that people were sharing with me, in a friendly way that they know some words in Polish"* (Participant 3). Only Participant 4 reported that he had experiences in which colleagues addressed him in a simpler manner, which was considered as a friendly gesture *"I really appreciate it."*

Following, the financial crime team also seemed to appreciate when colleagues simplified the way they spoke to them:

> *"I think that adjusting your language like based on someone else's proficiency is a very positive trait."* (Participant 13)
>
> *"It's nice because I'm actually trying to understand what they say. So, they're helping me."* (Participant 8).

The members expressed, however, that they could understand that some people could be offended by it, *"Maybe the people who didn't understand in the first place might feel also kind of offended due to the fact that someone noticed that they're not understanding it"* (Participant 10). It can be observed that adapting the way of talking, following the statements of the financial crime team can have both negative and positive impacts. Nevertheless, Participant 7 argued that members could tell if convergence occurred by hostile intentions, *"I think you can actually recognise pretty easily what's the intentions, if someone is genuinely trying to help you or just mock you."* According to this observation, convergence may be either negative or positive, depending on how the receiving end interprets its intentions.

Lingua Franca

As a final indicator, Lingua Franca was discussed during the interviews. A discussion of the idea of a common language was conducted with members, with the HR team collectively expressing the importance of English as their primary language *"It's the most important thing actually to speak English between the team"* (Participant 5). Additionally, according to Participant 1, it is critical for everyone involved in the company to communicate in a common language to avoid negative consequences *"It causes some inequality of knowledge, inequality of responsibility."* According to Participant 3, the team experienced problems due to language barriers since many tasks could only be completed by Turkish speakers, *"Non-Turkish speakers they're excluded partially from some part of the knowledge."* Although Participant 1 is a firm believer in the positive effects of cultural diversity, he was unable to understand why the team hired non-Turkish speakers as the tasks were in Turkish *"they might have different ideas. They might have different innovations, different points of view. But like since we're working with Turkish…"* Despite acknowledging the importance of a common language, the HR team faced a fundamental issue regarding their processes. Many of these were in Turkish, not allowing people who do not speak it to participate.

The members of the financial crime team also reflected on the importance of using a common language *"I think it's a decent practice, a good practice to not alienate people"* (Participant 7). Regardless of the team's efforts to conduct all processes in the official language of the firm (English), the team did struggle with communication as not all members were proficient in it *"the domestic part of our colleagues are not as proficient in English as foreigners are. So that is also creating some sort of gap in the communication"* (Participant 13). Participant 10 elaborated on the issue, stating, *"If you have a huge gap between the language capacity, it is just really difficult to pass over the knowledge."* Moreover, the majority of the financial crime team stated that language barriers between them were the only cultural difference that did have a significant negative impact on knowledge sharing inside the team, *"I would say that cultural differences do not have a very big impact. I will say that language is the most important factor that would cause differences in knowledge sharing"* (Participant 12). Participant 7 indicated that a lack of proficiency in English was causing most of the team knowledge-sharing problems. Regarding cultural differences in general, he argued that they did not have a significant impact on the team since everyone was well aware of them and expected them, *"I don't think they (Cultural differences) affected it that much, because I think what matters more in this context is age, and personality"* (Participant 7).

Therefore, both teams struggled with the concept of a common language, with the HR team not having adapted their processes from Turkish to English, and the financial crime team having members who were not proficient in English. Moreover, examining the statements reveals that this was also the primary cause of miscommunication in both teams and negatively impacted knowledge sharing.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview

The data collected from the qualitative interviews were examined to answer the research question: *"How do members of global virtual teams perceive cultural diversity and its relation to knowledge sharing?"*

This study follows the call of recent articles, such as Alaiad et al. (2019), that discusses the lack of deeper exploration regarding cultural barriers that disrupt knowledge sharing in multinational virtual teams. Additionally, this thesis followed the theoretical implications of Dube & Patrick (2012), who stated that to gain a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and knowledge sharing, researchers should study what members of multicultural teams believe and think. This report has attempted to dive deeper into the thoughts of such members by conducting semi-structured interviews.

Using Adi & Musbah (2017) as a conceptual model, the analysis followed the path of a critical summary of the existing literature, which established that most current literature on cultural diversity and its challenges to knowledge sharing of multicultural teams centres around four factors: Trust, Innovation, Learning, and Language. To identify how cultural diversity affected the sharing of knowledge, participants from both virtual teams were asked to reflect on their experiences in their respective teams regarding these four factors.

This chapter discusses and incorporates the research results into a broader context. In addition, the contribution to knowledge will be addressed, as well as how the findings may benefit organisations and members of multinational teams. Furthermore, the limitations of this research, suggestions for future research, and a conclusion will be indicated.

5.2 Interpretations of the Findings

5.2.1 Factor I: Team Trust

Starting with the interpretation of the findings regarding 'Trust,' the first indicator that this study examined was 'Mutual Trust,' which, according to Pinjani & Palvia (2013), contributes positively to the sharing of knowledge among virtual teams. The findings showed that in both cases, mutual trust existed, but in subgroups. Members of the HR team expressed that the team's trust

was divided between the members who spoke Turkish and the local Polish employees who did not. The team stressed the importance of mutual trust and personal relationships. As a result of the virtual working environment, the members had difficulty building relationships with people from different cultures, which was not a problem in the past. Team members faced the challenge of 'Perceived Distance' as explained by O' Leary et al. (2014) in establishing mutual trust, as they could not communicate with colleagues from other cultures. However, according to Costa et al. (2018), trust in virtual teams has been proven to achieve a comparable level with trust in teams that work on site. Moreover, the authors state that building personal relationships is a matter of time and that virtual teams need longer periods of time for their members to connect personally (Costa et al., 2018).

The findings for the financial crime team indicated that mutual trust was divided between local and foreign employees. As a result of societal differences, there was a rift between the locals and foreigners, as these groups could not relate to each other's situation and vice versa. A recent study conducted by de Jong et al. (2020) indicates that cultural diversity negatively impacts shared trust in virtual teams. It can be argued that the combination of cultural diversity and virtuality affects mutual trust, not cultural diversity by itself. Although this holds for the HR team, members of the financial crime team did not mention cultural diversity as an issue that needed to be addressed to build mutual trust. This difference may be related to the structure of both teams since the HR team only includes three nationalities while the financial crime team includes six. The findings of this study indicate that foreign ex-pats in the financial crime team have been able to bond and relate to one another regardless of their different cultures, with cultural diversity being significantly higher than in the HR team. According to the 'Social Identity Theory,' individuals tend to self-categorise themselves into groups based on social similarities and differences (Hogg, 2016).

Additionally, the findings indicated that both teams considered cultural similarities as a steppingstone that enabled trust to be built between people. However, the results showed that personality and common interests were more valuable to the participants in sustaining long-term relationships with their colleagues.

Furthermore, Breuer et al. (2020) stressed the importance of sharing vulnerability within the team. The analysis of the statements indicated that both teams viewed competencies and work behaviour as critical factors to entrusting important actions and being vulnerable. The findings

show similarities to the results of Kirkman et al. (2002), who observed that trust in virtual teams develops with characteristics such as reliability, consistency, and responsiveness between team members.

It appears that the perceptions of the members of both multinational cultural teams contradict those of de Jong et al. (2021) and much of the existing literature regarding cultural diversity and trust, as the participants indicated that cultural differences did not affect them as much as societal differences and differences in personality and behaviour. According to Pinjani & Palvia (2013), deep diversity negatively affects mutual trust, indicating that other factors other than culture influence this relationship, which was also observed in this study.

5.2.2 Factor II: Team Innovation

The majority of the existing literature presents cultural diversity as a factor that enhances innovation in teams, according to Bouncken et al. (2015). Nevertheless, the authors suggest the need for in-depth studies concerning the challenges that multicultural teams face with innovation (Bouncken et al., 2015), which this study has examined. Despite the largely repetitive nature of their tasks, both teams reported that there was some space for innovation, and both embraced new ideas and knowledge production. The findings indicate that despite the previous, only some members of both teams participated. Several similarities were observed, as both financial crime participants and HR participants expressed that personality and engagement were related to the level of involvement. Yet, Polish locals did not participate in the HR team's innovation process. Turkish-speaking colleagues argued that this was caused by the team's support of the Turkish market, as well as the fact that the most critical processes involving innovation were conducted in the Turkish language. Additionally, Turkish speaking members asserted that they were able to achieve greater success as they knew the Turkish mindset. They argued that they would not accept exclusion due to cultural differences and would be proactive in solving the issue. Nevertheless, the team was unable to overcome the problem of the locals not knowing the team's language. In contrast to surface-level differences such as language, it appears that deeper cultural differences did not impact participation in innovation.   Furthermore, several financial team members stated that a person's prior knowledge and experience on the topic could also affect their ability to participate in innovation. The perspectives of the financial crime team fit well with the article of Drach-Zahavy (2001), which states that 'Functional

Heterogeneity' impacts the involvement and the amount of knowledge shared as team members might vary in their roles and have different competencies, and expertise and knowledge.

Moreover, the findings of both teams indicate that participants considered cultural diversity as an enhancement for innovation, which is consistent with the study of Bouncken et al. (2015), and other studies which advocate for cultural diversity, including the study of Lee & Nathan (2010), who found that cultural diversity did increase innovation in organisations. In conclusion, the findings indicate that some participants from the financial crime team observed a positive relationship between cultural diversity and innovation as more foreign employees were hired.

5.2.3 Factor III: Team Learning

Regarding the factor of 'Team Learning,' as stated in the second chapter of this study, organisations ought to integrate intercultural activities regarding team learning, as cultural differences might drive other obstacles to the team's success (Chao & Pardy, 2017). Findings of the study show participants noticed cultural differences in how feedback is perceived, a phenomenon that has been proven by cross-cultural studies, such as Lee & Nathan's (2010) study, which identified cultural differences in how feedback is received between western and eastern cultures. Wilson et al. (2007) state that team learning is influenced by the degree to which all members are involved. The findings further showed that the participants believed that, in some cases, the reception and provision of feedback were a result of both cultural differences and personality differences.

Additionally, the results demonstrate that feedback exchange did take place within the subgroups discussed previously in interpretations of the team trust factor. As a result of the tasks being divided into those requiring Turkish and those requiring English, it was inevitable that feedback as a learning process would only take place with respect to a person's fluency in Turkish. Additionally, some financial crime team members noticed feedback exchanges between the local employees when the team worked on-site, which changed when they worked remotely. Cultural differences were not perceived as an obstacle to inclusion in team feedback; instead, colleagues chose to share their feedback with those with whom they had a better relationship or with whom they were working on a project. Consequently, in the context of the Turkish team, the surface-level cultural difference of language was shown to have the ability to cause deviations in feedback and

learning between colleagues. In contrast, cultural differences did not impact inclusion or exclusion from feedback in the financial crime team.

5.2.4 Factor IV: Team Language

Lastly, language will be interpreted, which has become essential for multilingual teams, according to Ahmad & Widen (2018). Gibbs et al. (2013) argue that knowledge sharing across locations may be imbalanced due to language barriers, cultural differences, and other factors. The findings confirm what has already been demonstrated in the previous interpretations of the other factors, that language has caused exclusion and deviation from both innovation and learning exchange, which are directly related to knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the HR team believed that the lack of translation of their tasks from Turkish to English led to an unequal absence of their colleagues from the knowledge sharing process. Both teams stressed the importance of having a common language. In addition, the findings suggest that establishing English as a common language will not solve the problem. In the case of the financial crime team, members reported that the imbalance in proficiency between the foreigners and the locals created problems with knowledge sharing. The findings seem to partially agree with the statement of Tenzer et al. (2014) that was presented in the second chapter of this study "obstacles to effective communication, which arise if interlocutors speak different mother tongues and lack a shared language in which they all have native proficiency" (Tenzer et al., 2014, p. 509). Since none of the financial crime team members speaks English as a native language, Tenzer et al. (2014) statement is not entirely accurate. Foreigners having a higher proficiency level than their local colleagues did not report any communication difficulties between them. Professional proficiency was sufficient to allow the foreigners to share knowledge without miscommunication. Some similarities can be drawn between the findings of this study and the results of a recent study around lingua franca by Nurmi & Koroma (2020). The authors state that non-native speakers of the lingua franca, compared to the native, tend to build a safe psychological climate inside the team, which in turn can present issues in their innovative performance, as it limits their communication abilities (Nurmi & Koroma, 2020). Although again, none of the team members in the financial crime team were native, they expressed miscommunications with the locals when using English as a common language. Thus, the results of Nurmi & Koroma (2020) could be extended to proficient English speakers and basic level English speakers.

Moreover, Ahmad & Widén (2018) suggest that language differences can also lead to exclusion and hostility at work, based on two different aspects defined in the article, code-switching and convergence, both of which are discussed in chapter two. Code-switching was found to be accurate, as participants reported feeling excluded and disrespected when colleagues switched languages they did not understand, with one participant even expressing anger at the situation. As for convergence, the findings showed that it did not negatively affect the team. Participants indicated they appreciated people adjusting their speech when conversing with them in a foreign language. According to the results, most people experienced convergence as a positive intention and would be aware if it would be expressed maliciously.

5.3 Contribution to Knowledge

Several aspects of this study contribute to the advancement of knowledge. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of cultural diversity and its relationship to knowledge sharing in multinational virtual teams, addressing a call from scholars such as Alaiad et al. (2019) and Henderson et al. (2018). In addition, this study examines cultural diversity in greater detail. It addresses the limitations presented in the research of Jyoti et al. (2019) through the acquisition of information and insights from members of multinational teams rather than cross-cultural teams. Further, this study does not examine cultural differences from a culture-specific perspective. Instead, it focuses on developing new knowledge that is applicable to multicultural teams regardless of the nationalities involved.

Furthermore, the findings of this study contribute to the gap in the literature that exists around virtual teams and the obstacles experienced by them with regard to knowledge sharing, as set forth by Kauppila et al. (2011), by shedding light on where such hindrances may arise, such as trust, where virtuality had created a barrier between Turkish- and Polish-speaking team members.

As a continuation, this report addresses the concern expressed by de Jong et al. (2020) that the existing literature regarding trust is not explicitly focused on virtual teams. Using the existing literature on team trust, this study contributes to this knowledge gap by identifying potential problems and gathering participants' perceptions of virtual teams.

Furthermore, this study confirms the emerging literature around innovation and cultural diversity by providing participants' opinions of virtual multicultural teams and assisting in the further development of cultural diversity enhancing innovation, as stated by Hu & Randel (2014).

In addition, this report addresses the request of Bouncken et al. (2015) for more in-depth studies regarding obstacles that multicultural teams face with innovation by identifying the absence of a common language as a significant challenge for general team participation.

Findings from this study have contributed to the understanding of virtual multinational teams in terms of team learning and knowledge sharing, as a gap in the literature has been identified. This confirms that cultural differences such as language could hinder the success of team learning in virtual teams, as well as in physical teams, as established by Chao & Pardy (2017).

The study also explores the impact of language on the success of knowledge sharing in virtual teams, addressing the absence that Tenzer et al. (2014) have reported by analysing in detail the perceptions of virtual team members as well as their emotions and thoughts regarding common language barriers when sharing knowledge.

5.4 Practical Implications

This research findings have provided in-depth knowledge for organisations and professionals who work in multinational virtual teams that can assist them in improving their knowledge sharing while also avoiding mistakes that hinder it. Organisations should understand that there are multiple factors that determine the success of knowledge sharing, which this study has proven.

Before setting up a virtual multinational team, organisations should ensure that a common language exists among the team as well as the task performed. As shown in the HR team, the lack of this action caused exclusion and deviation. In comparison, the financial team was able to capitalise on their cultural diversity, whereas the HR team could not. Moreover, participation in these teams should be by employees who speak the common language proficiently, as the findings showed that the locals, in the case of the financial crime team, struggled to participate in knowledge sharing. Thus, organisations should consider implementing a common language, as it should be a necessity according to the perceptions of the participant when it comes to knowledge sharing. Organisations should also ensure that employees can express themselves in the established common language as equally as possible.

Further, organisations should not be afraid to embrace and increase cultural diversity, as the participants, for the majority, did not consider deep cultural differences as an issue but rather societal differences, and the correct combination of people based on character and work behaviour should be focused on as shown in the interpretations of Trust, Innovation, and Learning.

As for professionals of such teams, the findings show that they should avoid grouping themselves as much as possible as that would not allow them to achieve common goals with their partners. Team members of multicultural teams should also invest in developing their language capabilities with a focus on the common language in their team.

In addition, members of virtual teams should understand that building personal connections with their team members might take longer but can be achieved if they become more engaged with their colleagues. Professionals of multicultural virtual teams should be creative and show more effort in creating bonds with their colleagues than in physical teams.

5.5 Research Ethics and Limitations

Regarding the ethics of this study, it is emphasised that the respondents willingly took part in the survey. After every interview, the participants were asked for permission to use their statements. Participants were also ensured total anonymity. Hence, none of the names or further details about the interviewees has been shared. Moreover, none of the collected interviews will be made public or revealed to anyone other than the individuals directly connected to this study.

Regarding limitations, this study contributes knowledge and generates new information regarding knowledge sharing, which was also the study's objective, but limitations are present. Initially, this study was designed to include participants from global virtual teams. Unfortunately, finding participants that would fulfil these requirements was unattainable given the resources. Moreover, this thesis initially planned for an additional qualitative tool for the focus group. Still, the restrictions regarding the research size and difficulty in convincing the participants to participate without losing their anonymity were also not possible.

Furthermore, the findings of this research should not be taken as a statistical representation, as the nature of this research is qualitative. Additionally, semi-structured interviews provided this study with a relative amount of space in the formulation of the questions, which means that the interviews were not harmonious to the fullest and variations in the thematic focus possibly exist.

Additionally, the conduct of the interviews was not balanced with regard to culture, as from the HR team. Unfortunately, only six members were willing to participate, with the majority being Turkish speaking and only two being Polish. The same goes for the financial crime team, as only one member of the local Polish colleagues was willing to participate, despite efforts to convince more.

Another limitation that the researcher faced occurred during the interviews, as some participants showed fatigue at the end of the interviews, resulting in less information gathered on the topics of team innovation and learning compared to the other factors presented in the findings of this study.

Finally, as one single author conducted the whole study, the results of this study should also be perceived with a possible amount of subjectivity.

5.6 Future Research

This study sought to investigate the topic of cultural diversity and knowledge sharing by conducting qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and perceptions of virtual team members who deal with this topic daily. Considering that this study has shown that surface-level cultural differences were the ones that impeded knowledge sharing in the teams, further research should be conducted on the subject and into the impact of 'deep diversity' on knowledge sharing, in addition to cultural diversity. It was found that the participants considered societal differences and personality to be more critical than cultural differences in terms of deep diversity. Thus, researchers should conduct an in-depth analysis while considering the factors mentioned.

In addition, further quantitative analyses could be performed in future research to examine the positive relationship between innovation and cultural diversity in virtual teams. This study showed similar outcomes to existing research on on-site and virtual teams.

Equally, interesting would be further research in comparisons between the presence of cultural diversity and its impact on knowledge sharing in teams. As shown by the findings, participants had noticed improvements in innovation due to more foreigners joining the team. So further comparative research between cross-cultural, semi-multicultural, and fully culturally diverse teams could provide a clear answer in proving that cultural diversity enhances innovation and, thereby, knowledge sharing.

Moreover, the perspectives examined in this report stemmed from individual interviews. It would be interesting to compare the findings of this study to a potential qualitative study that has used the alternative data collection tool, the focus group, presented in the methodology chapter. The focus group would provide a team perspective which could have different results than this study.

6. Conclusion

This master's thesis explores the emerging literature around cultural diversity and knowledge sharing by answering the research question: *"How do members of multicultural virtual teams perceive cultural diversity and its relation to knowledge sharing?"* This research has explored the factors influencing the relationship between cultural diversity and knowledge sharing to answer the research question. This report is qualitative and has focused on providing findings based on participants' perceptions of multicultural virtual teams. The results have been compared to the existing literature, with some differences and similarities being presented to other research.

In this report, four primary factors, Team Trust, Team Innovation, Team Learning, and Team Language, that influence the relationship of cultural diversity to knowledge sharing have been identified through a literature review. Responding to the researchers' call, the literature gaps have been further explored. The summarisation of the participants' thoughts in the findings showed that participants' major challenge regarding knowledge sharing is language. Language has been identified as a surface level characteristic in the existing literature. According to the participants of this study, language was the main cultural characteristic that has caused hindrances in knowledge sharing. Moreover, this research has shown that language influences the other three factors of trust, innovation, and learning, as the ellipsis of a common language has proven to be very difficult to overcome, as expressed by the participants.

The findings also show that the consensus of the participants was positive for cultural diversity in the process of innovation. In addition, the participants expressed that subgroups that were established and caused exclusion throughout their teams' knowledge sharing process were more significantly based on other factors such as societal differences, personal characteristics, competencies, and work behaviour and not as a cause of cultural diversity.

Finally, the findings of this study present the necessity for separating surface level cultural characteristics from deep level cultural characteristics when examining the influence of cultural diversity on knowledge sharing, which most of the existing literature has not considered. According to the participants' perceptions of this report, deep level cultural characteristics do not negatively influence the knowledge sharing process as much as other deep level characteristics such as societal and personality factors.

Appendix A

Questionnaire

Introduction: Welcome for this interview and thank you for participating. I would like to ask for your permission to record this interview. The data gathered by this interview will remain anonymous throughout the analysis of the research. The data will be stored in a secure cloud platform for which only I will have access. Through this interview if at any point you wish to not answer a question or for some information not to be used, please let me know. If at any moment you need a break feel free to ask.

Conclusion: Thank you very much for the interview, please let me know if you would like to receive this transcript, or the final outcome of this research.

Interview Questions			
Question Type:	Dimension/Indicator:	Initial Questions:	Follow-up Questions:
Factual Questions		What are some personal characteristics that you could tell me about yourself?	
		How long have you been working with this team?	How culturally diverse is the virtual team that you perform in?
			Could you elaborate on the different

		nationalities of the people involved?
		4. What are the more important tasks of your job?	
		5. How long have you been working virtually?	What are your experiences so far (thoughts and emotions) on working virtually?
			Could you elaborate on these thoughts and emotions?
			Could you give some examples?
			Do you encounter issues while working from home? How do you deal with them?
Cultural Diversity Questions	Surface-Level (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021)	1. How do you perceive cultural differences in your team?	
	Deep-Level (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021)	2. What are some cultural values that you have noticed to	How do you perceive the impact of different cultures in

		be different between team members?	your team? Impact on what?
			How do you think your team in general embraces these cultural differences?
			What are some challenges that you believe cultural differences bring up in your team?
Knowledge Sharing Questions		How do you transfer knowledge to your fellow team members and vice versa?	What are some common issues that you encounter while doing so?
			Can you recall instances where cultural differences caused issues in knowledge sharing in your team?
			If that would happen, what do you think

			would be the reasons for that happening?
			How would you feel about it?
Trust Questions	Entrustment of Vulnerable Actions (Breuer et al., 2020)	How do you cope with your fellow team members?	Would you invite them in your house?
			What do you know about them?
			Is it only professional or also personal?
			Is it important to know them on a personal level? If yes, why?
		Who do you trust more in your team?	Could you think about them; describe the person in gender, age, professional knowledge?
			Do you think that cultural similarities are important in building a better

			relationship? If yes, why?
			If no, why?
	Mutual Trust (Pinjani & Palvia, 2013)	How do you perceive the idea of mutual trust in your virtual team?	How do you delegate important tasks that you hold responsibility for to your team members?
			What are your thoughts on mutual trust being important for the success of your team?
			Have you ever felt that someone in the team is not trusted due to cultural differences?
	Shared Willingness (Breuer et al., 2020)	What makes you trust your fellow team members and vice versa?	What are some things that you expect from your teammates and vice versa?
			Have you ever felt that someone in the team is not held up to the same expectations

			due to cultural differences?
Innovation Questions	Idea Sharing (Rivera-Vazquez Juan et al., 2009)	How do you consider your work in terms of innovation?	What are the reasons for innovation in your team?
	Knowledge Production (Rivera-Vazquez Juan et al., 2009)	How do you share knowledge or ideas in your team?	
	Involvement (Castaneda & Cuellar, 2020)	How involved are all team members in this process of innovation?	If some members would be excluded from this process of innovation how would that make you feel?
			Why do you think that would happen in the first place?
			What are your thoughts on cultural differences being the reason for the

			exclusion of team members from the innovation process?
Learning Questions	Reciprocal Feedback (Yang & Chen, 2005)	How do you exchange feedback in your team?	How is feedback received among team members?
			If more feedback is exchanged due to some members sharing more cultural characteristics, what are your thoughts on that?
			If feedback from some members is perceived differently than from others, then what are your thoughts on that?

	Shared Willingness (Yang & Chen, 2005)	How involved are the team members in exchange feedback and reflecting on mistakes?	What are your thoughts on the influence of cultural differences on learning processes in your team?
Language Questions	Lingua Franca (Ahmad & Widén, 2018)	What is the main language that is used for communicating?	What is the main language that is used for communicating?
			Is there an official language and how strict is the organisation you are working in with communicating only with the official language?
			Is this enforced by the organisation or the team leader. Can you give examples?
	Code-Switching (Ahmad & Widén, 2018)	What are your thoughts on rules existcing regarding	

		the use of a common language in firms?	What do you think about this when it happens?
		Do team members switch languages? When does this usually occur?	How do you feel when this occurs, and you do not understand the language?
			What are some reasons for you choosing to change the language with some members?
	Convergence (Ahmad & Widén, 2018)	What are your thoughts on adjusting the way you speak with people, like using vocabulary that would help them understand you better?	If others have adjusted the way they speak to you, how do you feel about it?
Closing Questions		How do you think cultural differences affect the way that	How do you perceive your team regarding countering potential

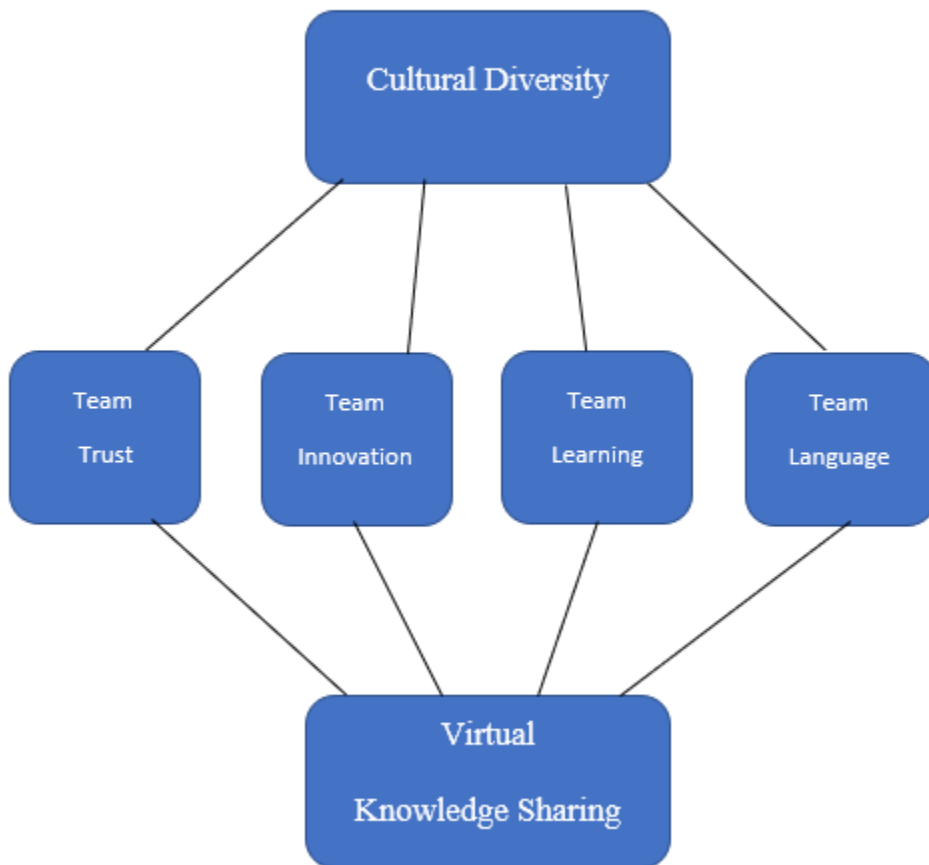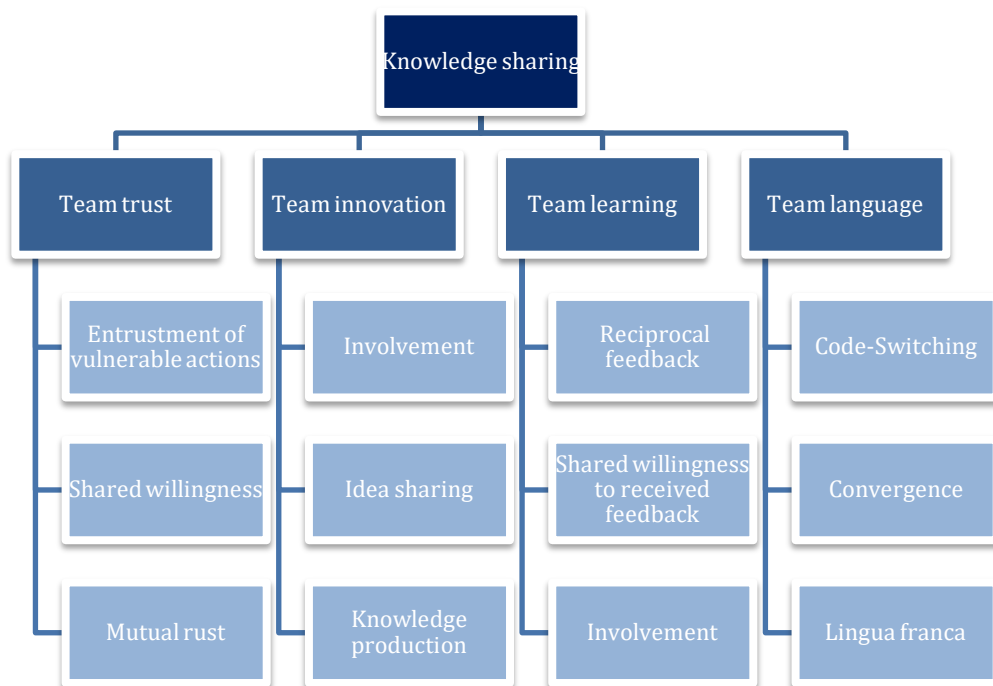|	teams share knowledge?	issues to knowledge sharing that stem from cultural differences?
		3. What are some practices you perform in your team to make sure that cultural issues do not come up?

Appendix B

Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Figure 2: Operational Tree

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