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How Employee Emotions and Interaction Can Benefit Cross-Border Acquisitions

Riikka Harikkala-Laihinen

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ISBN 978-951-29-7760-4 (PRINT)
ISBN 978-951-29-7761-1 (PDF)
ISSN 2343-3159 (Print)
ISSN 2343-3167 (Online)
Painosalama, Turku, Finland 2019

*"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Maya Angelou

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU
Turku School of Economics
Department of Marketing and International Business
International Business
Riikka Harikkala-Laihinen: The Power of Positivity: How Employee Emotions and Interaction Can Benefit Cross-Border Acquisitions
Doctoral Dissertation, 237 pp.
Doctoral Programme of Turku School of Economics
September 2019

ABSTRACT

Earlier research on mergers and acquisitions presents emotions as something problematic and negative that must be neutralized or controlled. However, emotions can also be the reason why individuals or organizations thrive. Thus, this study sets out to determine how employee emotions influence post-acquisition integration, paying particular attention to positivity in emotions. Taking a slightly unorthodox stance, this study adopts an abductive research structure guided by a moderate constructionist research philosophy in order to build a theory that is closely connected to empirical evidence. The empirical evidence that is crucial to abduction arises from an *in vivo* case study in two different acquisitions, where data collection centers on qualitative interviews and employee surveys.

Emotions in general arise through appraisal—an evaluation of how pleasing or displeasing a triggering event is considered. Both individuals and groups can experience them. At work, emotions are triggered by work-related events and can influence work-related behavior. According to the findings of this study, a key positivity trigger at work is interactive communication. Previous research has indeed confirmed that communication is a key aspect during integration because social interaction and employee engagement can create a feeling of belongingness to the new organization. However, emotions are dynamic and vary within and between individuals and groups. According to the findings of this study, a key reason for this evolving nature of emotions is the surrounding emotional climate. An emotional climate refers to a socially constructed *working atmosphere*. It is visible in the predominant collective emotional states that arise through social interaction between organizational members. A positive emotional climate can improve organizational identification and performance, and thereby facilitate organizational change.

The key theoretical contribution of this study is threefold. First, it acknowledges positive emotions. This can help overcome the previous negative bias in the emotion-centric acquisition literature. Second, it considers emotions in a more balanced manner, not as isolated instances but as both individual and collective instances, paying special attention to the relevant emotion triggers. This sheds more light on how and why emotions emerge during change periods, increasing the level of theorization in the field. Third, this study offers a more dynamic view of emotions in an organizational context, also shedding light on how to manage collective emotions following acquisitions. Together, these findings help answer the fundamental question of how to make acquisitions more successful.

For practitioners, the key contribution is in the analytical power of the suggested framework. Managerially, the key elements for creating positive post-acquisition change are the chosen integration strategy and the managerial skills necessary to create the desired positivity. With regard to employee emotions, acknowledging the different levels of emotions and their triggers can help emphasize positivity and alleviate negativity. Simultaneously, an emphasis on the post-acquisition organization can help overcome *us* versus *them* thinking. With regard to communication, information sharing is essential to ensure day-to-day functions, but interaction is crucial for long-term engagement and motivation. With regard to the emotional climate surrounding change, awareness of the pre-acquisition climate and possible sub-climates can help predict fluctuations.

KEYWORDS: Emotions, Positivity, Interaction, Work climate, Integration

TURUN YLIOPISTO
Turun kauppakorkeakoulu
Markkinoinnin ja kansainvälisen liiketoiminnan laitos
Kansainvälinen liiketoiminta
Riikka Harikkala-Laihinen: The Power of Positivity: How Employee Emotions and Interaction Can Benefit Cross-Border Acquisitions
Väitöskirja, 237 s.
Turun kauppakorkeakoulun tohtoriohjelma
Syyskuu 2019

TIIVISTELMÄ

Aiemman yrityskauppakirjallisuuden perusteella tunteet ovat ongelmallisia ja negatiivisia, joten ne täytyy neutralisoida tai niitä täytyy hallita. Tunteet voivat kuitenkin myös olla syy ihmisten ja organisaatioiden kukoistukseen. Siksi tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, miten työntekijöiden tunteet vaikuttavat yrityskauppaintegraatioon. Tutkimus kiinnittää erityistä huomiota tunteiden positiivisuuteen. Korostaakseen teorian ja empirian välistä yhteyttä tutkimus noudattaa abduktiivista, maltillisen konstruktionismin tieteenfilosofian ohjaamaa rakennetta. Abduktiossa keskeinen empiirinen aineisto kumpuaa tapaustutkimuksesta kahdessa yrityskaupassa, joista aineistoa kerättiin pääasiassa laadullisin haastatteluin ja työntekijöille suunnatuin kyselyin.

Tunteet nousevat kognition pohjalta ja perustuvat laukaisevan tekijän tai tapahtuman arvioituun miellyttävyyteen. Tunteita ilmenee sekä yksilö- että ryhmätasolla. Työpaikalla tunteet kumpuavat usein työpaikan tapahtumista ja ne voivat vaikuttaa työntekijöiden käytökseen. Tämän tutkimuksen löydösten perusteella positiivisuutta työpaikalla voi kasvattaa etenkin vuorovaikutteinen kommunikaatio. Aiempi tutkimus onkin vahvistanut kommunikaation tärkeyden yrityskauppaintegraatiossa, sillä sosiaalinen vuorovaikutus ja työntekijöiden osallistaminen voivat luoda yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta uudessa, yrityskaupan jälkeisessä organisaatiossa. Tunteet ovat kuitenkin dynaamisia ja vaihtelevat sekä sisäisesti että eri yksilöiden ja ryhmien välillä. Tämän tutkimuksen tulosten mukaan yksi tärkeä syy tähän dynaamisuuteen on muutosta ympäröivä tunneilmapiiri, mikä viittaa sosiaalisesti rakentuvaan työilmapiiriin. Tunneilmapiiri näkyy yleisimpinä työyhteisön jakamina tunteina, jotka kumpuavat organisaation jäsenten välisestä vuorovaikutuksesta. Positiivinen tunneilmapiiri voi lisätä organisaatioon identifioitumista ja parantaa organisaation tuloksia—ja sitä kautta helpottaa organisaatiomuutosta.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen kontribuutio jakautuu kolmeen osaan. Ensin, tutkimus tunnistaa positiivisten tunteiden merkityksen. Näin tutkimus pääsee yli aiemmassa tunteita käsittelevässä yrityskauppakirjallisuudessa vallitsevasta negatiivisesta ennakkoasetelmasta. Toiseksi, tämä tutkimus tarjoaa tasapainoisen näkökulman tunteisiin eristettyjen instanssien sijaan yksilöllisinä ja kollektiivisina kokemuksina, kiinnittäen erityistä huomiota yrityskaupan aikaisiin tunteita

laukaiseviin tekijöihin. Näin tutkimus lisää tietoa siitä, miten ja miksi tunteita syntyy muutosaikoina, lisäten alan teoreettisuutta. Kolmanneksi, tämä tutkimus käsittelee tunteita dynaamisena organisaatiokontekstin osana ja valottaa tunnejohtamisen periaatteita yrityskauppaintegraatiossa. Yhdessä nämä löydökset auttavat vastaamaan pohjimmaiseen kysymykseen siitä, miten yrityskauppojen onnistumisprosenttia voitaisiin parantaa.

Liikkeenjohdon näkökulmasta tutkimuksen avainkontribuutio on rakennetun viitekehyksen hyöty analyyttisenä ja ennustavana työkaluna. Johdon näkökulmasta avaintekijöitä positiivisen yrityskauppaintegraation luomiseksi ovat valittu integraatiostrategia sekä positiivisuuden ylläpitämiseen tarvittavat johtamiseen liittyvät kyvyt. Työntekijöiden tunteisiin liittyen tunteiden eri tasojen sekä tunteiden syiden tunnistaminen auttavat korostamaan positiivisuutta ja lieventämään huolia. Samaan aikaan positiivisuuden painottaminen voi auttaa yrityskauppojen jälkeen yleisen *me* vastaan *ne* -ajattelun purkamisessa. Kommunikaatioon liittyen tiedon jakaminen on tärkeää päivittäisten toimintojen turvaamiseksi, mutta vuorovaikutteinen osallistuminen on ensisijaista pitkän aikavälin motivaation ja sitoutumisen synnyttämiseksi. Tunneilmapiirin kannalta tietoisuus yrityskauppaa edeltäneestä ilmapiiristä sekä mahdollisista alailmapiireistä on hyödyllistä heilahtelujen ennustamisessa.

ASIASANAT: Tunteet, Positiivisuus, Interaktiivisuus, Työilmapiiri, Integraatio

Acknowledgments

No! Try not. Do, or do not. There is no try.

It was with these words from Jedi Master Yoda, reflected every single day on my computer screen, that I pushed through this project. I began my doctoral journey nearly five years ago. Along the way, I have faced both triumphant and desperate moments, been overjoyed and deeply depressed, thought that my work was just right and nowhere near it. I have felt every possible emotion, but what I have never felt is alone. I have been fortunate enough to stumble upon an encouraging, compassionate, unique group of people I am happy to call friends as well as colleagues.

First, I want to thank my supervisors and mentors, Professor Niina Nummela and University Research Fellow Birgitta Sandberg. Without you, I would have had the stubbornness (with which I am amply endowed) but not the skill to achieve this objective. I consider this piece of work not a testament to my own, but to your skills. Niina, I thank you for your great patience and infinite wisdom. From the very beginning, you have guided me with kindness and encouragement. You have never given me a cross word, you have never ceased to inspire me in what I wanted to do, and you have never given me anything but your fullest attention. Without your guidance and reassurance, completing this thesis would have been incredibly much more difficult, not to mention more difficult to finance. Birgitta, without you I would never have even dreamed of a doctoral degree. I remember how you stopped me after our final master's thesis group meeting to ask whether I had considered post-graduate studies. You saw something in me others did not. You have given me so many ideas to consider, so many thoughts on improvement, so many words of encouragement. You have made me feel competent when I was anything but. I thank you for believing in me from the start and for guiding me throughout this work.

Apart from my supervisors, great acknowledgment and thanks are due to my extremely competent pre-examiners. Professor Neal Ashkanasy, it was an honor to have your comments on my work. I value both your praise and your criticism and will work to improve my future work accordingly. Professor Jeremy Clegg, the depth of your expertise and willingness to help a new researcher overwhelms me. Your advice and encouragement were essential in bringing about this work. I am overjoyed with the chance to welcome you to Turku to act as my esteemed opponent. I look forward to continuing this enjoyable, interesting, and hopefully very productive collaboration for a long time to come.

In addition to academic guidance, my case companies were equally important. I want to thank everyone at Alpha Group for your eager participation and interest in the topic. Without your efforts, this study would never have been born. I also want to give a special thanks to the management and employees of Delta, who trusted me with everything I could ask for to finish my study. I hope you also found this journey beneficial.

No doctoral journey ever succeeds without financing, for which I give thanks to the University of Turku Graduate School and the Marcus Wallenberg Economic Research Foundation. I am also grateful for the stipends offered by Turun Kauppaseuran Säätiö, TOP-Säätiö, the Foundation for Economic Education, Turun Kauppaopetussäätiö, and Turku School of Economics Support Foundation for financing important travel and language-editing costs that have allowed me to finish this work.

At Turku School of Economics, I have been blessed with incredible colleagues. You have all given me so much, and I can only wish to have shown you even a little bit of the same support and friendship I have received over the years. When I first started working in the department of marketing and international business as a research assistant, I was overwhelmed by the kindness and appreciation shown to me by all of the staff. I cannot tell you how much your encouragement helped me in finding as well as realizing my future as a researcher. I wish to thank each and every one of my current and former colleagues in the IB faculty and beyond.

I especially want to thank my fellow doctoral candidates for being there when I needed to sound off my ideas as well as when I needed to divert to something a little less confusing than academia. When I first began, I was taken in by a group of inspirational, motivated, and talented people I immediately felt comfortable with. All of the current and former doctoral candidates have had a part in forming this chapter of my life, and for that, I am truly thankful. I expressly want to thank M.Sc. Isabel Galvis, M.Sc. Sanna Ilonen, M.Sc. Elisa Kallio, M.Sc. Mari Ketolainen, M.Sc. Danijela Majdenic, and M.Sc. Sini Nordberg-Davies for their friendship and support over the years. I am in awe of your skills and of your wonderful personalities. Each of you has a very special way of making the sun shine through rainclouds. May you never lose that ability. The same goes—and with a most special thanks—to *the breakfast club*, M.Sc. Anna Karhu and Associate Professor, D.Sc. Eriikka Paavilainen-Mäntymäki. You have kept me going so many times, refueling both my body and my mind. Without our morning meetings, this thesis would never have been born. I cannot thank you enough.

During the first two years of my doctoral studies, I had the pleasure and the privilege to be a part of the EmoMA research project. During this time, I was greatly impressed and influenced by D.Sc. Melanie Hassett and D.Sc. Johanna Raitis. Thank you, ladies, for giving me such a beautiful example of excellence and passion. I strive to meet your standards. Over the final two years of my studies, I was also taught a lot about teaching. I want to thank D.Sc. Peter Zettinig, D.Sc. Valtteri Kaartemo, and D.Sc. William Degbey for supporting and guiding me, but also allowing me to develop a voice of my own. I also want to thank D.Sc. Elina Pelto and D.Sc. Esa Stenberg for helping me develop my skills as a thesis supervisor.

During my studies, I have had the privilege of working as a board member for TuKKKilaiset ry. I want to thank my fellow board members for the joyful moments we have shared. Moreover, I thank all the members of our unofficial TSE exercise group for the laughs we have shared and the sweat we have shed. You have been an absolute joy to teach. I am particularly grateful also to M.Sc. Jenni Heervä, Ms. Auli Rahkala-Toivonen, M.Sc. Sanna Kuusjärvi, and M.Sc. Sanna Hirvola for their friendship and tireless help in practical matters over the years.

Finally, I want to thank my family. My husband Pasi, who has stood by me for longer than most couples can say at our age, I thank for always lifting me higher during moments of euphoria and picking me up during moments of despair. Thank you for accepting my quirky bits with the more elegant. To my sisters Salla, Jenni, and Marja, and their lovely families, I want to say thank you for keeping my feet on the ground. Together we have shared many tears and many times of laughter. Thank you for blessing me with such beautiful nieces and nephews. To my mother, who has always supported me with all that she has and all that she is, I wish to say that this accomplishment is not my greatest achievement so far, despite what she will tell me. What I consider my greatest accomplishment in life is to be able to grow a little bit more like her with each passing day. Although I will never reach her level of kind-heartedness and warmth, I consider this a worthwhile course of life-long learning. Finally, I thank my father, without whom I would never have had the obstinacy to finish this work. I hope I have made you proud.

Turku, 20.8.2019
Riikka Harikkala-Laihinen

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1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation

Where is the place for humanity in the bottom line of a company? Quite often business is reduced to numbers: profit and loss statements, returns on investment, and so forth. But those numbers do not drive themselves. Behind most actions there is a person, be it the CEO who decides the strategic direction of the company, the salesclerk typing orders in, or the line worker twisting the bolts. We sometimes unconsciously imagine that the corporate world still functions much as Charlie Chaplin's factory in *Modern Times*. Yet we often forget the humanity behind all of this. The decisive issue is that we do not stop being humans as we enter the workplace. We do not stop having emotions, we do not become entirely predictable, and we do not consider ourselves as summed up by numbers on a company fact sheet. But why does this matter?

As researchers have determined how humanity pierces organizations, increasing attention has been paid to the *soft* side of business. Still, efficiency and costs continue to be among the buzzwords of the business community: The *brain* (the *hard*, traditional business concerns) still receives much attention whereas the *heart and soul* (the *soft* side) of a company receives relatively little. Yet what causes concern is the rising amount of distrust and dissatisfaction among employees. (Karlgaard 2014.) As scholarly attention has likewise turned toward the soft side, "it is becoming clear that emotion dimensions pervade the entire spectrum of human behavior and interaction, including organizations" (Ashkanasy 2003, 10).

The mergers and acquisitions[1] literature in particular tends to treat this complex issue through *ticking the box*. This box is often named Human Resource Management (HRM), and entails everything from retaining talent, preventing redundancies, and deciding on salaries, to changing the corporate culture. But the value of a company can no longer be measured entirely through its tangible assets.

1 In many studies, the words merger and acquisition are interchangeable, with the abbreviation M&A referring to both. However, as acquisitions are more common than mergers of equals (e.g. Raitis, Harikkala-Laihinen, Hassett & Nummela 2017), this study mainly uses the term acquisition.

The true value of the company is increasingly found in its employees. It is the employees, a group of individuals with specific knowledge and skills, who are often the key to a company's worth—much more so than the office buildings or the machinery the company owns, or even the products they sell. (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010.) So how, then, is the human factor taken into account in acquisition research?

Over the past 30 years or so, increasing attention has indeed been paid to the human side of acquisitions (e.g. Sarala, Vaara & Junni 2019; Cartwright & Cooper 1993). This stream of research has increased the depth of understanding acquisitions not just in terms of hard, cold facts, but as softer human processes (Cartwright & Cooper 1995). The hard and the soft aspects of acquisitions have been combined into a typology of task and human integration, where the necessity of completing both to a satisfactory level is discussed as the key to a successful acquisition. Whereas task integration focuses on operational synergies, the objective of human integration is to create positive attitudes and unify organizational cultures. Consequently, a focus on only one aspect causes sub-optimal outcomes. Concentrating only on human integration will create satisfied employees but prohibit the realization of operational synergies, whereas focusing only on task integration will enable achieving synergies but at the cost of employee welfare. (Birkinshaw, Bresman & Håkanson 2000.)

Stemming from the literature focusing on the human side, acquisitions are seen as a process of adaptation rather than as singular events in the involved companies' life cycles (Cartwright & Cooper 1995). A growing body of literature dedicated to investigating the softer aspects of acquisitions argues that failure is often a consequence of socio-cultural challenges faced in the post-acquisition integration stage (e.g. Raitis et al. 2018; Marks & Mirvis 2011; Birkinshaw et al. 2000; Cartwright & Cooper 1993; Datta 1991; Buono, Bowditch & Lewis 1985). Socio-cultural challenges are most likely to influence human integration, which refers to the changes made to the organizational structure and culture following an acquisition (Birkinshaw et al. 2000; Shrivastava 1986). From the human point of view, the process is often called acculturation: the coming together, clashing, and adaptation of two previously separate cultures (Rottig, Reus & Tarba 2013; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh 1988). Acculturation in acquisitions refers to a process where a unified culture is formed from two previously separate sets of organizational beliefs, assumptions, and values (Larsson & Lubatkin 2001). However, the conflict and adaptation that are necessary for acculturation often lead to change resistance. At worst this may trigger the *merger syndrome*—a fear-the-worst response causing major stress in the affected employees (e.g. Sinkovics, Zagelmeyer & Kusstatscher 2011; Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Marks & Mirvis 1997).

Successful acculturation following acquisitions also seems to depend on social controls utilized in the integration process. This requires the socialization of affected employees, for example, through information exchange, training, or social gatherings. (Larsson & Lubatkin 2001.) In practice, socio-cultural integration necessitates the creation of a joint culture. Problems often arise when there are differences in the acquisition partners' norms and values (Stahl et al. 2013). Individuals are always attached to learned cultures. Thus, any changes in organizational culture are experienced as difficult. (Bastien 1987.) During acquisitions, culture clashes manifest themselves in perceiving and polarizing all possible differences between the acquisition partners, stereotyping, and putting the acquisition partner down as having a less desirable organizational culture (Marks & Mirvis 2011).

Thus it is clear that acquisitions can be very stressful (e.g. Ager 2011) and raise a myriad of emotions. Therefore, the emotions of the employees affected by the acquisition influence integration. Following this notion, acquisition researchers have studied emotions from various perspectives, including acquisition outcomes, culture, identity, employee behavior, change, emotion regulation, coping, and stress (e.g. Durand 2016; Fink & Yolles 2015; Gunkel, Schlaegel, Rossteutscher & Wolff 2015; Reus 2012; Clarke & Salleh 2011; Fugate, Kinicki & Scheck 2002; Kiefer 2002; Buono & Nurick 1992; Nahavandi & Malekzadeh 1988). They have found that during acquisitions, emotions mainly arise as a response to challenges employees perceive in upholding organizational values or objectives. Thus, emotions may arise even before the deal takes place and can significantly outlast formal integration. Nevertheless, emotions usually peak at the time of the public announcement or during integration. (Sinkovics et al. 2011.)

Positive emotions[2] in particular are crucial for successful socio-cultural integration (Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Birkinshaw et al. 2000), and can be created, for example, through communication (Raitis et al. 2017). Indeed, communication can help managers alleviate the anxieties and uncertainty related to the acquisition and thus decrease change resistance. (e.g. Angwin, Mellahi, Gomes & Peter 2016; Weber & Tarba 2010; Schweiger & Denisi 1991.) Yet social cohesion can be achieved primarily through open, two-way communication (Morrison 2017; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006). Rich, frequent, and interactive communication, which is also reflective and positive, helps engage employees in the post-acquisition change and enhances socio-cultural integration (Angwin et al. 2016; Clayton 2010). However, current research lags behind in giving organizations guidelines on how to achieve the positive climate that would encourage socio-cultural integration. This leads us to the identified research gaps.

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2 By *positive*, this study always refers to an experienced quality. Simplified, the felt quality can be divided between pleasure (e.g. positive emotions or positive interaction) or displeasure (e.g. negative emotions or negative interaction) (Lazarus 1991a). This issue is discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

1.2. Research Gaps and Positioning

1.2.1. Mergers and Acquisitions

This study is mainly positioned among the acquisition literature focusing on the human aspects of integration. Although emotions have recently gained popularity as a topic of interest in acquisition research, much of the discussion remains inconsistent and undertheorized (Zagelmeyer, Sinkovics, Sinkovics & Kusstatscher 2016, Reus 2012; cf. Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017). The crucial influence of both positive and negative emotions on employees and thereby on organizations has been identified, but this issue has not yet gained the attention it deserves in the acquisition literature (Kusstatscher 2006). Indeed, acquisition researchers have expressed the opinion that “despite the affirmation of importance, the role of emotions in international mergers and acquisitions is a relatively neglected area in management and international business research” (Sinkovics et al. 2011, 28). Despite recent advances, more research is thus necessary to create conceptual clarity and fully understand how emotions play a role during acquisitions.

Previous research on emotions during acquisitions has centered on employees’ negative affective states—for example, acculturative stress, change resistance, and the fear of losing one’s job. The focus has been on how to overcome these negative issues. (e.g. Sinkovics et al. 2011; Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Marks & Mirvis 2001; Cartwright & Cooper 1993.) However, acquisitions can also raise positive emotions such as pride or happiness (Kusstatscher 2006). Unfortunately, the previous literature concludes that emotions emerge primarily in the acquired company, that they are triggered by personal circumstances, and are mainly negative. Thus, they are assumed to cause poor organizational outcomes. (Graebner, Heimeriks, Huy & Vaara 2017.) Therefore, rather than examine specific emotional reactions or affective states, a more balanced viewpoint exploring the wide range of emotions that can emerge following an acquisition is necessary. In addition, research on positive emotions and outcomes seems narrow, prompting further attention.

Indeed, a focus on positivity has been suggested as a very fruitful addition to socio-cultural integration research (Stahl et al. 2013). Whereas negative emotions can strengthen employee identification with the pre-acquisition organization, positive emotions may generate a stronger identity in the post-acquisition organization (Raitis et al. 2017; Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005). Thus, the role of positivity during post-acquisition integration necessitates further research. Furthermore, during acquisitions, employees perceive many challenges, for example, caused by cultural differences, geographical distance, language, and market structures. Thus, placing emphasis on how the acquisition process is experienced and interpreted offers deeper insight into the process. Still, individual viewpoints are often left out in preference of aggregates. (Risberg 2001.) This has led to a limited understanding of how acquisitions influence employee reactions over time (Marmenout 2011). Therefore, obtaining a balanced view necessitates the involvement of all employees affected by the change process.

1.2.2. Change Management

Because an acquisition by nature initiates at least some change within a company—at the very least, a change in ownership—, this study is also positioned in the field of change management. Most notably, the change management literature to date has not considered the emergence and influence of emotions in social structures in depth (Zietsma, Toubiana, Voronov & Roberts 2019). As previous studies have failed to suggest how collective emotions can be managed following acquisitions (Huy 2012), the link between individual and group emotions offers a fruitful research avenue also from the viewpoint of change management. Indeed, it has been suggested that the change management literature in general would benefit from insights into active emotion management (Steigenberger 2015). The change management literature has encouraged organizations to develop positive change climates in order to ease change, but just how to do so requires further exploration. Thus, in order to help change management to develop a positive change climate, a closer focus on specific emotions that emerge during change is necessary. (Dixon, Lee & Ghaye 2016.) Although initial evidence has been found regarding the importance of communication and positivity for effective change, guidelines on how to generate the necessary positive climate are still scarce (Canning & Found 2015). Furthermore, the change management literature could benefit from further research into how the change environment influences individual emotions (Helpap & Bekmeier-Feuerhahn 2016).

Although previous research has found that the climate surrounding change will predict change outcomes to some extent, just how to make those predictions remains unclear (Schultz, Sjøvold & Andre 2017). However, it is known that during change, creating and maintaining a positive climate is largely dependent on communication (Ashkanasy & Daus 2002). Although the existing literature emphasizes the significance of communication (e.g. Angwin et al. 2016; Weber & Tarba 2010; Schweiger & Denisi 1991), less is known about how different communication means influence post-acquisition change. More particularly, the effect of specific communication practices and tools on the dynamics of post-acquisition integration remains unclear (Graebner et al. 2017). Consequently, the efficiency of communication in overcoming potential conflict following an acquisition necessitates further research (Angwin et al. 2016; Weber & Drori 2011).

1.2.3. Emotion in Organizations

Emotion research in organizations centers on affective experiences while working rather than on emotions relating to the job itself (Fisher 2002). The relationship between emotions and organizations has previously been studied from many viewpoints. The first popularized stream following the rise of emotion studies in the 1980s–1990s focused on explaining specific, individual emotions. Today, this stream centers on emotional concerns like stress, burnout, job satisfaction, or leaders' emotion traits. Conversely, a second literature stream considers emotions as a facet of organizational culture; a quality within the organization as well as in the individual. (Rafaeli & Worline 2001.) Herein, this second view is adopted.

Because this study takes particular interest in the human, emotional side of acquisitions, it is also connected to research on emotion in organizations. If organizations are indeed saturated with emotions, organizational behavior is best understood when the underlying individual emotional processes are revealed (Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017). Much of the emotion research to date does not focus on the process of elicitation, but on its outcome—the labeled emotion. However, a closer look at the dynamics within the process of elicitation can contribute to a more coherent theoretical understanding of emotion research in organizations. (Scherer & Moors 2019.) Indeed, human behavior is a complex, interactive process, further highlighting the need for understanding the dynamic nature of emotional reactions in organizational settings (Ashkanasy, Humphrey & Huy 2017).

Although emotions are subjective, and therefore divergence can occur, membership in a particular social group is likely to generate at least some level of uniformity in members' emotional experiences (Menges & Kilduff 2015). Indeed, future research can reveal how individual and group emotions influence wider, organizational spheres (Parke & Seo 2017). Thus, researchers have been encouraged to look at emotions on the individual as well as group and collective levels. More particularly, existing research lags behind in pointing out how individual- and group-level emotions are connected to organizational-level outcomes. (Ashkanasy et al. 2017; Menges & Kilduff 2015.)

1.2.4. Positive Organizational Scholarship

Because the previous acquisition literature seems to be biased toward negative emotions, this study highlights positivity. It does not exclude negative aspects but reveals how companies could harness the positive to help overcome the negative. Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) offers a justification for this. It concentrates on phenomena that may not be representative of a broadly defined context, but are unexpectedly positive (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn 2003). This focus highlights positive leadership, and the influence that a positive climate, positive relationships, positive communication, and positive meaning can have on organizational success (Cameron 2012). Because of this shift in focus, POS can result in significantly different theoretical conclusions than other lenses can (Caza & Caza 2008).

One source of improvement capacity that is central in POS research is the generation of positive emotions (Cameron et al. 2003). Indeed, it has been proven that an emphasis on positive over negative inputs makes human beings thrive (Cameron 2017). For example, Fredrickson's (e.g. 2013, 2001) *broaden-and-build theory* emphasizes the power of positivity. According to this theory, the dominance of positive over negative emotions leads to an increased thought spectrum, enhanced creativity, and wider information-processing ability. These benefits outlast the experienced emotion and in the long term build a personal reserve of resources, and even increased psychological resilience. The advantage of this broadening effect is in the accumulated long-term personal resources that can be employed when tackling future threats. Moreover, this positive personal reserve can be utilized to regulate subsequent negative emotion experiences and build toward improved emotional well-being.

Positivity has also been connected to individual and organizational success. For example, it has been determined that team positivity is an important predictor of team performance (West, Patera & Carsten 2009). Similarly, positivity has been found to increase employee engagement and ease organizational change (Avey, Wernsing & Luthans 2008). Positivity within organizations is decisive in generating an organizational climate where positive behaviors can occur and be promoted (Luthans & Youssef 2007). Nevertheless, it is important to note that POS does not assume that organizations can, or indeed should, achieve perfect harmony and happiness—rather, POS stipulates that striving toward positive outcomes will be more beneficial for organizational outcomes than striving to neutralize negative outcomes will be. It is also noteworthy to consider that a positive organizational outcome does not only mean improved organizational performance but includes positive actions and attitudes. As such, POS can be thought to set unattainable standards. However, in practice this means that POS acknowledges that positive organizational states cannot be achieved merely through reversing negativity. (Roberts 2006.)

In international business research, POS has been introduced especially as a way to overcome the imbalance between studies focusing on negative and positive aspects of diversity, distance, or foreignness. The existing literature in international business strongly emphasizes the negative, which can prevent full understanding of the potential benefits of diversity. (Stahl, Tung, Kostova & Zellmer-Bruhn 2016.) Furthermore, it is likely that a focus on the positive produces especially beneficial results. Positivity can help overcome the liabilities of foreignness and to improve the human condition beyond a focus on solving immediate problems. (Cameron 2017.) In this study, a focus on employee emotions will allow for a novel understanding on how to create positivity that may ease organizational life—for example, following a cross-border acquisition. Figure 1 portrays the focus of this research at the intersection of the discussed fields of literature.

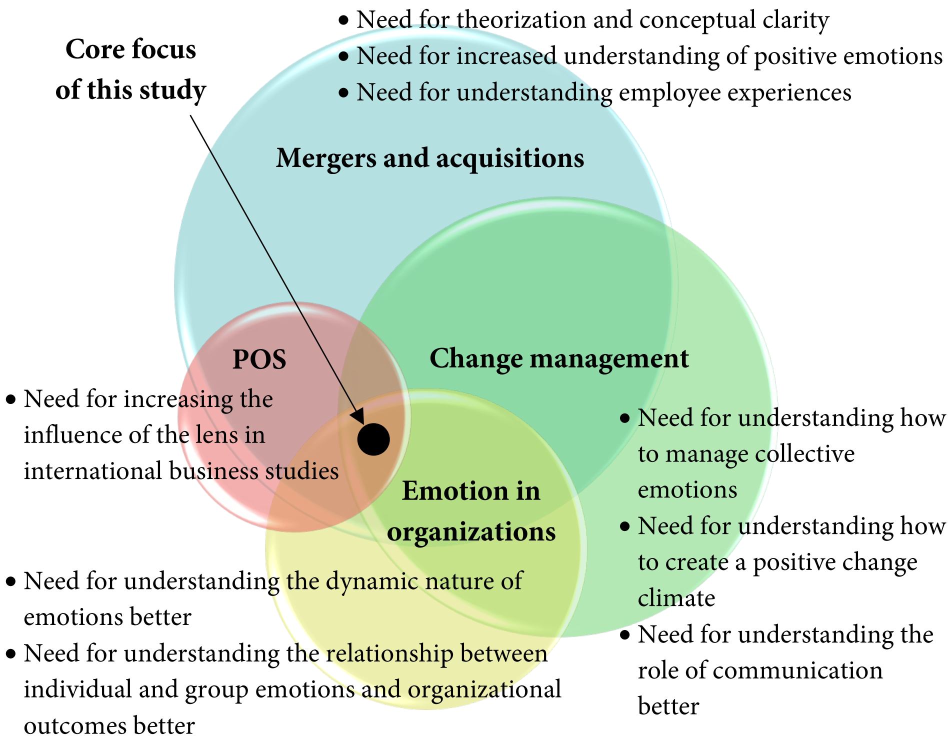

Figure 1. Positioning the study

The relative sizes of the circles in figure 1 reflect the expected importance of the contribution of this study to that field. The key areas where current research is lagging behind in each field are also highlighted, as these are the points to which this study seeks to contribute. Just how that contribution is to be made is reflected in the research objectives stemming from the identified gaps.

1.3. Problematization and Research Objectives

Based on the above, the objective of this study is to find the means for supporting positivity during post-acquisition integration in order to ease the integration process and thereby improve acquisition outcomes. More particularly, this study seeks to answer the question: How do employee emotions influence cross-border acquisition integration? In order to find an in-depth answer, three sub-questions are used to guide the study:

1. What triggers emotions following acquisitions?
2. What is the relationship between interaction and emotions?
3. How does an emotional climate evolve following acquisitions?

The key point for problematization (Alvesson & Sandberg 2011) in this research is the fact that the previous acquisition literature assumes that emotions in general are negative for acquisition performance. However, empirical evidence suggests that this is not the case; apart from the possibility of positive emotions being triggered (e.g. Kusstatscher 2006), emotions can have positive outcomes (e.g. Raitis et al. 2017). Thus, it could very well be assumed that emotions, as a part of the human experience, are also a positive factor in organizational life. Nevertheless, previous research has also proven that emotions can have negative effects such as with the merger syndrome described above. This contrast highlights the relevance of the main research question.

Apart from theoretical interest, this research stems from a practical problem encountered in many companies. In the course of integration, organizations may be subject to major changes that employees experience as threats to the distinctive features of the company. This can lead employees to adopt protectionist attitudes and thereby endanger the sought after synergy benefits. (Menges & Kilduff 2015.) Although much research has focused on solving this issue, the consistently poorer-than-wished-for acquisition outcomes point out that an answer is yet to be found. Through an emphasis on emotions and positivity, this study calls to question the dominance of negative outcomes as the focus of socio-cultural integration research and offers novel insights into how to overcome difficulties during post-acquisition integration.

In order to be able to support positivity following acquisitions, the triggers that create positivity must be determined. Therefore, this study will begin with examining how emotions emerge—what triggers them following acquisitions. As previous research has suggested that there is a link between communication and emotion, this study will pay special attention to that relationship. Furthermore, as it has been found that the context in which emotions emerge and the existence of social groups directly influence emotional experiences, this study will examine the evolving emotional climate following acquisitions.

Seeing as emotions are rather short-lived experiences and thus can even change quickly (e.g. Fredrickson 2001), investigating them as they naturally occur alongside integration activities has been encouraged (Sinkovics et al. 2011). Furthermore, this study considers acquisitions that can be described as friendly, meaning that both shareholders and management are involved in the acceptance of an offer. This is opposed to the definition of a hostile takeover, where management is overlooked and an offer is made directly to shareholders, who may accept or decline individually. (Schnitzer 1996.) This focus is deemed necessary, seeing as it is likely that following a hostile takeover employee emotions will be particularly negative and thus may bias findings (Fink & Yolles 2015; Cartwright & Cooper 1993; Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991).

Furthermore, this study places emphasis on the human side of acquisitions. Thus, the focus is on the socio-cultural integration literature. However, it has been found that employees tend to react to all integration-related changes as suggested by the literature on the human aspects (Teerikangas & Irrmann 2016). Therefore, this study does not make a fundamental separation between task and human integration, but rather considers the integration as a whole, as experienced by the employees. Nevertheless, the acquisition literature often discusses the particular characteristics of the socio-cultural environment surrounding the involved organizations. This, and the cross-border nature of the study at hand, warrants a closer look at cross-border acquisitions as a research context.

1.4. Cross-Border Acquisitions as a Research Context

1.4.1. Basics of Post-Acquisition Integration

Acquisitions are in essence a type of growth strategy (cf. Cartwright & Cooper 1993). Fundamentally, through acquisitions, companies seek to build competitive advantage (Lin, Chen & Chu 2015). Following a decline prompted by the economic downturn in 2008, cross-border acquisitions are again increasing in popularity. The acquisition process can be divided into pre- and post-acquisition phases, separated by the date of formal transfer of ownership (Gomes, Angwin, Weber & Tarba 2013). The *pre-acquisition* phase consists of scouting, planning, and decision-making. The suitability of the chosen target is ensured through an extensive due diligence process, during which strategic fit is a key concern. Because the negotiation process may be lengthy and become visible, for example, in freezing recruitment or discontinuing training, suspicions and rumors tend to emerge. (Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005.) Nevertheless, in the *post-acquisition* phase the planned synergies are—hopefully—realized. This calls for an atmosphere where resources and skills can be effectively transferred. Effective communication, interaction, and cooperation are necessary between the two companies at all levels. The transfer of skills, which is crucial in the realization of projected outcomes, can only succeed if both acquisition partners show an understanding and appreciation of each other's differences in structure, processes, and culture. (Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Birkinshaw et al. 2000.)

During the post-acquisition phase, integration, organizational activities, and assets, both material and immaterial, are combined in order to bring out synergy benefits. This process includes the amalgamation of procedures, physical infrastructure, and managerial practices. (Shrivastava 1986.) However, it must be noted that integration is not always necessary. Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991; cf. Angwin & Meadows 2015) suggest four main alternatives for integration strategies based on the need for strategic interdependence and organizational autonomy (figure 2). These are called *preservation* (keep acquired benefits intact), *symbiosis* (coexistence and gradual interdependence), *holding* (do nothing), and *absorption* (full consolidation). The optimal integration strategy differs from deal to deal, depending on where the deal lies with regard to strategic interdependence and organizational autonomy needs. For example, the focus-increasing (vertical/horizontal) or -decreasing (diversifying) nature of the deal will make a great difference in determining the most suitable integration approach. Whereas in focus-increasing acquisitions it seems that integration is essential in order to realize synergies, in focus-decreasing acquisitions integration may even be detrimental for future performance. (Daniliuc, Bilson & Shailer 2014.)

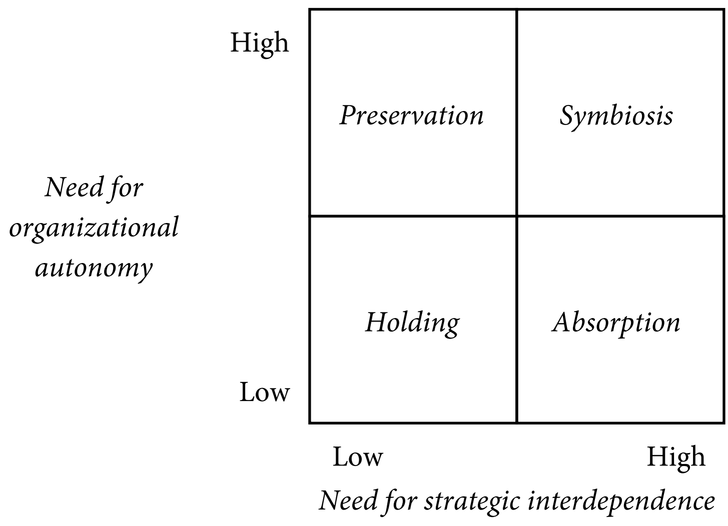

Figure 2. Types of acquisition integration approaches (Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991, 145)

Viewing post-acquisition integration from an HRM perspective reveals several overlaps between possible acquisition strategies, post-acquisition integration strategies, and HRM practices. Should the strategic reasoning behind the deal lie in absorbing tangible assets, its implementation is largely the responsibility of the acquirer. Thus, the acquired organization has very little autonomy, whereas the acquirer holds all the power. This likely leads to minimal interfirm trust and diminishes the role of HRM in recruiting suitable skills and removing redundancies. However, should the deal be prompted by a wish to capture intangible assets such as capabilities, the acquired organization is likely to have a little more say in the matter. The acquired organization may be given some operational and tactical liberty, but the acquirer still holds most of the power. Interfirm trust is likely to be a little higher, and the role of HRM usually also includes performance and development programs, employee retention, and motivation initiatives. Finally, should the deal be based on creating new, joint opportunities, power is likely to be shared more equally between the acquisition partners both in terms of strategy and operations. The relationship therefore encourages trust and synergistic behavior, and the role of HRM increases to engagement and empowerment. (Brueller, Carmeli & Markman 2018.)

Based on the previous literature, it seems that organizational culture compatibility can be a crucial determinant of success and therefore should influence the choice of integration strategy. There are three main categories of cultural change following an acquisition. The least intrusive is an *extension merger*, where the target is left to operate much as it did before. Next is a *collaborative merger*, where integration is necessary to actualize performance. The most intrusive category is a *redesign merger*, where major changes are introduced in the target to comply with the acquirer's culture. (Cartwright & Cooper 1993; Napier 1989; cf. Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991.) Whereas systematic tools exist for evaluating strategic fit, the assessment of culture fit is less guided. Thus, the culture fit is often neglected or evaluated intuitively. This is sub-optimal, as organizational culture crashes following acquisitions lead to increased stress and absenteeism and decreased productivity. Moreover, in order to modify—or amalgamate—organizational cultures, the features of each culture must be identified and addressed. The purpose of such cultural auditing is to find the (dis)similarities in the organizational cultures of the acquisition partners in order to prepare for integration. (Cartwright & Cooper 1993.) Although it is claimed that increased cultural distance increases the difficulty of cross-cultural contact, studies have shown the relationship to be much more complex (Stahl & Voigt 2008). Nevertheless, where organizational cultures collide, stress and absenteeism increase while productivity decreases (Cartwright & Cooper 1993). However, during cross-border acquisitions, not only the organizational but also the national cultures may play a role.

1.4.2. Culture in Cross-Border Acquisitions

National culture is a systematic, integrated entity, which entails learned behavior based on shared tradition. Children growing up in a particular society, and to some extent also others entering the society, adopt it naturally through social interaction. In this sense, culture is a much larger entity than arts, science, religion, or philosophy; culture spans all aspects of life, including political systems, technological development, and daily habits such as cooking, eating, or childcare. (Mead 1953.) Hofstede (1997, 6) has illustrated the concept of culture as "human mental programming" (figure 3).

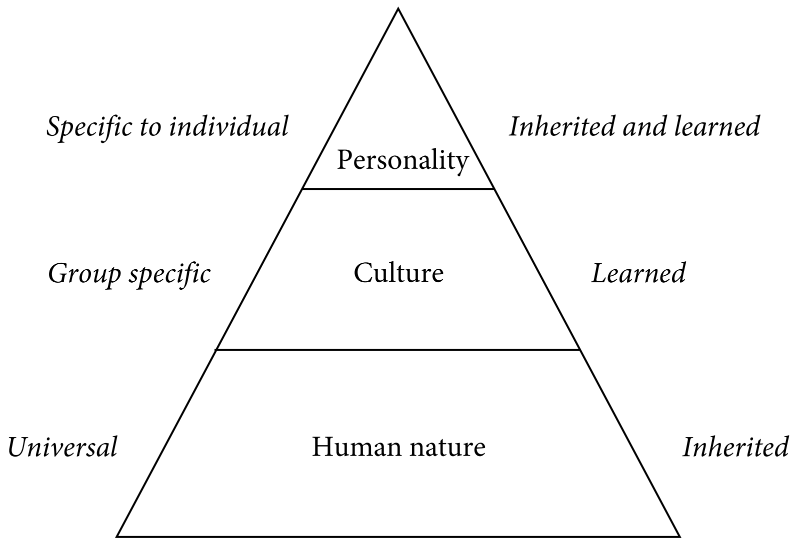

Figure 3. Three levels of uniqueness in human mental programming (adapted from Hofstede 1997, 6)

By human mental programming, Hofstede[3] means the innate patterns of thought, feeling, and action each individual develops throughout the course of their life. This *software* can be divided into three categories: human nature, culture, and personality. Whereas human nature is universal and inherited—that is, present in each human being through their genetic make-up—, culture is learned. Culture is always a unifying force among a group of people; it is learned in and specific to a social environment. There is no sensible way to rank cultures intrinsically; each is

3 The critique regarding Hofstede's work (e.g. Ailon 2008) is not overlooked here, but most of the critique seems to be directed at the measures of culture. Conversely, in this study, Hofstede's argumentation is used as an explanation of what culture is, not to describe and separate specific cultures.

unique and cannot be judged based on another. Culture together with human nature creates the base on which individual personality is built. Personality is specific to a single individual and consists of inherited traits that have been modified by the surrounding environment as well as by past experience. (Hofstede 1997.)

Culture, simply put, thus consists of shared ethical and moral principles and expectations that are common to a specific group of people. Consequently, interaction with people from different cultures is more complicated due to differences in preferred communication styles and even thought processes. Understanding the existence of these elementary differences is crucial in understanding the dissimilarity of values and conventions that arise from these differences. It is equally important to understand that such differences do not make any one culture better or worse than another. (Mukherjee & Ramos-Salazar 2014.) Still, differences in cultures have been found to cause problems in social interaction and communication following acquisitions (Vaara 2003). In the acquisition literature, the lack of cultural compatibility has indeed often been reported as the main cause of problems in the post-acquisition integration (e.g. Cartwright & Schoenberg 2006; Datta 1991).

Culture influences how individuals interpret events and what reactions or responses are triggered by the interpretations (Schneider & de Meyer 1991). In the end, culture accounts for the difference between what is said and what is meant. The understanding of when *no* means *maybe* or *tomorrow* means *never* is culturally bound. (Hall & Whyte 1960.) Therefore, a cross-cultural etiquette is desirable to create interpersonal relationships and understand differences. Moreover, cultural sensitivity is crucial in effective cross-cultural communication. (Okoro 2012.) A child is often told to "Mind your manners!", yet sometimes even experienced businesspeople overlook this important lesson. Nevertheless, some universals exist in the norms of social interaction also in the business world. For example, the practice of courtesy—respect and consideration in social behavior—is expected of everyone (Buss 1999). Similarly, politeness is a universal value in social interaction. In the business context, politeness can be viewed as a linguistic tool. When faced with a situation that can have negative repercussions, individuals tend to soften the blow by way of defrayal. Instead of attacking others with harsh words, openings such as "You make an interesting point, but you might consider…" are used. Such mediating actions are essential in social interaction because they lessen friction and help establish cooperation. (Morand 1995.)

In cross-border acquisitions, the influence of culture is often discussed from the viewpoint of how similar or dissimilar the acquisition partners' cultures are (Schoenberg 2000; Weber, Shenkar & Raveh 1996; Cartwright & Cooper 1993). Previous research supports both the view that cultural differences hinder acquisition performance, for example, due to increased costs (e.g. Datta & Puia 1995; Chatterjee, Lubatkin, Schweiger & Weber 1992), and the view that differences enhance acquisition performance, for example, through the benefits of increased diversity (e.g. Chakrabarti, Gupta-Mukherjee & Jayaraman 2009; Morosini, Shane & Singh 1998). Thus, culture has been argued to be a double-edged sword in acquisitions (e.g. Rottig 2017; Stahl & Voigt 2008; Very, Lubatkin & Calori 1996), with, for example, experience in cross-cultural management (Popli, Akbar, Kumar & Gaur 2016; Dikova & Rao Sahib 2013) or the level of integration (Bauer, Matzler & Wolf 2016; Slangen 2006) suggested as the key determinants.

In business contexts, one must still be able to determine a separation between the different layers of culture. Societal culture may refer to national, organizational, or even narrower spheres. Due to globalization, national origin is no longer a clear signal of the culture with which an individual identifies. (Darlington 1996.) Indeed, the acquisition literature most often makes a division between the influence of national and organizational culture (Schoenberg 2000). Some researchers even argue that the role of national culture in post-acquisition integration is less pronounced than that of organizational culture (Sarala 2010; Stahl & Voigt 2008; Schweizer 2005). Moreover, as discussed with regard to POS, this study does not aim to highlight differences between cultures. As this study does not focus on the national level, an emphasis on national cultures is deemed unnecessary (Dauber 2012). Nevertheless, it is important for the reader to know that such cultural differences do exist and may play a role in how employees experience post-acquisition integration. Still, this study does not focus on examining the potential national cultural differences between acquisition partners, but rather emphasizes the way employees experience such differences. Yet, in employee experiences, culture can also play a major role through its influence on emotions.

1.4.3. Culture and Emotions

The ability to experience emotions belongs to the universal level of human mental programming, but how these experiences are expressed and what they result in is shaped by the surrounding culture and an individual's personality. In order to explore the interconnections between culture and emotion, it is also necessary to make a separation between different *layers* of emotion: emotional experience and emotional expression. Emotional experience is an individual, internal reaction. Emotional expression, however, is visible to the outside world. Emotional expressions occur both spontaneously (e.g. smiling at a pleasant sight or in return to another's smile) and strategically (e.g. in expressing emotions verbally or reacting in a socially acceptable way, disregarding personal experience). (Guerrero, Andersen & Trost 1996.) Culture can have an impact on both layers; internally by defining what is an acceptable emotional reaction, and externally by determining how to express emotions.

Cross-cultural differences between emotional expressions are vast. Culture has an impact on certain aspects of expression such as bodily movement, frequency, and visibility. For example, a cultural norm of always being polite will impact emotional expressions in social contexts; it would not be prudent to display, for instance, anger toward another. Culture influences how, which, and to whom emotions can be expressed, which events trigger which emotions, whether group or individual outcomes are emphasized, how the context influences interpretation, and what kind of non-verbal behavior is considered acceptable (Porter & Samovar 1996). Culture can also influence emotions simply through the number of verbal expressions available to describe them. Language is a way to discuss and make sense of emotions. Emotion vocabulary captures the sameness of a certain category of a psychological and physiological state (i.e. enables the use of *labels*) as well as offering a means for researchers to examine individual experiences of emotions (i.e. a way to analyze verbal accounts). (Ogarkova, Borgeaud & Scherer 2009.)

It can be assumed that there is a universal relationship between emotions and events of perceived importance. Nevertheless, what is deemed a good or pleasant outcome of such events will differ according to ideals and accustomed norms. (Mesquita & Karasawa 2002.) One important reason for differing emotions rests in differences in individual appraisal. Evaluating an event as pleasant or unpleasant is highly subjective. Therefore, the same event may give rise to very different emotions in different individuals. (Scherer 1997.) On a cultural level, different outcomes of appraisal can also stem from different emphases. For example, some cultures value independence: a focus on the self and personal accomplishment. Others prefer interdependence: fitting in with a group and promoting common goals. Such differences can be found, for example, between the American and Japanese cultures. American independence seeks achievement and self-esteem, whereas Japanese interdependence focuses on the avoidance of disruption and of a loss of face. However, the two are not mutually exclusive; rather the emphasis varies. (Mesquita & Karasawa 2002.)

Similarly, the norms for feeling emotions may greatly influence emotional experiences. For example, if an individual is prone to value positive emotions, he or she is more likely alert to events that may trigger positive emotions, may appraise a positive event in a more positive way, might stay longer in positive situations, and might try to boost positivity in his or her experiences. However, individuals who consider positive emotions inappropriate are likely to avoid events that may trigger positive emotions, might not be able to appraise positive situations as positive, might withdraw from positive situations earlier, and may attempt to dampen positive emotions. Conversely, individuals who consider negative emotions as appropriate may seek anger-provoking situations. Through such attempts they may seek to, for example, clarify conflict or assert goals. These individuals may seek to prolong anger as long as they consider it necessary for achieving their goals and may not withdraw from conflict situations. (Eid & Diener 2009.) Thereby, despite being culturally bound, emotions are an individual, subjective phenomenon. Thus, they influence social interaction through group members—for example, employees.

1.5. Pre-Understanding

This study began with the assumption that following an acquisition, there is a relationship between employees' emotions, interaction within the company, and the surrounding emotional climate. Similarly, it was assumed that if the emotions, communication, and climate were positive, integration would be smoother. The pre-understanding upon which this study is built is presented in figure 4. This framework seems rather self-evident, and was kept purposefully loose in order to allow for the true relationships between the key concepts—emotion, interaction, and emotional climate—to emerge as the study progressed (cf. Dubois & Gadde 2002).

		EMOTIONS	
		Negative	*Positive*
INTERACTION[4]	*Negative*	Emotional climate[5] is likely negative. Clashes occur and integration is slow or unsuccessful.	Emotional climate is in a state of flux. Positive emotions may encourage positive interaction, or negative interaction may cause negative emotions. Integration is possible, but more complicated.
	Positive	Emotional climate is in a state of flux. Negative emotions may increase negative interaction, or positive interaction may promote positive emotions. Integration is possible, but more complicated.	Emotional climate is likely positive. Integration runs more smoothly and quickly.

Figure 4. Pre-understanding

An *emotion* is a short-lived, multicomponent response to interpreting the environment (Fredrickson 2013). Current acquisition research recognizes that emotions can play a significant role during organizational changes, as positive and negative emotions help employees understand and make sense of the change (Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Kiefer 2002). As emotions can help comprehend changes such as acquisitions, it is important to understand rather than suppress them (Clarke & Salleh 2011; Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Kiefer 2002). Although studies focusing on emotions during acquisitions exist, they are scarce compared to other streams of literature in the field (Sarala et al. 2019). Positive emotions refer to pleasant sensations, whereas negative emotions are unpleasant experiences (Lazarus 1991a). During acquisitions, emotions arise, for example, as a response to perceived changes in accustomed organizational values or objectives (Sinkovics et al. 2011). It is known that negative emotions can hinder integration (Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005), but positive emotions enhance organizational identification and promote intra-organizational cooperation (Fischer & Manstead 2008). One key trigger of

4 Interaction refers to communication with a distinctly collaborative aim (cf. Turner 1988).
5 Emotional climate refers to a felt quality of the organizational culture (DeRivera 1992).

positivity following acquisitions seems to be communication (Harikkala-Laihinen 2018).

Communication is a key concern during socio-cultural integration (e.g. Angwin et al. 2016; Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Schweiger & Denisi 1991). How participants experience the quality of intercultural communication largely determines the smoothness of the cross-border interaction. The quality of interaction here refers to a perception of the clarity, responsiveness, and comfortability of the communicated message. (Liu, Chua & Stahl 2010.) Such communication quality is especially noteworthy during cross-border acquisitions, as differences in cultures often cause problems in social interaction (Vaara 2003). Additionally, the organizational socialization literature suggests that participative communication is the key to achieving social cohesion (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006; Morrison 2002). Accordingly, participative, reflective, and positive communication has been found to best enhance socio-cultural integration (Clayton 2010). To highlight the two-way nature of this communication, this study adopts the label *interaction*.

Understanding the surrounding socio-cultural context is decisive for effective communication in international business (Adair, Buchan, Chen & Liu 2016). Such sensitivity is essential, particularly in cross-border acquisitions, where subjective interpretations and experiences strongly influence integration (Risberg 2001). However, the intercultural nature of cross-border acquisitions complicates achieving a shared understanding (Schein 1993). Nevertheless, the outcome of the interaction can be enhanced through communication that is perceived as clear, engaging, and comfortable (Liu et al. 2010). Thus, such communication can potentially ease integration. During integration, the objective of the interaction is often to increase socialization; to create a shared belief system that can act as the basis of a common identity (van Marrewijk 2004). It seems likely that participative interaction in general can ease socio-cultural integration through creating positivity regarding the change. This intertwined nature of emotions and interaction creates the climate in which change occurs.

Organizational climate "constitutes the collective mood of organizational members toward their jobs, the organization, and management" (Ashkanasy 2003, 38). Congruently, an *emotional climate* is a sustained feeling of an organization, a kind of organizational atmosphere. It is born out of organizational socialization and normally only changes when the surrounding culture changes. (DeRivera 1992.) In effect, the emotional climate of an organization is the norm for emotional experiences. On the one hand, it is born out of, and on the other hand, it rules the appropriateness of emotions experienced within an organization. Apart from emotional experiences, the emotional climate reflects the values, objectives, and beliefs of the organization. (Tran 1998.)

With regard to post-acquisition integration, it is important to consider that in the organization's emotional climate both positive and negative emotions are contagious (cf. Maimone & Sinclair 2010; Tran 1998; Hatfield, Cacioppo & Rapson 1994). Nevertheless, for successful integration, a healthy emotional climate (Ashkanasy & Daus 2002) where positivity is dominant (Birkinshaw et al. 2000) seems crucial. A positive emotional climate is "an organizational environment where managers take into consideration the emotional needs and personal growth of employees and encourage the sharing of positive emotions" (Ozcelik, Langton, Aldrich & Langton 2008, 187). A positive emotional climate does not exclude negative emotions, but emphasizes the positive (Bar-Tal, Halperin & DeRivera 2007). It can be built through increasing employee contentment both physically and mentally (Maimone & Sinclair 2010).

Because post-acquisition integration often touches upon cultural change, it is likely that it will influence the surrounding emotional climate. Therein, the power of positivity lies in that a positive emotional climate supports organizational change (Sekerka & Fredrickson 2008), organizational identification, and cooperation (Fischer & Manstead 2008). Nevertheless, acquisitions trigger many different emotions that vary between positive and negative (e.g. Lawlor 2013). Thus, managing the post-acquisition integration process in a way that supports positivity will likely result in swifter and smoother integration. The rest of this study will therefore dig deeper into the key concepts to reveal the means for supporting positivity during post-acquisition integration. First, however, the research design of this study is introduced in detail.

1.6. Research Process

I began my study aiming to determine the role of emotion in pre-acquisition negotiations. However, from the very start of my doctoral studies I was involved in a research project investigating the influence of emotions on mergers and acquisitions on a wider scale, emphasizing the post-acquisition phase. This project, funded by the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation, was titled *Emotions in Mergers and Acquisitions—Managing Emotions in a Global, Virtual World (EmoMA)*. Through this project, I came to understand the critical role emotions play in all human interaction. I began to challenge strategic differences of opinion as the cause of negotiation problems. Despite my continued interest in the negotiation context, I soon realized that although negotiations may be very emotional at times, problems in the negotiation phase could not explain persistently disappointing acquisition outcomes. The disparity between the increasing literature on the subject yet consistently poor results has continued to interest acquisition researchers for decades (e.g. Graebner et al. 2017) and has given rise to literature on the human side of acquisitions (e.g. Cartwright & Cooper 1993)—which I considered a good match with my interest in emotions. Therefore, I turned to the literature on socio-cultural integration and came to the conclusion that employees' emotional reactions are critical to the success of acquisitions (e.g. Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005).

The newfound context was intriguing. Whereas the previous literature focused heavily on negativity (Graebner et al. 2017), in practice, the EmoMA project findings showed abundant positivity. This puzzled me, raising the question of what a company could do to influence its employees' emotional reactions. I soon came to understand that the importance of communication during integration runs deep (Angwin et al. 2016). I had to consider that the daily chitchat around the coffee table could have just as much influence on employee reactions as formal CEO announcements. Through the EmoMA project, I found that most employees considered participation as extremely positive. To explain this, I turned to the literature on dialog as a special form of communication.

Dialog seemed an especially good fit with the socio-cultural integration context, as through dialog a unified culture and identity could be built around a common understanding (Isaacs 1999; 1993; Schein 1993). Based on the data, it seemed that emotions and communication were strongly linked. Nevertheless, locational differences suggested that something was moderating the outcome of communication. In the fall of 2016, approximately mid-way through my doctoral studies, I participated in a tutorial where it became very clear to me that the image in my head did not match the image I had created on paper. I came to realize that the key component was not dialog, but interaction. Dialog could not really explain differences in employee opinions, but the perceived quality of the interaction could (dialog being an example of interaction likely to trigger positive emotions).

Thus, I modified my thinking to allow myself to truly embrace the interconnections between emotion and interaction. At this stage, I also first realized that telling the story as it unfolded in practice might be a much more compelling way to present my framework than simply following the rules of conventional research reporting. Although I could have chosen to depict the resulting framework as an isolated piece of theory-induced argumentation, I felt it more honest to show the reader how my thinking was influenced and inspired by a particular case. I restructured my framework again, trying to allow both data and theory to speak to me. Through this matching process, I was able to write the first draft of what eventually became the final framework. I tried to capture the interrelatedness of emotion and interaction through introducing the emotional climate as a key condition. At this stage, all the pieces of the puzzle finally seemed to be in place, but I still needed to determine how they were connected to each other.

Up until this point, my thinking had been inspired by a single case from the EmoMA project. Indeed, it seems that in this study the case chose the researcher. It was the interesting empirical observations at Alpha Group that initially caught my attention and guided me to study emotions in the post-acquisition integration context. (cf. Dubois & Gadde 2014.) However, although I ceased to stumble upon new significant questions in my research, I did not feel the journey was yet complete. Most significantly, I did not consider that the first case, in all its depth, was enough to justify my reasoning. In addition, the case was unique, and thus could not offer transferrable conclusions. As I revisited the stages of my research it became obvious to me that my work would benefit not only from the inclusion of the case that guided my study (the abductive part), but also of a case I could use to reflect on what the abductive process had possibly missed (a deductive part). This is why I also chose to reflect upon another case in the more traditional, theory-led manner. These significant twists and turns on the abductive journey formed the continuum of my doctoral research. Rather than isolated events, they evolved and expanded over time. This is due to the processual nature of research, where learning and critique continuously shape the outcome.

The traditional composition of a research report includes an abstract, an introduction, a review of existing literature, an explanation of the used methodology, a discussion of the findings, and conclusions drawn based on the findings. Generally, any research report—be it a journal article or a thesis—contains these sections in this order. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2010.) Although this conventional way of presenting the research has long-standing merit in conveying complex ideas in a manageable way, it does not always reflect the process of research accurately, as the process can be anything but linear. This study maintains a strong link between theory and empiria throughout the different stages of research. Therefore, rather than suppress that link to conform to the usual style of an academic report, this study discusses theory and empiria in parallel to highlight the discovery of links between the literature and practice. This is a common structure in research where the framework of the study is developed through matching data with theory (Dubois & Gadde 2002). The steps of this study and their connection to the organization of this report are reflected in figure 5.

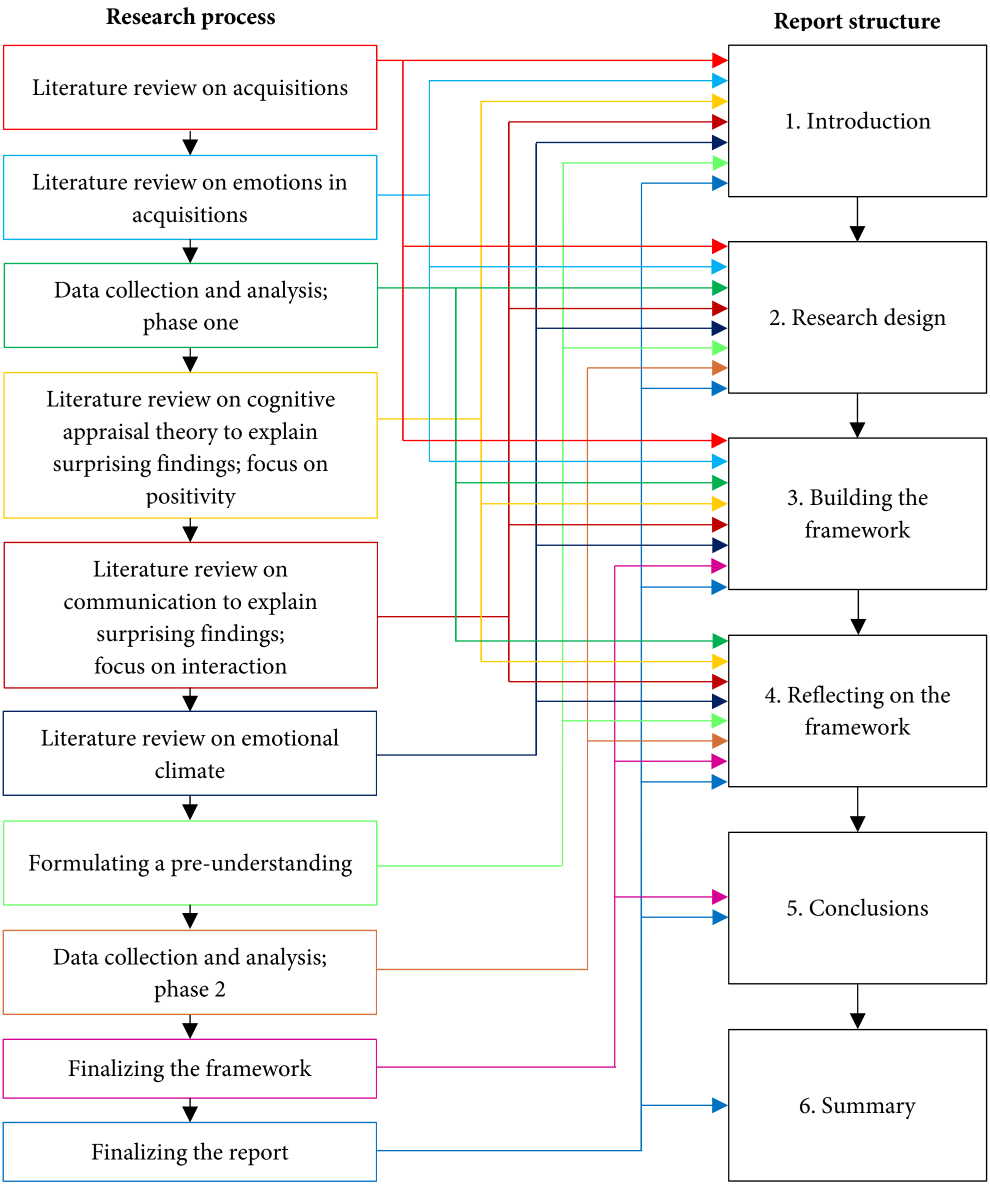

Figure 5. Structure of the study

Figure 5 shows how the twists and turns on the abductive journey have guided me from choosing the context, through seeking explanatory theory, to suggesting new theory. This report is organized in a manner that is as true as possible to the actual way in which my study has evolved. To highlight the subjective choices and underlying ideology that have guided this work, I use an active voice in writing this dissertation, where applicable. This decision is based on the recent development in academic writing, which is slowly losing its faceless, impersonal objectivity in favor of persuasive interaction between the writer and the reader. An active voice allows the writer not only to illustrate an external reality credibly, but also to acknowledge his or her role in building and negotiating the represented social relations. This requires an evaluative stance in writing, which acknowledges alternative views, in order to build a more convincing argument. (Hyland 2005.)

More particularly, I will use the personal pronoun *I*. This is to highlight my understanding of how the choices I have made have affected this dissertation. This is also to show responsibility and individual authority over the decisions made during this research process. I understand that "The use of first person allows these writers to emphasize, and to seek agreement for, their own contributions. It leaves readers in no doubt where they stand and how their statements should be interpreted. First person then, is a powerful means by which writers express an identity by asserting their claim to speak as an authority" (Hyland 2002, 1093). Therefore, rather than hide behind a passive voice, I want to convey to you my understanding of the passages where I have used my authority as a researcher and where I seek agreement with my decisions and arguments.

Apart from authority, my decision was inspired by a wish to increase engagement, show passion, and increase personality in my writing. Although I am among those who have been taught to hide behind a third person voice or passive account of the research process, I want to step away from that impersonal tradition and attempt to include agency and individuality in my writing. In doing so, I seek to increase the energy, persuasion, and understandability of my writing. At the same time, I strive for honesty. Nevertheless, I wish to engage you in an intellectual conversation. Thus, I use the active voice to highlight certain passages, but in others I opt for a third person style, still allowing for subjectivity and character. This division comes naturally to me. Where I have been the authority, stating so seems only fair. Conversely, where I cite the works of others, claiming authority through the active voice is against ethical scientific practice. Thus, the first person is reserved for justifying my own choices and communicating my arguments as effectively and persuasively as I can. (Sword 2012.) I will begin this persuasion through a discussion on the research philosophy that has guided my study.

2. Research Design

2.1. Philosophical Underpinnings

2.1.1. Research Philosophy

When making the methodological choices in this study, I have been guided by a moderate constructionist research philosophy. Of course, it is possible to study emotions from a strictly positivist perspective, for example, through examining brain activity or hormonal fluctuations, but from the very beginning I considered a more subjective, experience-based analysis more fruitful when looking at emotion in building social cohesion. This makes moderate constructionism an adept choice, as it falls between realism (positivism) and relativism (constructionism). It is a constructionist-oriented alternative to the post-positivist stance of critical realism. (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010.) In particular, moderate constructionists build a bridge across the two extremes and accept that the reality as it is seen is an interpretation, a constructed meaning (epistemological relativism), but at the same time conclude that an objective reality (ontological realism) may exist beyond what is empirically perceived. In the social sciences, such a stance overcomes the simplicity of purely realist assumptions as well as the impracticability of a purely relativist approach. Such a stance allows for a high degree of social construction, yet reconciles with an essentially external reality beyond the social sphere. (Jones 2002; cf. Elder-Vass 2012.) I consider a moderate constructionist stance highly applicable in this study, as it allows for the subjectivity of an emotional experience on the one hand, but the possibility of finding patterns that can help predict future behavior in similar contexts on the other hand.

According to moderate constructionist reasoning, research data will always carry interpretations based on collective, social, cultural, and historical circumstances. In effect, data convey meanings, but those meanings are not idiosyncratic or singular—they rather (although incompletely) reflect an external reality. This highlights the necessity of understanding the context where data are collected. Informants carry certain ideologies and histories in their opinions, but these are not considered exceptional. Rather, they reflect collective circumstances that give meaning to the expressed ideas. Thus, when collecting data, the researcher looks beyond the immediate social situation for the patterns of thought or interpretation, the ideology or behavior that lie behind what is said in the present. (Höijer 2008.) I believe this further justifies the choice of a moderate constructionist perspective, as it allows for the necessity of discussing individual experiences, but, at the same time, of looking for the patterns that underlie those experiences in a wider social context such as an organization or a nation. In sum, I consider the empirical reality an ongoing, evolving interpretation of meaning based on individual viewpoints coming together (Suddaby 2006).

Due to the reflective nature of data, moderate constructionist methodologies emphasize empirical observations and often adopt an abductive research process. This allows researchers to match data with theory, thus offering a way to portray the reality beyond the socially constructed image portrayed in the data. (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010.) The moderate constructionist research process of this dissertation is presented in figure 6.

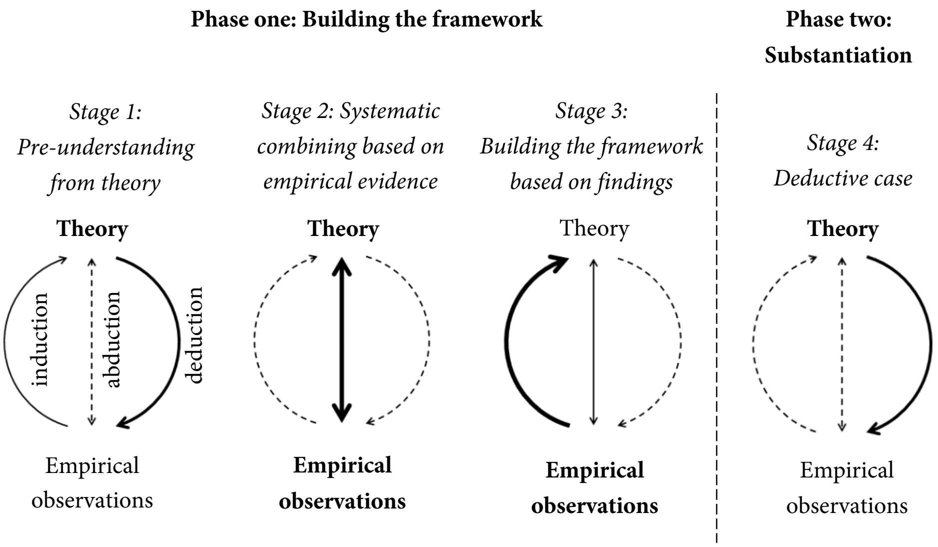

Figure 6. Moderate constructionist research process (adapted from Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010, 103)

According to Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010), the moderate constructionist research process occurs in four stages that combine inductive, abductive, and deductive sub-processes into an abductive whole (cf. Annosi, Magnusson, Martini & Appio 2016; Dubois & Gibbert 2010). The emphasis of each sub-stage varies between theory and empirical observation. The first stage is mostly deductive, with theory informing empirical observation. This is where the focus of the study is clarified. In this study, the first stage occurred through forming a pre-understanding based on theory. I used this pre-understanding to plan and conduct the initial data collection; in effect, it guided my empirical observation.

The second stage of the moderate constructionist research process is strongly abductive.[6] Here, theory and empirical data are in constant interplay to extend the research framework. In this study, the second stage occurred during project research, where questions arose from the data and were answered through matching with a suitable theory. I took the empirical observations that were based on my pre-understanding, and began my analysis based on the data. I then searched for additional literature to best explain the findings. The third stage of the process highlights induction and is aided by abduction. This is where the empirical data are analyzed more thoroughly to find a pattern. In this study, the third stage is where the framework was built. I took the findings and theory from stage two and wrote them down, eventually resulting in chapter three of this dissertation.

Finally, the fourth stage of the process is strongly deductive and assesses the validity and transferability of the findings. In this study, the fourth stage occurred through substantiating the built framework. Although I did reflect on the finished framework based on existing data, I believed that further data from a different context would allow for a better discussion on the transferability of the findings. Thus, in addition to the initial data, I collected additional data from a different research setting. In this dissertation, the first three stages of the abductive research process therefore describe one case study, whereas the fourth stage describes another. The cases reflect phase one and phase two of this study. Phase one is strongly abductive and describes how the theoretical framework emerged from data through systematic combining (Dubois & Gadde 2002). Phase two is strongly deductive and reflects on the transferability of the built framework to another context. This two-phase structure follows the notion that abduction is best suited for theory development, but less so for theory confirmation. Thus, the deductive part adds a context of justification. (cf. Nenonen, Brodie, Storbacka & Peters 2017.) I discuss the two selected cases and the chosen methods for data collection and analysis following the justification for choosing a case-study methodology.

2.1.2. *In Vivo* Case-Study Structure

Due to human nature, the social sciences will likely never be able to create theories as strong in explanatory and predictive power as the natural sciences can. This means that in the social sciences, the role of context and perception are brought to the center of the research. Thus, for social sciences to matter, it is essential to examine real-life

6 Abduction is discussed in more detail in section 2.2.1.

phenomena in their natural surroundings. This pushes the researcher toward case studies. (Flyvbjerg 2001.) Based on this logic and my choice of philosophical perspectives, I strongly agree with the sentiment that social sciences should consider the context. Thus, I have chosen a case-study methodology, where the context of the study takes center stage in the research. The importance of context is often heightened in research settings that cross national borders (Fletcher, Zhao, Plakoyiannaki & Buck 2018)—like in the study at hand. Following this logic, many researchers have adopted the case-study methodology to uncover the particular dynamics of socio-cultural integration in cross-border contexts (e.g. Raitis et al. 2017; Moore 2013; Drori, Wrzesniewski & Ellis 2011; Rottig 2011). I follow their example.

Essentially, a case study enables the formation of an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon in a particular context. This, in turn, allows for comprehensive knowledge regarding what actually happens in a specific real-life setting. (Yin 2012; Eisenhardt 1989.) In this study, the case approach allows me to investigate the phenomenon in depth and connect strong empirical evidence with explanatory theory. However, instead of a single method, a case study portrays a wide array of methodological choices that guide the research process. These choices affect how a case study is conducted and evaluated, and how it relates to existing theory. This study belongs to the third generation of case studies in management literature. This tradition has emerged based on a naturalist convention, where intimacy with the context is critical. (Welch & Piekkari 2017.) I chose this frame to highlight the need to understand the central phenomenon in its real-life context, as it occurs naturally. The naturalistic case-study approach is also compatible with the moderate constructionist philosophy, which takes into account the socially constructed, community-bound contexts that are central in case studies (Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010).

This study is *in vivo* by character. This approach is related to the ontological and epistemological assumptions presented above and matches with the abductive stance of the research process explained in figure 6. The *in vivo* nature of this study is illustrated in figure 7. *In vivo* studies take existing theory as an inspirational starting point around which to frame a study. Existing theory is used to understand the empirical data. Theory building, conversely, occurs through interpolation; a pre-existing conceptual framework (such as the one presented in the introduction of this study) is continuously refined and adjusted through complementary theory (as is done in this study throughout chapter three, when the final framework is built). Through the *in vivo* process, the understanding of key concepts is gradually deepened through finding improved explanations. (Andersen & Kragh 2011.) Through the *in vivo* approach, this study can actively match the theory with the literature by means of systematic combining (Dubois & Gadde 2002).

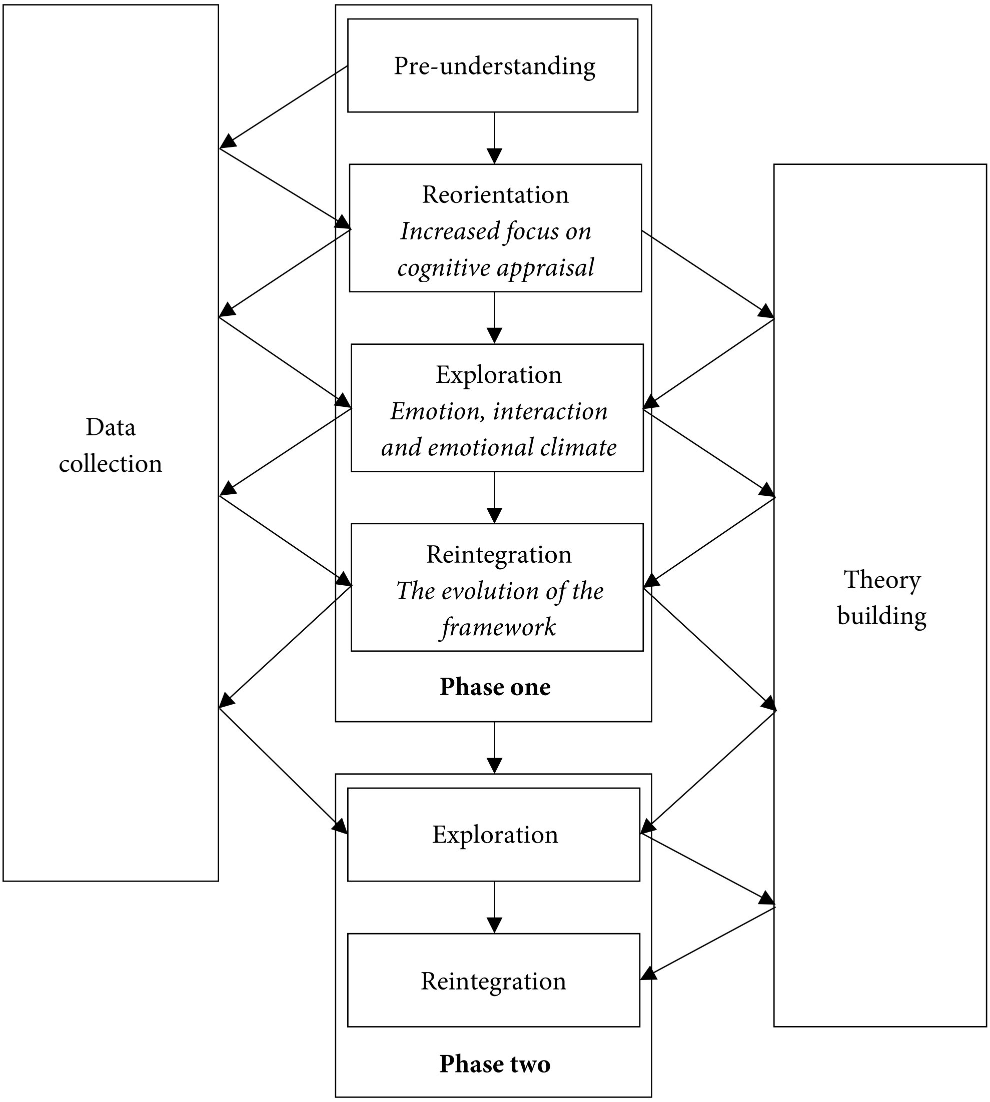

Figure 7. *In vivo* research process (adapted from Andersen & Kragh 2011, 157)

The research stance in this study is largely qualitative. As research on emotion during socio-cultural integration is still nascent, the utility of qualitative research is evident in allowing for a search of interrelated patterns and a deeper understanding in the form of suggestive theory (cf. Edmondson & McManus 2007). Instead of cause and effect, the interest here lies in understanding human experience (Welch & Piekkari 2017; Stake 1995). However, the data collection and analysis combine qualitative and quantitative means. The findings from these two sets of data and analysis are subsequently integrated in the discussion. This approach has been determined as especially fruitful for gaining a deep understanding from a single case. (Hurmerinta & Nummela 2011.) Thus, this study utilizes a mixed-method strategy.

Mixed methods refer to research strategies drawing from both qualitative and quantitative traditions, where the two can be considered mutually informative (Maxwell 2016). Mixed methods can help researchers address and understand complex environments better. Mixed methods also increase researchers' ability to bring in the voices of the actual study subjects, which adds to the comprehensiveness of the study. (O'Cathain, Murphy & Nicholl 2007.) In particular, integrating qualitative and quantitative findings can increase the depth and credibility of the findings (O'Cathain, Murphy & Nicholl 2010). Indeed, the strength in mixing methods lies in the increased understanding it creates on the one hand, and in the opportunity it provides to offset the weaknesses of each method through incorporating the other on the other hand (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011).

I use mixed methods in both phases of this study.[7] For each separate phase of the study, a single case was chosen in order to maximize the richness of the contextualized description (Dyer & Wilkins 1991). A single case for each phase also allowed the collection of extensive data (Yin 2012) from multiple units of observation, while simultaneously maintaining the perspectives on socio-cultural integration as the unit of analysis (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki 2011). This process left ample room for interpretive sensemaking from the data (Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2011), which, in turn, enabled the deepening of both the theoretical and practical understanding of the phenomenon. As this study is based on a pre-understanding from theory, the purpose of the case approach is to shed light on the phenomenon of interest. Thus, the case here is instrumental in nature. (Stake 1995.)

In phase one, I began with a single case, aiming to refine the theory (Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift 2014) from the psychology literature to fit a new context. The case was treated as critical—as the strategic selection of a particularly helpful case upon which naturalistic generalizations can be built (Ruddin 2006; Flyvbjerg 2001). Building naturalistic generalizations is possible based on an understanding gained from the previous literature, which allows the researcher to make assertions and discuss the findings from a wider perspective, enabling the reader to draw his or her own conclusions regarding the transferability of the findings (Stake 1995). However, later on I discovered that a single study, although exceptionally informative, was unable to describe the phenomenon in full. Thus, I sought a second case to reflect on the framework. The theoretical contribution of this dissertation therefore relies on seeking dissimilarities and centers around tying the findings to different fields of

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7 A detailed description of data collection and analysis is provided in sections 2.2 and 2.3.

literature to best explain the phenomenon (Ridder, Hoon & McCandless Baluch 2014).

The two cases examined in this study are both cases of post-acquisition integration. However, I selected the cases through somewhat different means, as they represent different purposes in this study. The first case in phase one represents a critical case-sampling approach. The case is rich in information, but statistically atypical. Nevertheless, the case serves its purpose as it is particularly informative, maximizing my learning opportunities. (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki 2011.) Thus, in phase one, choosing a single significant case (Patton 2015) ensured that the case would best illuminate the phenomenon of interest and allow for the unraveling of the integration in question (Stake 1995).

For phase two, I needed a case that would best allow for substantiation. The case was still instrumental in nature (Stake 1995), but this time the theoretical pre-understanding depicted the framework built in phase one. Thus, I adopted a theoretical sampling approach and found a case that would shed light on the built framework—with an emphasis on those points where evidence from the first case was limited. Through this integration of single and multiple case designs I am able to simultaneously offer thick contextualization and an enhanced potential for transferability. (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki 2011.) However, before explaining the data collection and analysis process for each phase in more detail, I will briefly explain why studying emotions is a complex issue, necessitating the chosen research approach.

2.1.3. Emotion as the Topic of Research

Philosophically, until relatively recently emotions were thought to hinder judgment. However, such views began to fade in the middle of the 20th century, with emotions gaining center stage in the research around the new millennium. (Ben-Ze'ev & Krebs 2018.) As everyday occurrences as emotions are, in a scientific sense they are still among the least understood facets of humanity. Emotions are invariably complex. Thus, they necessitate analytical tools that are flexible and capable of capturing subtle nuances. (Ben-Ze'ev 2018.) Due to its subtle nature, defining *emotion* is difficult. Still, rather than relying on subjective human explanations of emotion, science must seek a more explicit conceptual definition. In fact, the scientific reality of emotion may be somewhat different from the common, experience-based notions. However, what can be said for certain is that emotion is not a tangible element. Additionally, emotion is not merely a word or a felt quality. As a concept, it includes much more than a label or a bodily sensation; emotions are bound up in psychological processes. This complex meaning makes the study of emotions especially interesting. (Parkinson 1995.)

However, we could also take a step back and ask *is* emotion a usable scientific concept. For example, Duffy (1934; 1948) argues strongly against the use of emotion in a scientific meaning due to the failure of experimental differentiae in distinguishing between emotional and non-emotional states. A differing view, though, has been expressed, for example, by Harré (1987), who claims that it is not the scientifically sound explanation but the meaning that the actor gives to an action—as well as the reaction and perception of others—that make an interesting topic of research. Therefore, he believes it would be desirable to incorporate "unexamined commonsense understandings into the concepts of psychological science" (Harré 1987). Averill (1996, 24) supports this idea, stating that "Often, however, our theories are little more than formalizations of folk beliefs, clothed in the scientific jargon of the times." Indeed, "the direct experience of human beings is the basis of all science and speculation" (Arnold 1960a, 6). Therefore, we can accept that emotion as a concept is worthy of our interest.

Philosophers have pondered over the question "What is an emotion?" since Socrates. Early on—and in some ways, to this day—emotions were considered primitive. They were manifestations of something less desirable, less intelligent, and less reliable than logic or reason. Thus, they needed to be restrained and controlled by the higher authority of logic. This reflects the still ongoing debate over the relationship between reason and emotion. These two spheres have long been thought of as separate and contradictory. Even those willing to admit their interplay have wanted to keep the concepts separate and subordinate one to the other. Most often, the notion that emotions must succumb to reason has prevailed. (Solomon 2008.)

Yet even ancient Greek Stoics did not dismiss the value of emotion quite so abruptly. They gave rise to the Neo-Stoic notion of emotion as judgment—and thereby inherently not completely separate from reason. Although emotional experiences can be thought of as currents in the ocean, unwitting flashes of primal passion, pushing us toward certain behaviors, the fact remains that emotions are fundamentally about something. An emotion has an object; unlike the wind or the current, which can blast away without reason, an emotion is *about* something. This *aboutness* is subjective. It is not merely an arrow in the compass, swirling around, but a perceived object, an interpretation. This interpretation might be accurate or not, portray an existing or imagined object, but the aboutness is ever present. It is this aboutness, the interpretation, which gives an emotion its character. The object may be the same, but it is the interpretation that allows us to label emotions. Such interpretations are informed by individuals' beliefs about the object. These beliefs make emotions personal and subjective. To give rise to an emotion, the object, interpretation, and beliefs must carry some personal value for the individual; the object must be considered somehow important. (Nussbaum 2004.)

In the psychology literature, there are many schools of thought on the study of emotion. These have more or less followed each other over time. One of the earlier popular ideas is the James–Lange theory, which posits that bodily sensations are primary to the mental emotional experience (James & Lange 1922). In effect, this means that the act of smiling causes the experience of happiness. Born out of this notion, the Cannon–Bard theory claims an emotion includes a concurrent psychological and physiological response to stimuli. Thus, according to this theory, a smile and feeling happy occur simultaneously. (Cannon 1927.) Conversely, the Zajonc theory argues for the primary and inescapable nature of emotions, claiming that an emotion can be an antecedent to and separate from cognition. In practice, this might occur as fear when encountering an unknown animal. Therefore, smiling and happiness could occur without conscious acknowledgment of the reason. (Zajonc 1980.)

However, the Schachter–Singer theory assumes that cognitive interpretation is necessary in labeling the psychological experience. Thus, the cognitive interpretation allows individuals to recognize emotions such as happiness. (Schachter & Singer 1962.) Thus, cognition would be necessary to label the experience of happiness. The final significant theoretical school relevant for this study builds on the relationship between cognition and experience. Cognitive appraisal theory emphasizes cognition as an essential antecedent of an emotional experience. This theory posits that emotions are responses to stimuli and are based on an appraisal of the environment. Thus, an event interpreted as pleasing triggers both happiness and smiling. According to cognitive appraisal theory, the subjective experience (feeling happy) and the physiological sign (smiling) are both part of the same emotional reaction. (Lazarus 1991a.) In this study, I have chosen to follow the cognitive appraisal viewpoint on emotions.[8] Indeed, the philosophical discussion on emotion in general remains largely on the level of cognition (Solomon 2008), and cognitive appraisal theory resonates well with the Neo-Stoic views on emotion. Nevertheless, before delving deeper into the world of emotion, I want to clarify the data collection and analysis used in this study.

8 This is an informed choice. I am aware of the critique that cognitive appraisal theory has encountered (e.g. Zajonc 1980; for an overview of key debates, see Schorr 2001), but find it the best fit for this study. The key reason is that through the focus on external stimuli and subjective emotional responses, cognitive appraisal theory explicitly allows for the search of emotion triggers, which is a key element in this study. The justification continues in chapter 3.

2.2. Phase One: Abductive Theory Building

2.2.1. Building Theory Based on Systematic Combining

Systematic combining is an abductive research process characterized by "a continuous movement between an empirical world and a model world" (Dubois & Gadde 2002, 554). Abduction begins with curiosity about a phenomenon and reflects a reasoning process that aims at finding the most promising explanation for the curious incident. Reasoning in abductive research is therefore contrastive. (Folger & Stein 2017.) It involves elements of imagination and logical extrapolation (Schwab & Starbuck 2017), referring to creative and critical theorizing, which highlights the empirical world (Nenonen et al. 2017). Simply phrased, abduction is the journey taken from "Huh?" (surprising or significant elements in the empirical world triggering interest) to "Aha!" (finding a plausible explanation for those elements) (Folger 2005). It is non-linear and aims at finding the best possible match between interesting empirical phenomena and explanatory theory (Annosi et al. 2016).

The abductive process thus highlights the importance of emergence. It emphasizes the interaction between theory and an empirical reality, as well as openness to new issues as the case develops. (Salmi 2011.) In this study, I utilize systematic combining in order to build the theoretical framework, as the process is especially suitable for building new theory based on case studies. During systematic combining, the framework of a study is continually reoriented and reframed as it is confronted with empirical data. Thus, the framework, empirical fieldwork, and case analysis develop concurrently. (Dubois & Gadde 2002.) Systematic combining includes two key activities: matching theory with reality and embracing direction and redirection (figure 8). This interplay further emphasizes the importance of evolving in abductive research (Salmi 2011; Dubois & Gibbert 2010).

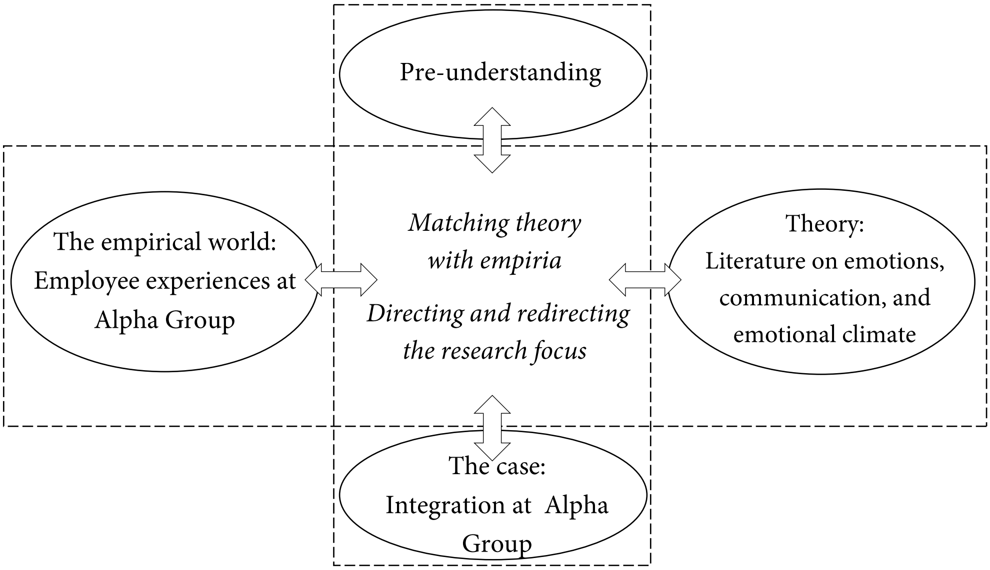

Figure 8. Systematic combining (adapted from Dubois & Gadde 2002, 555)

In a systematic combining process, the preliminary conceptual framework depicts a voiced preconception. Yet in systematic combining, the researcher remains open to developing the pre-existing framework through empirical and analytical discovery. Existing theory is sought to explain novel empirical findings in order to build a coherent theory. The empirical world (in this study the reality in which the case takes place) and the case itself (the integration process) are considered necessary to understand theory in practice. Conversely, theory (in this study additional literature on emotions, communication, and organizational climates) is necessary to understand the empiria fully. Thus, the two coevolve with theory explaining the emergent findings and such findings then redirecting the focus of analysis and empirical research. (Dubois & Gadde 2002.) I began my study with a pre-understanding presented in the introduction. In chapter 3, I amend that framework through seeking theoretical explanations for empirical evidence gathered during fieldwork at Alpha Group and reorienting the analytical efforts to explain the emergent findings better.

The idea of matching the theory with the empirical findings is closely aligned with the nature of case studies. Especially when building new theory, it is essential to compare emergent findings with a broad range of extant literature. This ensures that the best possible explanatory power can be achieved. In addition, reconciling empirical evidence with existing theory allows for the creation of a new theoretical vision. (Eisenhardt 1989.) In this study, I approach theory building from the viewpoint of novel insights in the data. Existing theory is used to find the best possible explanation for the findings, and thereby to build a novel theory regarding the relationships between key concepts. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), pre-existing theory can complement, extend, or verify emergent findings. It can also offer alternative or improved explanations or redirect the study. I believe that the use of existing theory should ideally be manifold. Thus, in this study, the existing theory was used in the initial stage to direct empirical efforts. Later, during the analysis, complementary theories were used to find a more powerful explanation and thus extend and verify the findings.

Through these steps, theory becomes both an input and an output of research. Preliminary theoretical viewpoints can be used as general guidelines or signposts informing fieldwork and the same concepts subsequently become refined during fieldwork. This necessitates a research setting that is relatively open. Such openness to reshaping data collection or adopting new explanatory theories enhances the opportunity for novel and even unexpected findings. (Bryman 1988.) To allow for such openness, I endeavored to try out multiple explanations—the best of which are written down in this dissertation. The explanations I found again informed further data collection and analysis, so that the empirical and theoretical sections of this study coevolved.

Indeed, it is necessary to be able to support the matching process with a myriad of data. Direction and redirection thus aim at increased trustworthiness and explanatory power through principles similar to triangulation. (Dubois & Gadde 2002.) Data triangulation insures an in-depth view of the studied context and phenomenon. Through gathering data at different time points from different informants, the theoretical arguments made based on the data are strengthened. Similarly, a stronger case can be built through methodological triangulation; that is, using several different means of data collection. (Denzin 1970.) The use of different data sources also makes conclusions more convincing and accurate (Yin 2012). I have adhered to these principles through using multiple informants, multiple time points, multiple data-collection means, and multiple lenses for analysis.

Nevertheless, the data are not collected to fit into a pre-existing framework, but rather the chosen theoretical categories must fit the data. In effect, data are the starting point for analysis and a theory is sought to best explain the empirical findings. During this process, the theory is fitted to match the data rather than vice versa. Thus, the theory is readjusted, refined, and renewed, so that it can explain the past, interpret the present, and even predict the future. The close connection with data is necessary in order to generate a practically relevant theory. (Glaser 1978.) Such a loose initial stance on the existing theory is desirable when something is already known about the phenomenon of interest, but prior knowledge cannot produce a fully testable theory. In such a setting, the researcher understands what the phenomenon is and is able to look for pieces of information that complete the picture. (Miles & Huberman 1994.) Thus, in building the final theoretical framework I have attempted to find the theory perspectives that best illuminate the phenomenon.

In terms of originality and utility (Corley & Gioia 2011), I aim at a theoretical contribution that is both scientifically interesting and extremely useful in that it advances conceptual rigor and offers an improved way of operationalizing emotions in management research. The scientific originality of the intended theoretical contribution lies in melting multidisciplinary conceptual findings into a coherent management theory. Moreover, the resulting theory offers practical utility in providing guidelines and increased understanding for practitioners. However, before delving deeper into the framework itself, I will describe the context of the first case as well as the data collection and analysis used to flesh out the finished framework.

2.2.2. Alpha Group

The Alpha Group case was selected for the first phase of this study as it represents a single, significant case (Patton 2015), which is particularly informative, thus maximizing my learning opportunities (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki 2011). To suit the purpose of illustrating the influence of emotion on post-acquisition integration, the case also had to fulfill several other criteria (table 1). Most importantly, apart from being particularly informative, the case had to allow for the best possible quality and extent of data. In addition, I wanted to examine an international case, as the international nature of integration has often been argued to highlight potential mismatches in culture (e.g. Vaara 2003).

Table 1. Case selection criteria for phase one

Criterion	Selected case
The case must maximize my learning potential.	The selected case offers a unique, in-depth viewpoint to post-acquisition integration because despite the deal being an acquisition, the acquirer chose a merger-of-equals approach to integration.
The case must be completed to allow for sufficient data.	Including the retrospective and real-time data, the case covers approximately three years of organizational life.
The case must be recent enough to avoid retrospective bias.	The acquisition partners completed the deal in September 2013. A cooperation agreement was made in late 2014 and cooperation began in early 2015. Therefore, retrospection was necessary to cover approximately one year.
The case must allow for in-depth data collection.	The acquirer was eager to complete integration in the best possible way, which encouraged the acquirer to allow access to any data that was asked for.
The case must be international in order to allow for the best possible chance of uncovering the dynamics of integration.	The acquiring company was based in Finland and the acquired company in Germany. The new headquarters is in Finland and the organization has adopted a matrix structure. Despite the matrix structure, the company aimed at building a new, joint culture.

Prior to the acquisition, Alpha was a Finnish, family-owned industrial company with international operations for developing, manufacturing, and marketing user-friendly, technologically advanced, energy-saving products. Having been established in the mid-1900s, Alpha was known in Finland and abroad as a long-standing, reliable supplier. Outside Finland, Alpha's presence was most notable in other Nordic countries. In late 2013, Alpha acquired its German competitor Beta through a friendly deal. Beta had once been a family-owned company but had since moved into the ownership of a capital investor through a series of acquisitions. Beta's product offering and market presence was similar but complementary to Alpha's. Moreover, at the time of the deal Alpha employed approximately 800 workers, while Beta employed 600. Due to the relative similarity in size as well as the complementary nature of the acquisition partners' operations and locations, Alpha chose a merger approach for integration, intending to choose the best practices from both pre-acquisition companies in order to form a wholly new organizational culture (cf. Cartwright & Cooper 1993; Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991). The name of the new company was Alpha Group, to highlight the Alpha ownership on the one hand, and the equality of the different functions and locations on the other hand.

The initial integration strategy at Alpha Group involved several different sub-projects. My focus in this dissertation is the sub-project named *Cultural Integration and HR*. This integration project had two objectives: one company and structure with two strong brands, and common values within two-to-three years. Although by the time I began this research in 2015, the official integration phase had ended and the company had moved onto a new strategic focus, the work on cultural integration and especially the unification of values was only just beginning. In fact, following the official integration phase, the *one company with two strong brands* objective became the theme of the new company strategy. The goal was to form new organizational values that would act as the basis of a strong, unified organizational culture. For this purpose, every single employee was invited to take part in value workshops designed to engage them in the integration process.

2.2.3. Data Collection

I collected primary data at Alpha Group through interviews, employee satisfaction surveys, and participant observation. Secondary data comprised company newsletters, integration strategy presentations, internal information leaflets, and the in-house employee magazine. Figure 9 illustrates the data-collection timeline.

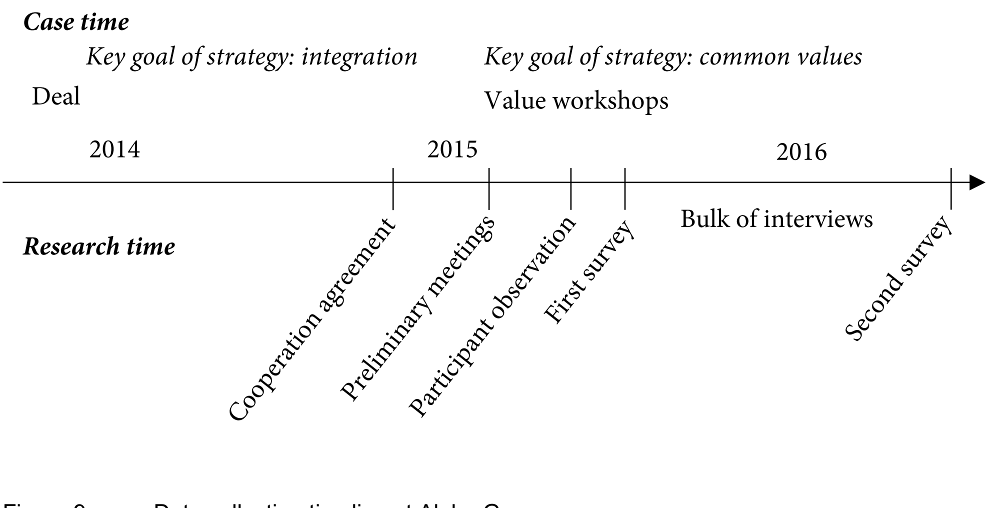

Figure 9. Data collection timeline at Alpha Group

In addition, I participated in regular meetings with Alpha Group representatives in 2015 and 2016. My field notes from those meetings are used to inform the analysis. Most importantly, preliminary meetings with Alpha Group representatives took place in early 2015. During those meetings, the particulars of research cooperation were clarified and most of the secondary material regarding the deal gathered. In addition, the preliminary meetings guided the data-collection process at Alpha Group. (cf. Dubois & Gadde 2002.) The preliminary meetings were audio-recorded and transcribed but were used mainly for understanding the context in which the acquisition took place.

The first set of data collected for analysis was an employee satisfaction survey in the spring of 2015, aimed at determining employee opinions regarding the acquisition as well as overall work-related well-being. The survey enabled the collection of company-wide information on employees' opinions and attitudes (cf. Ghauri & Grønhaug 2010). Alpha Group conducts a similar survey every year. For the purpose of this research, three questions were added to the pre-existing frame. The questions explored the themes that arose as central in the preliminary meetings and in the Alpha Group integration strategy. The questions asked the employees to contemplate:

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

An outside professional translated the entire survey into all of the Alpha Group locations' native languages. The responses were again translated into English. Altogether, 681 employees responded to these three questions. The response rate represents some 50% of Alpha Group where 39% of the respondents were employed at Alpha Group locations in Germany and 24% in Finland. The final 37% represented other countries, with Poland and the Czech Republic among the largest. 42% of the respondents had been employed in the organization—including the pre-acquisition organization—for more than 16 years, whereas 21% had been employed in the organization for between two to six years. Approximately half of the respondents represented manufacturing employees.

In the spring of 2016, the employee satisfaction survey again asked the respondents to contemplate what emotions the acquisition evoked at the time. Again, an outside professional translated the entire survey into all of the Alpha Group locations' native languages. The responses were subsequently translated into English. Altogether, 1082 responses were given. The response rate represents some 80% of Alpha Group. 33% of the respondents were employed in Finland and 28% in Germany. Poland and the Czech Republic had, again, the largest representation outside the former HQ countries. 44% had been employed in the organization for more than 16 years, while 18% had been employed for between two to six years. 57% of the respondents represented blue-collar workers.

The value of company-wide survey data notwithstanding, more in-depth information regarding the context and especially individual perceptions, emotions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes was needed to understand the case fully. Thus, interviews were conducted. (cf. Saldaña 2011.) The interview data used in this dissertation consist of thirteen interviews that were conducted between late 2015 and mid-2016. The interviewees represented a cross-section of former Alpha and Beta employees, consisting of the ten members of the top-management team, two HR representatives, and the integration manager. The interviews were semi-structured and I utilized an interview guide (appendix 1) in order to ensure the suitability and increase the comparability of the discussion topics (cf. Tolley, Ulin, Mack, Robinson & Succop 2016). Six interviews were conducted in Finland in Finnish and seven interviews were conducted in Germany in English. Due to geographical distance, two interviews were conducted over Skype. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Table 2 describes the interviews in detail.

Table 2. Alpha Group interviews

Interviewee title	Date	Duration	Language	Type
CEO	2.4.2015	99 min	Finnish	Face-to-face
Vice President, Sales	11.11.2015	56 min	English	Face-to-face
Vice President, Product Management	11.11.2015	74 min	Finnish	Face-to-face
Internal Services Manager, Union Representative	11.11.2015	51 min	English	Face-to-face
Vice President, Sales in German-Speaking Areas	12.11.2015	60 min	English	Skype
Vice President, Brand Management	13.11.2015	68 min	English	Face-to-face
Vice President, Purchasing and Logistics	13.11.2015	55 min	English	Face-to-face
Vice President, Manufacturing and IT	13.11.2015	52 min	English	Face-to-face
CFO	21.1.2016	50 min	Finnish	Skype
Employee Representative	22.1.2016	55 min	Finnish	Face-to-face
HR Manager	22.1.2016	56 min	Finnish	Face-to-face
Vice President, Business Development and HR	22.1.2016	66 min	Finnish	Face-to-face
Integration Manager	23.6.2016	90 min	Finnish	Face-to-face

Participant observation occurred during one value workshop, organized in Finland in the Finnish language in February 2015. During that workshop, I participated with Alpha Group employees in value-introducing group tasks, which were designed to familiarize the employees with the new values, engage the employees in giving the values meaning, and help employees adopt value-congruent work practices. The participant observation was recorded as field notes describing employee shared experiences and opinions as well as the interaction that took place. (cf. Tolley et al. 2016.) In addition, during the workshops, employees were asked to draw and write illustrations reflecting the values. I was given all the employee-made materials from the workshops conducted in Finland.

2.2.4. Data Analysis

I read the field notes from company meetings and participant observations carefully to inform the analysis, but they were not a part of the analysis process *per se*. These data represent an impressionistic familiarization with the case, which was later amended through more formal data collection (Stake 1995). Similarly, the secondary data I obtained I read through carefully and used to illustrate the case context, but I did not use the data directly to inform the systematic combining process. The formal analysis for systematic combining began with the survey data collected in 2015, which was investigated using both quantitative and qualitative means. The purpose of this combination was to gather evidence both on a large, aggregate scale, and on an interpretive, more meaningful scale (cf. Stake 1995). First, the valence of the data was given a numeric code:

- 0, for no emotional content or a missing response,
- 1, for negative emotional content,
- 2, for mixed negative and positive emotional content, and
- 3, for positive emotional content.

The numeric data were transferred to SPSS20 software for descriptive statistical analysis, revealing the frequencies and distributions of responses. This gave the researcher an overview of the data and employee perceptions. The original qualitative data were then transferred to NVivo software for qualitative analysis.

The qualitative analysis centered on the responses containing emotional information, previously coded as 1, 2, or 3. The purpose of the qualitative analysis was to identify specific emotions that employees experienced, as well as the different triggers that caused employees' emotional reactions. Thus, the analysis process relied on the emotion categories of Lazarus (1993), which describe both the emotion and the cognitive trigger. This analytical guide resulted in a three-level code structure, where the first-order code described the valence of the response, the second-order code described the emotion label, and the third-order code the trigger of the emotion. The full coding scheme can be found in appendix 2. The qualitative survey analysis process in 2016 repeated the basic pattern. The full coding scheme for 2016 can be found in appendix 3.

The interviews were analyzed based on both a pre-understanding from theory (reflected in the interview guide) and topics arising from the data (cf. Miles & Huberman 1994). The transcriptions of the interviews were transferred to NVivo software for coding. The transcriptions were read carefully and categorized into meaningful themes (table 3). Each theme node was then re-examined to ensure correct and consistent coding. The coding scheme was kept rather loose in order to allow for the data to illustrate meaningful themes rather than singular events. Nevertheless, each coding node was further explored to highlight the specific events that employees experienced as central.

Table 3. Categories of interview findings at Alpha Group

Category	Occurrences
Integration	152
Emotions	132
The deal	74
Challenges in the deal	61
Cultural differences	59
Communication	57
Describing Alpha	45
Values	36
Virtual communication	29
Value workshops	23
Describing Beta	21
Organizational identity	15

The written materials and illustrations gathered at the value workshops in Finland were first recorded in electronic form as images and then categorized into themes. The themes reflect the new values of the company, which formed the core of the workshop discussions (table 4). The image counts reflect the depth of work on each of the four company values separately and together.

Table 4. Value workshop materials

Category	Images
Effectiveness	33
Fairness	25
Courage	24
Comparing different values	9
Openness	8

Each theme was transferred into NVivo software to highlight the overlapping sections between different employee perceptions. The use of SPSS and NVivo software throughout the process was helpful in recording, ordering, and categorizing the data (Miles & Huberman 1994). At the same time, the use of software increased the trustworthiness of the analysis process through allowing more efficient organizing, coding, searching for similarities, and interpretation (Sinkovics, Penz & Ghauri 2008). The findings from each set of data are intertwined in my discussion. Wherever I use direct quotations, they have been personally translated, unless originally stated in English. I have completely masked the source of all direct quotations in order to maintain the promised anonymity. However, I have made sure that direct quotations represent various participants with particularly interesting or representative viewpoints. In chapter 3, I discuss the core of the findings with regard to employee emotions and the emotional climate arising from the employee surveys, whereas the discussion regarding communication and interaction at Alpha Group utilizes the interviews and value-workshop materials more. In addition, I use the secondary data to describe the integration process at Alpha Group as well as to display internal communication means. My learning from this data-collection and -analysis process at Alpha Group directly influenced the research process at Delta for phase two of this study.

2.3. Phase Two: Deductive Substantiation

2.3.1. Reflecting on Theory Based on Deduction

Deduction, in its essence, means the application of a general rule to a particular case (Peirce 2014). It refers to a theory-testing process where an established framework is applied to a specific instance (Hyde 2000). In interpretive case-study research, abduction holds the role of idea generation, whereas deduction allows for the evaluation of those ideas (Åsvoll 2014). Therefore, to conduct a sort of weak test on the framework built during the Alpha Group case, I decided to add a reflective part, which would evaluate the proposed framework based on deductive logic. As qualitative research is often used to generate new theory, the introduction of deductive logic into qualitative research can greatly increase the credibility of the findings (Hyde 2000). Through reflecting on the generated framework with new data, I am therefore able to argue more convincingly regarding the naturalistic generalizability of the findings, as well as on the trustworthiness of my study.

Following the abductive formation of ideas, deductive reasoning allows for the testing and categorization of empirical evidence more systematically to either support or overrule the abductive reasoning (Åsvoll 2014). Through deduction, a case can be subjected to a known or hypothesized theory. New ideas or relationships between concepts are unlikely to occur, but useful knowledge regarding the explanatory power of the tested framework emerges. Thus, even though deductive reasoning can be tautological, it conveys practical truths. Should the tested framework prove explanatory in the case, applying the framework should produce the desired results. (Reichertz 2004.) This reasoning is essential in deepening my argumentative power. If I can show that my framework explains a novel situation, it is much more likely that it can also predict a further instance, thereby increasing the practical as well as theoretical impact of my argumentation.

In theory-testing case research, previously existing propositions are examined in a contextual light. An empirical context is used to test the logic, whereby the context augments the theory. In fact, the propositions themselves are likely to be situationally bound. However, although theory testing through a case study is driven by deduction, it need not be limited to deduction. Especially data collection and analysis can still carry elements of induction or abduction. (Ketokivi & Choi 2014.) The influence of context is essential in my study, as post-acquisition integration is a highly context-specific process. The framework I build reflects this situation-bound nature, allowing for different inputs and outcomes. Nevertheless, I remained open to possible new openings or negating findings in the reflective data, going back to pattern matching where necessary.

An important aspect in increasing the credibility of a proposed theory is using a new set of data. Separate sets of data for theory building and theory testing ensure that the emergent findings are relevant and trustworthy. For example, a researcher can set a section of data aside during initial data analysis to come back to it later in order to confirm the findings. (Hyde 2000.) However, as in my study the phenomenon of interest is highly contextual in nature, and as the case upon which I build theory is somewhat unique, I chose to look for another case setting for substantiation. This, in my opinion, increased the meaningfulness of the second phase of my study.

2.3.2. Delta

The Delta case was selected for phase two because it could shed light on the built framework—with an emphasis on those points where evidence from the first case was limited. The case selection criteria for phase two are detailed in table 5.

Table 5. Case selection criteria for phase two

Criterion	Selected case
The case must maximize my learning potential through being sufficiently similar to yet also different from the Alpha Group case.	The selected case offers a more traditional viewpoint to post-acquisition integration because the acquirer chose to lead the process. This makes the case different from phase one. However, both cases examine a Finnish–German deal in an industrial context, thus allowing enough similarity for fruitful comparison.
The case must be completed to allow for sufficient data.	Including the retrospective and real-time data, the case covers approximately 15 months of organizational life.
The case must be recent enough to avoid retrospective bias.	The acquisition partners completed the deal in January 2017. A cooperation agreement was made, and cooperation began in May 2017. Therefore, retrospection was necessary for covering approximately six months to include final negotiations.
The case must allow for in-depth data collection.	Delta was eager to help employees through integration. I was given ready access to all the necessary data.
The case must be international in order to allow the best possible chance for uncovering the dynamics of integration.	The acquiring company was based in Germany and the acquired company in Finland. A new Deputy Managing Director from the German headquarters was assigned to Delta and different functions work in close cooperation with their foreign counterparts.

Finnish Delta was bought by German Gamma—a large group with operations complementary to Delta's—in January 2017. The deal had been a long time in the making, the first discussions already having taken place but then discontinued due to differences of opinion in 2014. Prior to the deal, Delta was a small industrial company that had struggled to remain profitable among large competitors. At the time of the deal, the company employed 77 workers and had suffered from occasional layoffs for years. However, Delta had high quality standards and a competitive product range. It had strong sales across Europe, the Middle East, and India, and its brand was well known and trusted. Thus, with the acquisition, Gamma sought to expand its product portfolio while Delta sought a way to increase resources and regain its competitiveness. Gamma was an older and larger player in the field, with established, global operations. As Gamma's product range was complementary rather than overlapping and the companies worked in the same industry, Gamma was also a previous customer of Delta. My research was carried out from Delta's point of view, thus representing the acquired company perspective. The data therefore consist of Delta employees' reflections on the deal and subsequent changes.

The data collection and analysis for phase two of my study are described in detail in the next two sections.

2.3.3. Data Collection

I collected primary data at Delta over 11 months between May 2017 and March 2018. During that time, multiple informants and data-collection methods were used to triangulate the findings and thus increase trustworthiness (Denzin 1970). In addition to primary data, I collected secondary data such as strategic information and internal communication material in order to gain a thorough understanding of the Delta context. These data also allowed me to gain a better understanding of how the deal was negotiated and what had happened during the first months after the deal. In addition to data collection, I visited Delta on several occasions to introduce and discuss the research with the employees as well as the Board of Directors. Figure 10 details the data-collection process at Delta.

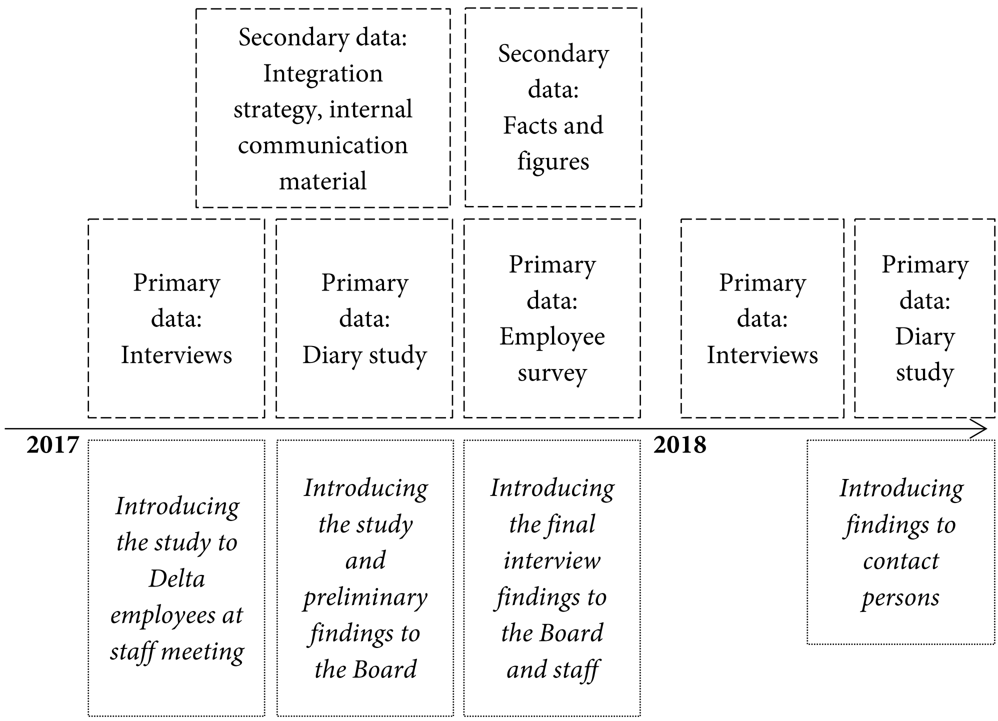

Figure 10. Data-collection timeline at Delta

I began data collection at Delta with seventeen semi-structured interviews in summer 2017. I followed up these interviews with nine informants in spring 2018. I selected the interviewees (table 6) from an organizational directory detailing the different hierarchical and functional divisions of Delta. Thus, the interviewees represent a total cross-section of Delta members. Although my focus was on Delta, I also interviewed the integration manager from Gamma, as the position was held by the new Deputy Managing Director of Delta. My wide selection of informants was based on the desire to gain as complete a view of Delta as possible. Only one of the interviewees I initially contacted declined the invitation, claiming to be too busy to participate. Following the first interviews, I chose the subsequent follow-up interviewees based on the convenience of their schedules and willingness to participate, but in a manner that maintained the broad viewpoint of Delta. Everyone approached for a second interview was willing to participate.

Table 6. Delta interviews

Interviewee title	Function	Duration 2017	Duration 2018	Type
Managing Director	Top management	58 min	58 min	Face-to-face
Deputy MD, Integration Manager	Top management	63 min	52 min	Face-to-face
Supply Chain Director	Production	48 min	29 min	Face-to-face
Chief Financial Officer, Personnel Director	Finance	62 min	57 min	Face-to-face
Country Manager	Sales	53 min	51 min	Face-to-face
Manager	Sales	41 min	-	Skype
Customer Service Coordinator	Customer Service	50 min	57 min	Face-to-face
Senior Purchaser	Purchasing	58 min	-	Face-to-face
Purchaser	Purchasing	44 min	-	Skype
Logistics and Quality Manager	Logistics	62 min	-	Face-to-face
R&D and Training Manager	Technology	62 min	49 min	Face-to-face
Manufacturing Supervisor	Production	41 min	-	Face-to-face
Assembly Supervisor	Production	46 min	49 min	Face-to-face
Employee	Production	38 min	-	Face-to-face
Employee	Production	55 min	-	Face-to-face
Employee	Production	62 min	54 min	Face-to-face
Employee	Warehouse	59 min	-	Face-to-face

The interview questions were based on the key themes found in phase one of this study (appendix 4). The majority of the interviews was conducted face-to-face, but due to the overseas location of the informants, two were conducted via Skype. Most of the interviews were conducted in the Finnish language, which was the mother tongue of both parties. Due to their foreign origins, the integration manager and sales manager were interviewed in English. The interviews lasted between approximately 30 minutes and one hour and were transcribed prior to the analysis.

In addition to interviews, I engaged Delta employees in writing a memo-like daily diary following the interviews in autumn 2017 and spring 2018. The diary method enables the collection of personal, context-specific data (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli 2003) that are sensitive and time-bound in nature (Kenten 2010). The diary method also allows for the researcher to remain objective and detached from data creation (Hurmerinta & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki 2013), thus increasing trustworthiness. I considered the diary method especially suitable at Delta because it allowed the employees to consider sensitive, subjective issues in a safe and private manner. The employees had the opportunity to fill in their diaries either online or in written form. The written diary frame consisted of a background information sheet and one A4 sheet per day asking the respondent to rate the emotional climate of that day, share any emotions they may have felt or detected in their colleagues, and contemplate how the company or they themselves could improve the atmosphere at Delta (appendix 5). I asked the employees to fill in their diary over three-to-five consecutive working days. In 2017, I sent the request to keep a diary to the interviewees. Altogether ten respondents made 44 diary entries: 29 online and 15 manually. In 2018, the diary was distributed throughout the company. Despite wide circulation, only six respondents altogether made 21 entries, all of them online. I believe there are two main reasons for this: As the number of approached employees was very high, it was easy to think that one answer would not be that significant, and as the timing of the second diary coincided with what was at that point the busiest time during integration, employees may have felt hesitant to volunteer their time. All diaries were written in Finnish.

I collected the final set of primary data at Delta in late October 2017 through a company-wide employee satisfaction survey. Delta conducts a similar survey every second year to allow employees to share their opinions regarding strategy, the work community, leadership, health, and job satisfaction. The survey had 56 respondents who represented some 59% of Delta employees (at that time totaling 95, including 7 agency contract workers). An outside consultant conducted the survey, but I was able to add four open-ended questions to it for the purpose of this research. These questions asked the employees to consider:

1. What feelings or perceptions does the Gamma–Delta acquisition raise in you?
2. How successful do you find acquisition-related communication at Delta? Why?
3. What do you think is deteriorating or improving the working atmosphere at the moment? Why?
4. In which acquisition-related matter do you think top management has been especially successful or unsuccessful? Why?

The questions were based on the key issues found in phase one of this study and in the interviews at Delta in summer 2017. Most respondents were Finnish speaking, but a few replied in English.

In addition to primary data, I asked for and received a myriad of secondary data to inform myself of the research context at Delta. This included an organizational chart, a list of organizational members and their responsibilities, materials from staff information sessions, the strategy of the company, the personnel manual, and an issue of the in-house magazine that focused on the acquisitions. In addition, I asked for key figures regarding the organization at different time points leading up to and following the deal. As in phase one, the secondary data were extremely valuable in informing the analysis of the primary sets of data.

2.3.4. Data Analysis

I began with the interview analysis, using NVivo software to categorize the data according to themes that arose from the theory-based interview guide as well as themes arising from the data during analysis. Both interview rounds centered on similar main themes for analysis. These included the deal itself, changes, communication, emotions, emotional climate, and management. The second-order codes varied slightly between the rounds, as they were formed primarily based on the data. The key second-order codes were, however, similar—centering on what was positive or negative under the first-order codes, as well as the employees' suggestions for improvement. The coding scheme for the Delta interviews and the number of items coded under each category are presented in table 7.

Table 7. Categories of interview findings at Delta

	Sub-category 2017	Items	Sub-category 2018	Items
The deal	Describing the deal	19	Changes in the job	6
	Challenges in the deal	6	Changes at Delta	12
	Image of Gamma	13	Changes in the deal	7
	Integration and changes	58	Progress of the deal	8
	Negative about the deal	5	Challenges in integration	24
	Positive about the deal	21	Managing the deal	18
	Reasons for the deal	2	Progress of integration	22
Communication	Describing communication practices	53	Communication regarding the deal	25
	Improvement suggestions	28	Topics of interest at Delta	11
	Interactive communication	13		
	Negative comments	28		
	Positive comments	33		
Emotion	Dealing with emotions	25	Challenges and coping	19
	Negative emotions	28	Image of Delta	7
	Positive emotions	15	Image of Gamma	16
	Showing emotions	13		
Emotional climate	Gamma/Delta differences	19	Emotional climate	42
	Improvement suggestions	15		
	Negative climate	45		
	Positive climate	40		
	Management	42	Future	4

The diaries were analyzed iteratively based on a pre-understanding from theory and from the interview data. My goal in collecting and analyzing the diary data was to gain a deeper insight into the emotional content found in the interviews. Thus, in the diary data analysis I focused on the emotion themes found in the interviews, collecting reasons and explanations for employees' perceptions. These I further categorized into positive and negative viewpoints. In 2017, the process was linked to the first interview analysis, whereas in 2018, I connected the diary findings to the corresponding interviews. Initially I aimed at gaining in-depth knowledge of employees' subjective experiences, but the filled-in diaries were relatively narrow in scope, often containing only a few words of description. Therefore, their role in the analysis was mainly supportive.

I used the same tactic in analyzing the survey data in 2017, linking the comments to the themes that arose in the first interviews. Again, employees expressed both positive and negative viewpoints, clarifying the findings from other sets of primary data. The findings from each set of data are intertwined in my discussion. I have personally translated all direct quotations, unless they were originally stated in English. To maintain absolute anonymity, I have completely masked the source of all direct quotations. However, I have made sure that they stem from various participants from various positions and functions within Delta, and from all three types of primary data.

Having discussed the philosophical underpinnings and practical implementation of my study at length, it is time to delve into the subject matter. In the following chapter, I explain the findings from phase one of my study. Throughout this chapter I discuss what I found interesting and of note in the Alpha Group integration process, and which theories I believe explain these findings best. Based on this discussion and the pre-understanding formed in chapter 1, I finally build the framework of this study.

3. Phase One: Building the Framework

3.1. Positivity in Post-Acquisition Integration

3.1.1. Change During Post-Acquisition Integration

Integration can be seen as the collection of activities that are undertaken and resources that are deployed in order to efficiently and effectively work toward achieving the desired level of amalgamation between the acquisition partners (Pablo 1994). Post-acquisition integration is an essential concern for acquirers because it influences acquisition performance. From an integration point of view, acquisition performance is influenced by the performance of the previously separate entities, the performance of joint initiatives, the integration costs and speed, as well as the performance of key functions such as sales, research and development, manufacturing, or HRM. Integration has a strong influence on at least three antecedents of such performance measures: processes, behavior, and culture. Integration can influence processes in unexpected ways due to possible surprises arising from due diligence, or through integration management. Behavioral influences emerge from arising emotions and employee motivation. In turn, the degree of organizational fit, the nature and extent of national cultural differences, and potential language barriers are cultural influences. (Teerikangas & Thanos 2018.) In this study, the focus is on the behavioral element, illustrated through emotions.

In essence, integration is a series of interrelated actions designed to create a new organizational entity. For example, what was learned during due diligence should play an important role in planning both the public announcement and the subsequent integration (Perry & Herd 2004). Therefore, the due diligence phase, although understandably confidential, should not be closed to human resources (Recardo & Tortehi 2015) nor to the integration team (Schweiger, Csiszar & Napier 1993). Including the HRM department in due diligence will ensure attention is paid to issues such as leadership styles or cultural differences that, if unnoticed, might lead to costly challenges in integration (Recardo & Tortehi 2015). Similarly, including the integration team in due diligence will enable a speedier and smoother transition from the deal-making phase to implementing the integration plan (Schweiger et al. 1993).

Being able to formulate an integration plan during the due diligence phase will clarify the early integration process. Some flexibility should, however, be maintained in order to modify the plan should the need arise. (Recardo & Tortehi 2015.)

In the best-case scenario, managing the integration should be a separate business function instead of an additional task (Ashkenas, DeMonaco & Francis 1998). The leader of the integration function is often called an integration manager. The integration manager is most often appointed by the acquiring company to be responsible for the coordination of work and the overall success of the integration process. In small deals, the integration manager may be a single actor, whereas in large deals the integration manager will head the integration team and its task forces. In the pre-deal phase, the integration manager can enable the establishment of a trusting relationship between the acquisition partners. In addition, he or she can project a positive future image of the integrated company to the affected employees as well as to the public. The integration manager can also act as a change agent, as well as working to ease cultural change and knowledge transfer. Through these roles, integration managers can aid employee commitment. (Teerikangas, Véry & Pisano 2011.)

One important aspect during integration is the division of power between the partners. Often, acquired company management will have considerably less power over integration decision-making. However, if the decision-making power is divided equally, both companies will be represented in the final outcome. Equality in decision-making also increases mutual learning and employee perceptions of fairness. (Schweiger et al. 1993.) In turn, employee perceptions of justice influence their willingness to cooperate. Assessments of whether or not cooperation will lead to outcomes that are perceived as just will influence employee actions. During acquisitions, employees will rarely have all the relevant information regarding decisions and outcomes. Therefore, forming a judgment of justice may be difficult. This increases the reliance on heuristics—judgments made based on cues, for example, from management behavior. (Melkonian, Monin, & Noorderrhaven 2011.)

Indeed, it has been found that different approaches to integration raise different reactions. If the acquirer becomes indifferent to the process and does not promote integration in any manner, the acquired company is likely to see the process as badly managed. In contrast, a very speedy process may cause satisfaction on the one hand, but a sense of undermining human needs on the other hand. An incremental yet progressive approach seems to elicit the most positive perceptions. (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy 2006.) In much of the acquisition literature, a critical early period of 100 days is discussed (e.g. Angwin 2004). During this period, it is suggested that the focus should be on specific activities that are crucial for realizing synergies. During the 100-day period, ownership of the integration process should be transferred to line management. For a successful 100-day period, actions that are easy to implement and offer short-term synergies should be identified and executed. For example, changes to the physical layout or technology ideally occur during the first 100 days. This early period is essential, because early positive experiences of synergy will boost confidence in the overall integration process. (Recardo & Tortehi 2015.)

Much of the existing acquisition literature highlights that perceptions of cultural change may be great. In one study, for example, almost 92% of respondents felt that the acquisition had prompted changes in organizational culture (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy 2006). Accordingly, cross-border acquisition research has often focused on cultural differences—a cross-cultural perspective. But in intercultural situations such differences are to be expected. Therefore, change resistance may be somewhat less prominent. Accordingly, cultural awareness has been suggested as a way to overcome the hurdle of cultural clashes. Nevertheless, international acquisitions have heightened complexity beyond that of cultural concerns. For example, geographical distance and differences in market structures may cause concern. Distance may be detrimental to understanding, seeing as the likelihood of misunderstandings and misrepresentation increases when meetings do not often happen face-to-face. Language barriers may cause similar problems. Differences in management styles may also cause higher levels of ambiguity in cross-border situations compared to domestic ones. For example, management styles may vary between supervisory, order-giving roles, and loose, direction-giving roles. There may also be differing opinions on how to fulfil consumer needs or how to evaluate success based on differing cultural backgrounds. (Risberg 2001.)

Looking back on the extent of cultural change (section 1.4.1), it would seem that a collaborative merger, where the best of both cultures is used to create value, is the best alternative for synergistic acquisition goals. However, studies have shown that even when a collaborative merger is intended, employees fail to recognize the situation and react to cultural change as if they were undergoing a redesign merger. Often the misconception is rooted in unrecognized or unshared expectations as to how a joint culture is to be formed, which leads to misinterpretations. (Cartwright & Cooper 1993.) Essentially, the challenges in integration center around the in-group–out-group bias: *us* versus *them*. Change often triggers protectionist attitudes as well as feelings of loss and fear (Menges & Kilduff 2015). Such defensiveness can culminate in polarizing differences rather than of being receptive to the acquisition partner (Marks & Mirvis 2011). Moreover, perceptions of the degree of disparity between the acquisition partners (Björkman, Stahl & Vaara 2007), power distance (Stahl & Sitkin 2005), or decreasing autonomy (Larsson & Lubatkin 2001) can enforce tensions and elicit a sense of inequality that is detrimental to the integration endeavor. Moreover, managers may not always be fully aware of or capable of recognizing employee emotions (Vuori, Vuori & Huy 2018). However, it may be possible to overcome such tensions through generating positivity regarding change.

3.1.2. Managing Positive Organizational Change

Positive organizational change refers to change that is more affirmative than harmful with respect to employee responses as well as organizational outcomes (Avey et al. 2008). If change is to be achieved at the employee level, integration should be considered an interactive process, where the managers and employees of both pre-acquisition organizations collaborate in order to succeed (Harikkala-Laihinen, Hassett, Raitis & Nummela 2018). Moreover, it is possible that acquisition management will have to tackle several change processes simultaneously (Rouzies, Loe Colman & Angwin 2019). This highlights the growth of management from a controlling task toward the duties of building commitment and promoting change receptiveness that it includes today (Caldwell 2003). Whereas management has traditionally been seen as a practice of rationality, more recent research has found that it includes an emotional aspect. Particularly, employees seem more disposed to change if it triggers excitement and positivity. (Karp 2004.) Such positivity is felt through different positively-laden emotional states (cf. Fredrickson 2001).

People have an innate tendency toward positive change, but our receptiveness to negative triggers—that is, events or situations that trigger negative emotions—stifles this trait as we grow older. This is why it is important to emphasize positive triggers during change. (Cameron 2008.) Whereas negativity leads to instinctive fight-or-flight reactions, positivity enables broader thought patterns that may lead to more positive attitudes toward change (Fredrickson 2001). Yet employees often react to change negatively, showing resistance. This is due to an aversion to the unknown, a reaction toward an unclear future. (Dhingra & Punia 2016.) Such resistance may turn into negative attitudes or detrimental behavior (e.g. Waddell & Sohal 1998), but creating positivity regarding change can help overcome resistance (Dhingra & Punia 2016).

One way for managers to try to increase positivity is to simply express positivity, because employees tend to mirror their emotions against managers' emotions. This increases the importance of managers' emotional displays as they communicate with employees. (cf. Ashkanasy & Daus 2002; Hatfield et al. 1994.) Previous research has indeed shown that leader positive affect generates follower positive affect and organizational goal-congruent behavior (Gooty, Connelly, Griffith & Gupta 2010; Johnson 2008; Bono & Ilies 2006; Newcombe & Ashkanasy 2002). Moreover, managers can facilitate positive change through both observable actions and internal awareness. Managers can facilitate discussion and promote agreement, encourage thinking, persuade and engage employees, and present their message passionately. They should have a clear target and be able to delegate tasks, walk the talk, reward success, and objectively evaluate the process. (Cameron & Green 2012.)

Internally, the most successful leaders seem to possess emotional intelligence (EI) (e.g. Ovans 2015; Gardner & Stough 2002; Goleman 1998). EI refers to the "ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions"[9] (Salovey & Mayer 1990, 189). EI includes the ability to understand and explain emotions as well as the capacity of emotions to augment thought (Mayer & Caruso 2002). It contributes to effective leadership in several ways. It can help leaders detect and manage employees' emotions better, create and maintain excitement and optimism, manage employee reactions, hone decision-making, maintain a strong organizational culture and identity, and guide leaders in forming compelling goals (George 2000).

EI is especially beneficial for managing change (Mayer & Caruso 2002) because leaders with high EI are more likely to detect and understand others' emotions as well as respond to and even alter these emotions to enable effective change (George 2000). Thus, EI can also play an important role in positive change management. According to Whetten and Cameron (2011), positive change management includes five steps: establishing a climate of positivity, creating readiness for change, articulating a vision of abundance, generating commitment to that vision, and institutionalizing the change. These steps are well in accordance with the traits of emotionally intelligent leadership as suggested by George (2000). Table 8 links the notions of positive change and emotionally intelligent leadership to integration management.

9 A feeling is a subjective experience, whereas an emotion is the psychological process that creates the feeling (Scherer 2009). This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Table 8. Positivity and emotional intelligence in integration management

Steps for creating positive change (Whetten & Cameron 2011)	Forms of emotional intelligence (George 2000)	Managing integration
Establish a climate of positivity	Detect and manage employees’ emotions better	Detect and understand employee emotions in order to encourage positivity
Create readiness for change	Create and maintain excitement and optimism	Communicate the positive aspects of integration, creating a sense of excitement and readiness
Articulate a vision of abundance	Form compelling goals	Form a compelling vision of the future of the integrated company
Generate commitment	Detect and understand others’ emotions	Respond to employees’ emotions in ways that encourage commitment to the integrated company
Institutionalize the change	Maintain a strong organizational culture	Strengthen the achieved integration through encouraging employees to identify with the new organization

Based on the notions of positive change and emotionally intelligent leadership, I propose that managing post-acquisition integration as positive change centers on employee emotions. As discussed in the introduction, this study is positioned in POS. Moreover, the focus on positivity highlights its important role in furthering post-acquisition integration (Birkinshaw et al. 2000). In the post-acquisition integration context, managers can facilitate change through adopting the steps of positive change management and portraying emotionally intelligent leadership. This connotes recognizing and reacting to employees’ emotions, promoting positivity, increasing engagement and excitement, endorsing a beneficial future vision of the integrated organization, and increasing employees’ commitment to the integrated rather than the pre-acquisition organization. These objectives are, to some extent, also visible in how the integration was planned and managed at Alpha Group.

3.1.3. Integration at Alpha Group

At Alpha Group, the integration plan included ten different projects named *workflows*. These workflows centered on different geographical areas (German-speaking countries, Nordic countries, Russia and new markets, Europe and other markets) and different functions (administration and finance, portfolio and brand, operations and IT, purchasing and logistics, product development) within the organization. The name of the final project was *Cultural Integration and HR*. This workflow had two goals: *one company and structure with two strong brands* and *common values within 2–3 years*. The final integration project is at the core of this study. Alpha Group's integration strategy also included a top-management steering group and an individual integration manager.

The workflows Alpha Group undertook reflect the unification of both activities and assets (cf. Shrivastava 1986), focusing on both task and human integration (cf. Birkinshaw et al. 2000). Based on the extensive integration plan, Alpha Group was aiming for full amalgamation between the pre-acquisition organizations. The objective was full consolidation, or absorption (cf. Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991). However, despite the deal being an acquisition, Alpha Group did not wish to force the ways of the acquirer on the target. Instead, they chose an approach more akin to a merger of equals, trying to find the best of both worlds. Thus, change was planned in the cultures of both pre-acquisition organizations. The name *Alpha Group* reflected the acquiring Alpha, but Beta had an active part in both planning and implementing the integration. Thus, with regard to human integration, the chosen strategy was collaborative (cf. Cartwright & Cooper 1993). Indeed, Alpha Group seemed to aim at engagement and empowerment of the employees (cf. Brueller et al. 2018).

In 2015, Alpha Group finished the planned integration. Thus, they formed a new strategy focusing strongly on strengthening the company as an international player. This strategy was planned to last until the end of 2017. The key objective of the strategy was *one company, two strong brands*, which reflects its nature as the continuation of the cultural integration workflow. Alpha Group aimed at unifying the value mindsets of its employees, but at the same time wished to maintain the strong product brand names of the pre-acquisition companies. Indeed, the strategy focused strongly on implementing new Alpha Group values that would build toward a common company culture. Thus, integration was not yet over.

The value process began in late 2014 through inviting two different multicultural teams to discuss their personal and work-related values. One team consisted of human resource managers and employee representatives, and the other of the new Alpha Group management team. In these teams, three nationalities were dominant—Finnish, German, and Polish—, reflecting the locations of the largest plants of Alpha Group. Each team reflected on their personal values, based on which they gave suggestions for the new organizational values (table 9). Similarities in the suggestions could also be identified based on the national origin of team members. Based on the overlaps of all these lists, the selected new Alpha Group values were courage, fairness, effectiveness, and openness. Whereas fairness, effectiveness, and openness were directly quoted in the suggestions (shown in table 9 in italics), courage reflected a combination of other suggestions such as braveness, proactiveness, and independence.

Table 9. Values suggested by Alpha Group members

Separated by teams	**Suggested values**
Human resource managers and employee representatives	proactiveness, fairness, effectiveness, and openness
Alpha Group management team	braveness, fairness, effectiveness, and openness
Separated by nationalities	**Suggested values**
Finnish representatives	respect, trust, family, honesty, security, and independence
German representatives	*openness*, trust, reliability, *fairness*, and safety
Polish representatives	family, honesty, *openness*, development, and security

The new values were introduced to key personnel in a strategy kick-off meeting in December 2014. Each value was given a description reflecting foci in internal and external relations. Courage was paired with commitment and innovativeness, fairness with motivation and responsibility, effectiveness with objectives and profitability, and openness with interaction and customer satisfaction. Alpha Group deliberately chose to maintain the values and their description on an abstract level, believing that this would help employees from different countries and cultures to adopt them more easily. However, they also acknowledged that this abstractness hindered employees' ability to see the values in concrete everyday work tasks. Thus, every employee of Alpha Group was invited to discuss the values in specific value workshops, organized in early 2015. For this purpose, Alpha Group trained local workshop facilitators to run the discussions in the local language.

The facilitators were selected from among the human resource professionals within the company, and the training aimed at enabling them to help employees adopt the values in leadership, organizational citizenship behavior, and customer service. The workshops consisted of a maximum of twenty employees across all departments and functions. They were organized in the local language and strongly emphasized interaction. The key purpose of the workshops was to offer an arena where common ground could be found as to what the meaning of the new values was for employees and how they could be incorporated in daily work. Every single employee at Alpha Group was invited to take part in the value workshops, and both blue- and white-collar workers attended them in high numbers.

In the value process, Alpha Group portrayed some of the key principles of positive change following an acquisition (cf. Whetten & Cameron 2011; George 2000). They sought to create positivity regarding the new organizational culture and motivate employees to commit to the new Alpha Group. They emphasized the positive aspects of the deal from the viewpoint of the employees in forming a compelling vision of what the new, joint organization could achieve in the future. Through engaging in research cooperation, they also actively sought to detect and understand employee emotions. Nevertheless, as the human integration strategy at Alpha Group was centered on values, I find it necessary to briefly visit the subject of values from the viewpoint of organizational change before delving deeper into the employee experiences of the process.

3.1.4. Organizational Values at the Core of Change

According to Sullivan, Sullivan and Buffton (2001, 247), "In embarking upon an organizational change program, the most powerful forces are the individual and organizational values. By aligning the values of the people in the organization and those of the organization itself, rapid change can be brought about." A value can be defined as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach 1973, 5). Values imply a preferable state or opinion on a large scale of alternatives. Thus they are always positive by nature (Roe & Ester 1999).

Organizational values refer to members' shared beliefs over how the organization *should* choose which actions to undertake or which objectives to pursue (Enz 1988). They may be based on the founders' vision for the organization or be more formally developed within the organization. The values are what distinguish one company from another, and what enable employees to identify with and rally behind organizations. (Lencioni 2002.) They give direction to organizational policy and strategy (Wiener 1988), and shared organizational values improve effectiveness through building and promoting a strong organizational culture (Murphy & Davey 2002).

Openness to new values is an essential enabler of organizational change (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2016). Through promoting unified values, organizations can decrease perceptions of value incongruence and increase employee motivation (Roe & Ester 1999) as well as job satisfaction (Andrews, Baker & Hunt 2011) following an acquisition. Thereby, shared organizational values can increase harmonious coexistence between the acquisition partners (Cartwright & Cooper 1993) and lessen the influence of the merger syndrome (cf. Sinkovics et al. 2011). In addition, shared values can ease cross-border governance (Nohria & Ghoshal 1994).

Nevertheless, organizational values and the organizational cultures they embody are difficult to modify (e.g. Roe & Ester 1999). Thus, the meeting of different values and cultures following an acquisition is likely to bring out conflict. Moreover, change always looks different from various viewpoints, both organizational and occupational. Thus, individuals have a tendency to revert to their old ways following change projects. (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2016.) Indeed, employees tend to only support change efforts for which they can truly understand the need (Buono et al. 1985). Similarly, emerging emotions regarding the acquisition partner can alienate or endear the new organization to the employees (Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Vaara 2000). Therefore, it is crucial to get the employees *on board* for the change (e.g. Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991).

To this end, Sullivan et al. (2001) suggest five steps for successful organizational change via value renewal, which Alpha Group seems to have (unconsciously) followed. First, it is necessary to identify the critical values of the organization in a small group. Second, the organization should endeavor to identify the employees' work values. Third, the employees should be given the opportunity to engage with the values in order to form a thorough understanding of them. Fourth, all managers and employees of the organization must engage in breathing life into the values through adopting them in practice. Finally, even after such successful absorption, regular reinforcement is needed in order for the values to remain in the employees' minds.

Indeed, for organizational values to have any of the beneficial effects described above, they cannot remain mere official statements. The values must be enacted in order to become significant and salient. It is especially important for managers to lead by example in adopting the organizational values in everyday tasks. Otherwise, employee attitudes may turn toward the negative. (Murphy & Davey 2002.) Thus, I will next explore the emotions that the integration at Alpha Group triggered in the employees.

3.2. Emotions Following Acquisitions

3.2.1. A Mismatch in Need of Explanation

At Alpha Group in 2015, employee emotions were largely positive (figure 11—exact percentages are available in appendix 6). Combined, some 42% of the respondents' comments were positive, 15% were negative, and 17% were mixed. In particular, the news about the deal was initially welcomed by 47% of the employees, but experienced as negative by 24%, and with mixed emotions by 9% of the respondents. The employees also received the value workshops very well: 48% considered them with purely positive emotions, 22% with mixed emotions, and only 5% with negative emotions. The overall integration period in turn raised positive emotions in 30% of the respondents, mixed emotions in 20%, and negative emotions in 16%. However, the responses clearly varied between the largest Alpha Group locations.

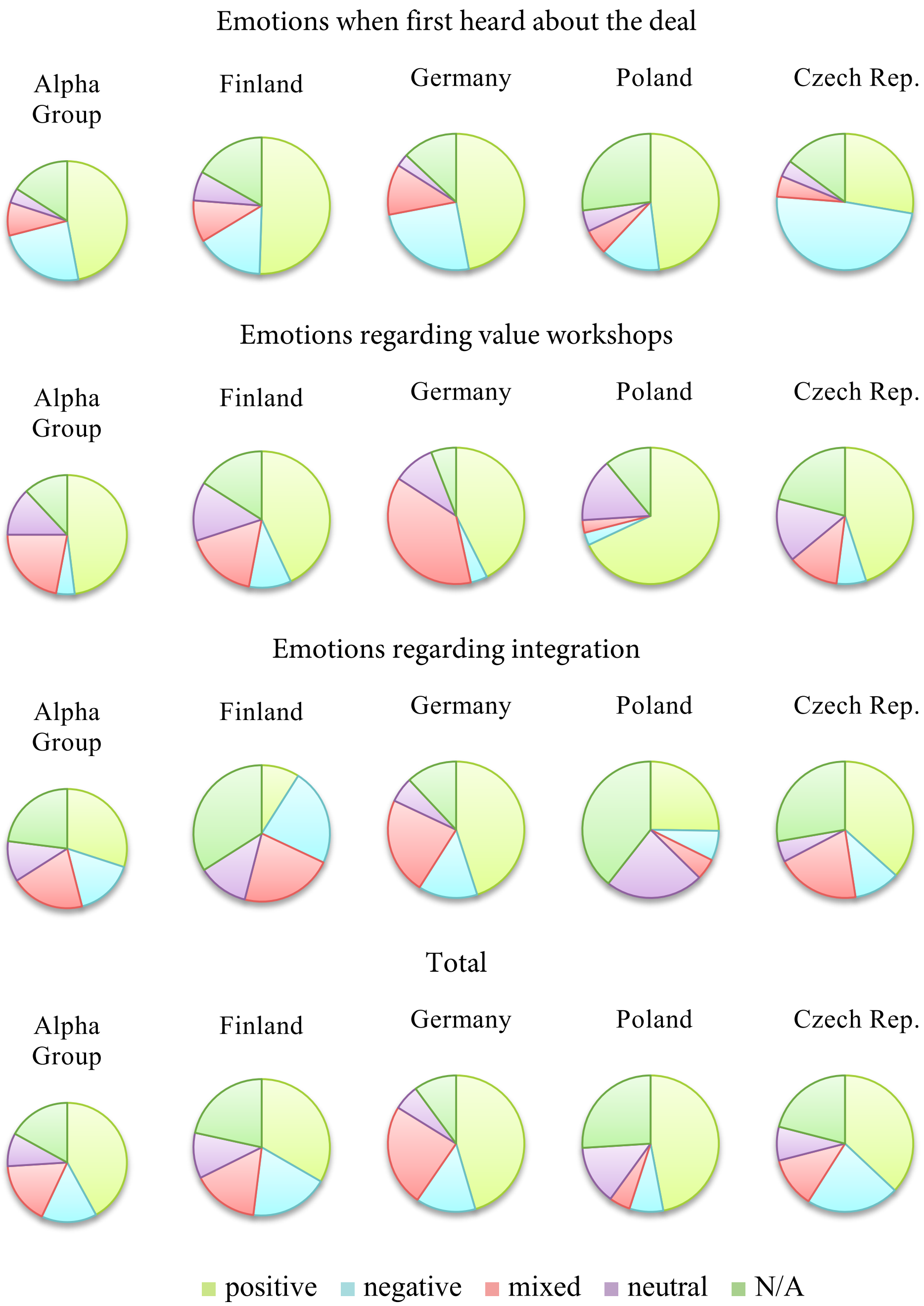

Figure 11. Emotions at Alpha Group in 2015

The division of emotions at Alpha Group puzzled me exceedingly. Based on the previous literature, I would have expected much stronger expressions of negative states such as stress and anxiety. These were, of course, present, but seemed much less pronounced than the overwhelming happiness employees were expressing, for example, with regard to the deal itself and the value workshops. This is why I first began to question the extent of the existing literature and its emphasis on the negative emotions and consequent negative outcomes in acquisitions. Therefore, I wanted to understand emotions: how and why they emerge, how they are linked to work environments, and what outcomes they may have. Emotions thus form the first and most important theoretical concept in this study.

3.2.2. From Affect to Emotion

In daily situations and even in research, terms such as *affect*, *emotion*, and *mood* are used somewhat interchangeably. However, further study reveals that each is distinguishable on its own. Thus, emotion is not an umbrella term. (Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017.) Rather, affect is a more general term, which includes all *affective phenomena*, such as emotion or mood (Guerrero et al. 1996). Core affect is a simple neurophysiological state that simultaneously falls somewhere between pleasure and displeasure, and activation and deactivation (figure 12). Core affect is a continuous, subjective assessment of an individual's current state. Since a change in core affect drives the individual to look for its cause, core affect directs attention toward and increases the accessibility of similarly valenced material. Generally, people seek to act in ways that maximize pleasure and minimize displeasure. Individuals can attempt to influence core affect, for example, through daily habits that increase pleasure such as a morning coffee. Thus, core affect influences motivation. (Russell 2003.)

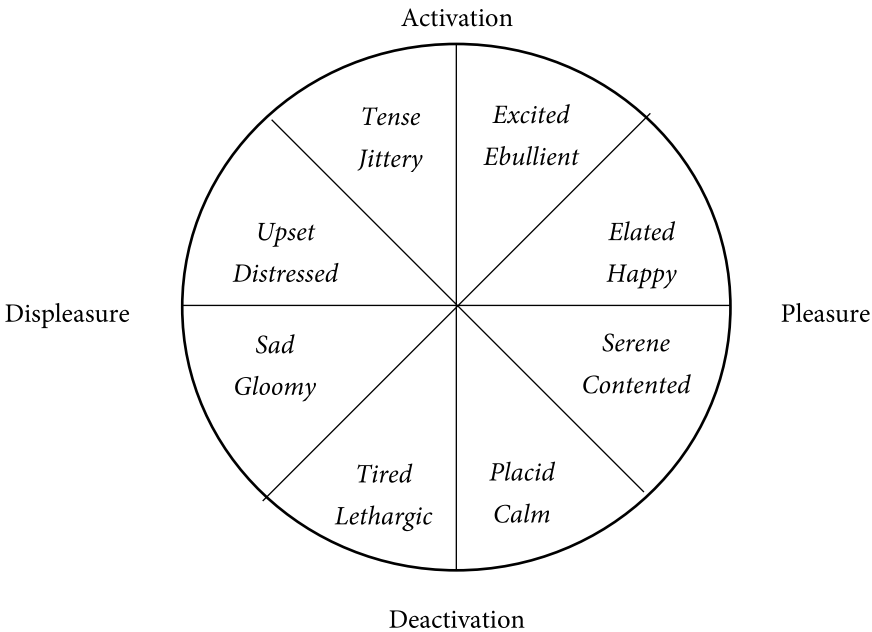

Figure 12. Core affect (Russell 2003, 148)

When core affect is prolonged and not directed at an object, it becomes a mood (Russell 2003). Moods are affective states that determine an individual's attitude toward the environment. Moods are relatively long lasting and do not have a definable root; an individual can feel good or feel bad without being able to pinpoint the reason. A good mood implies positive affect, whereas a bad mood implies negative affect. (Guerrero et al. 1996.) The key separation between moods and emotions is that moods have no intentional object. Moods can influence thoughts and emotions through their impact on faculties such as judgment and information processing. (Wong 2016.) Positive mood—happiness, for example—increases the likelihood of relying on heuristics (Park & Banaji 2000; Bodenhousen, Kramer & Süsser 1994), whereas negative mood may decrease reliance on heuristics and consequently increase deliberate rational judgment. (Park & Banaji 2000.)

In dividing positive and negative affect, it must be noted that these are not necessarily opposites. Instead, both positive and negative affect can have a high or a low state and are in fact independent and uncorrelated. In effect, this means that a term of high positive affect does not find its opposite from terms of high negative affect but rather from those of low positive affect. For example, excitement, as high positive affect, finds its opposite in dullness, low positive affect, rather than in relaxation, with low negative affect. Instead, fear, which is high negative affect, might be placed opposite to relaxation. From this, it is also visible that only at the high end is affect able to create emotional arousal, whereas at the low end it is rather the absence of the affective state that describes the emotion. (Watson & Tellegen 1985.) In figure 12, such opposites can be found in active pleasure versus inactive pleasure, and active displeasure versus inactive displeasure. Therefore, considering emotions as positive or negative is not always straightforward. The pleasantness of the event arises from personal and cultural traits as well as the level of emotional arousal. Following this, it can be argued that emotion is a highly volatile concept that will not easily yield to a comprehensive categorization (cf. Bowen 2014).

Nevertheless, a categorization can be made based on the hedonic quality of a given emotion. Positive emotions tend to be pleasing, those that *feel good*, whereas negative emotions are more unpleasant, and thus *feel bad*. This is a similar quality to the attractiveness of an emotion; positive emotions are rather more attractive than negative ones, which may in fact be repellent. However, it is not as straightforward as this. One might, at times, enjoy a negative emotion (such as taking pleasure in being sad), or feel bad about experiencing a positive emotion (such as deeming it bad to feel proud of a personal accomplishment). Therefore, it seems important to consider attitude, or anticipation. Should a person have a positive attitude toward the object of the emotion—that is, a positive emotion is expected—, it is more likely that the emotion will be positive, and vice versa. (Gordon 1987.) For example, if a company were to adopt a more thorough recycling plan, employees might either experience happiness as a result of having a positive attitude toward environmental protection, or anger as a result of having a negative attitude toward the heightened complexity of waste disposal. However, before digging deeper into emotions in the workplace, the meaning of emotion needs clarification.

3.2.3. The Meaning of Emotion

In early life forms emotions arose for the purpose of survival; finding nurturance and avoiding harm (Izard 1984). Whereas emotion once signified physical motion, it has since become a generic label, used to designate, describe, and count instances of experience. Emotion labels have been in use much longer than the discussion that has since adopted the word *emotion*. Such labels include *fear*, *joy*, or *anger*. (Gordon 1987.) However, operationalizing experiences for academic research is not always easy. Consequently, many theorists have accepted the option of utilizing a commonsense description but keeping it flexible so as to enable modification for specific scientific needs (Parkinson 1995). As a result, many definitions for emotion have arisen. Nevertheless, there seems to be near consensus that emotions include several components, including appraisal, action readiness, physiological signs, behavioral outcomes, and subjective feelings (Scherer & Moors 2019).

Already in 1987, Scherer defined emotion as "a sequence of interrelated, synchronized changes in the states of all of the five organismic subsystems in response to the evaluation of an external or internal stimulus event as relevant to central concerns of the organism" (Scherer 1987, 7). In a more clear-cut yet far-reaching explanation, Ekman and Cordaro (2011, 364) state that "Emotions are discrete, automatic responses to universally shared, culture-specific and individual-specific events." This point of view emphasizes the reactive nature of emotions. Izard (1972, 263), on the other hand, emphasizes the multiaspect nature of emotions in his definition of "emotions as phenomena that include neuropsychological processes, expressive behaviors, and a particular subjective experience."

The definitions for emotion are, thus, many. Already over three decades ago, a systematic review of the psychology literature produced 92 different definitions. In this review, eleven categories of emotion definitions were found based on how emotion was characterized in the source literature (table 10). The categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive; many definitions utilized secondary categories. Especially physiological reactions, emotional behavior, motivational aspects, and external stimuli were frequently mentioned in definitions that primarily belonged to another category. This is perhaps also noticeable due to the fact that the multiaspect category was the largest single category. In turn, the affective category, which is based on seeing emotion through experiences of arousal or pleasure/displeasure, was the most frequently used single aspect definition. (Kleinginna & Kleinginna 1981.)

Table 10. Classifications of emotion definitions (adapted from Kleinginna & Kleinginna 1981)

Foundation	Category	Description
Subjective and experiential	Affective	Emphasizes feeling
	Cognitive	Emphasizes appraisal/labeling
Stimulus-Organism-Response	External emotional stimuli	Emphasizes external emotion triggers
	Mediating physiological mechanisms	Emphasizes dependence on biological mechanisms
	Emotional behavior	Emphasizes externally observable responses
Functional consequences	Disruptive	Emphasizes functional effects
	Adaptive	Emphasizes functional effects
Scope	Multiaspect	Comprises several significant components
	Restrictive	Attempts differentiation from other psychological concepts
	Motivational	Emphasizes overlaps between emotion and motivation

This study takes a cognitive view of emotions. This approach connects emotion to thought processes, seeing emotion as a continuum of "sensing emotional stimuli and responses, appraisal of the sensed experience, labeling the emotion, emotional memory searches, planning or eliciting control mechanisms to deal with the emotional situation, or other cognitive activities triggered by that situation" (Kleinginna & Kleinginna 1981, 350). Nevertheless, even within cognitive theories, emotions are thought to consist of many components—in effect, they are multiaspect experiences. They are not self-explanatory and concrete, but rather a result of a myriad of circumstances, both internal and external. The internal components include cognition, motivation, physiological changes, and emotional experience (cf. Kleinginna & Kleinginna 1981; Scherer 2005), whereas the external include the circumstances from which appraisals are made; situations and contexts that individuals find trigger emotions (cf. Ekman & Cordaro 2011).

Appraisal is, indeed, a key component of emotion. Cognition—intra-individual evaluation—is deemed, in the end, the factor that forms a specific emotional experience on the basis of a given event or context. Emotions create both psychological and physiological effects (cf. Ekman & Cordaro 2011; Scherer 2005; Cabanac 2002; Izard 1972). The psychological components include the cognitive process and subjective experience, whereas physiological symptoms are visible in bodily impacts and motor expression (cf. Scherer 2005). In addition, emotions can have an impact on behavior (cf. Scherer 2005; Izard 1972).

For the purpose of this study, it is of interest to further consider the definition of emotions as *experiences*. This wording portrays a belief in the subjective nature of emotions. Each individual has a subjective experience of what it is to love, or to be angry, or to be envious, for example. Thus, it seems more likely that emotions are, in fact, experiences rather than *truths*. This study does not assume that there exists a universal explanation of *love*, or *anger*, or *envy*—or any other emotion—behind these experiences. It is rather assumed that the subjective experience of the emotions described with these words bear a resemblance to each other in a significant enough way to enable researchers to study emotions and their effects (Ortony, Clore & Collins 1988). For example, it can be argued that, in each individual, the experience of love indicates pleasure (at least at times), or that the experience of anger indicates displeasure. Thus, it seems that an appraisal of personal significance is essential for emotion. This does not mean that physical conditions could not have an impact on emotional experiences, but even in such situations, the power of cognition remains greater. (Lazarus 1991a.) Nevertheless, physiological states can affect emotions in a myriad of ways. For example, fatigue might increase the tendency to get angry, or interest can weaken the impact of sadness. (Izard 1984.) Such influences on cognition raise further interest in the nature of emotions as reactions.

3.2.4. Emotions as Reactions

The reactive nature of emotions is a central notion in cognitive appraisal theory. It was first discussed as it is understood today by Arnold (Cornelius 2006). Arnold (1960b) argues that the experience of emotion requires perception and appraisal. According to Arnold, it is impossible to make judgments of the unknown; a situation becomes relevant only when appraised against the backdrop of previous experience.

Cognition is a wide-ranging concept, which can be variously defined (Solomon 2003). However, in order to rationalize the relationship between cognition and emotion, it has to be defined more narrowly than simply as *information processing* (Izard 1984). Thus, it is necessary to take a closer look at what kind of cognition is important in terms of emotion. In this sense, a separation between knowledge and appraisal is needed. Knowledge is built on beliefs of how the world works and thus can be non-emotional. Appraisal, conversely, reflects a degree of personal relevance; it is an evaluation of importance regarding the knowledge of a specific situation. Only by recognizing that a situation is relevant to personal well-being can a situation become *emotional*. Thus, appraisal is necessary for emotion. In the strictest view of a cognitive approach to emotion, the effect of cognition on the emergence of emotions is seen as twofold. First, cognition can produce emotions. Second, cognition is necessary for the occurrence of emotions. Thus, cognition and emotion are somewhat inseparable. However, it should be noted that the relationship is bidirectional. Emotion can, in turn, have an impact on cognition; an emotion can influence ensuing thoughts and thus generate new emotions. This can happen, for example, when a situation makes an individual angry and subsequent consideration of the emergence of the state of anger makes the same individual ashamed. (Lazarus 1991a.)

The modern cognitive approach to emotions seems to have its roots in Aristotelian philosophy; Aristotle suggests that anger is born out of a perception of unfairness. From the cognitive viewpoint, emotion theory centers on the emotion-triggering effect of motivation and cognition. This is named *cognitive mediation*; it is subjective, and has also been named *folk psychology* (cf. Solomon 2003) due to the reliance on everyday constructions made by ordinary individuals regarding their personal lives. The importance of considering motivation alongside cognition stems from the basis of cognitive evaluation; in order to deem an event damaging or favorable—and thus emotional—, an individual taps into innate notions of what is important or unimportant. (Lazarus 1991a.) Thus, it can be said that “emotions are judgements” (Solomon 2003, 1). This implies that emotions are of short duration. They include a triggering event, an appraisal of said event, and a reaction to the outcome of appraisal. (Fredrickson 2001.) Furthermore, once triggered, emotions activate motivational goals that modify behavior (Wang, Clegg, Gajewska-de Mattos & Buckley 2018). Figure 13 illustrates a simplified process of an emotion.[10]

10 Although it is beyond the scope of this study to examine this process in detail empirically, I consider it important for the reader to be aware of how emotions are triggered in order to justify the argumentation presented with regard to the empirical findings.

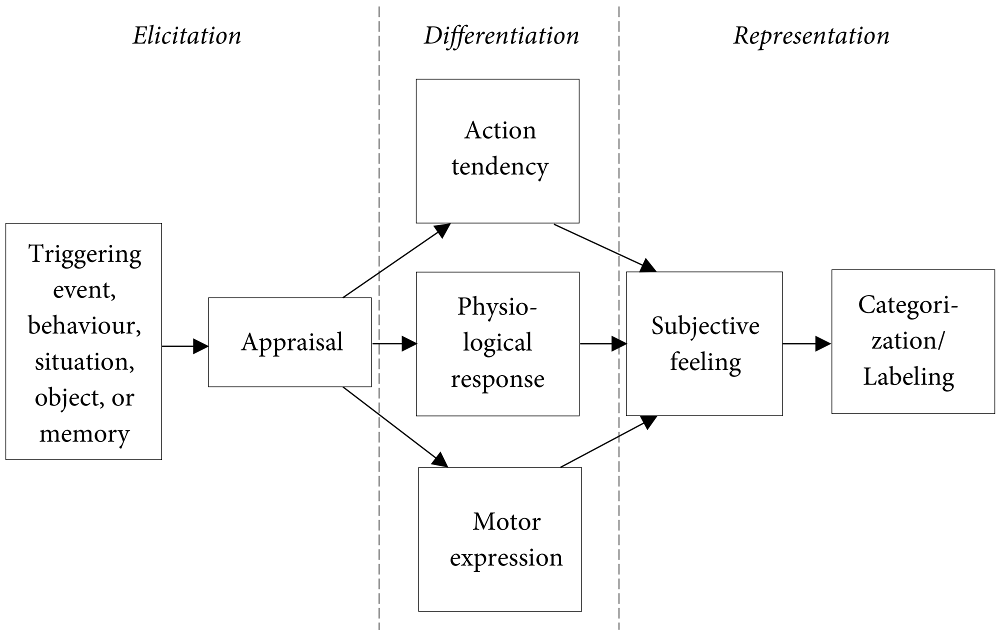

Figure 13. The emotion process (adapted from Scherer & Moors 2019, 722)

This notion is easy to exemplify. Should the triggering event be that of seeing a fast-approaching car, the appraisal might follow the lines of a car coming toward you at a speed that will not allow it to stop before it reaches this spot, which causes the psychological experience of fear along with the physiological change of a faster heartbeat. In the end, the process results in the behavioral change of running out of the way. The experience of the emotion, fear, is of short duration; when the triggering event passes, so does the emotion. However, the brief nature of the experience does not diminish the ability of the individual to re-experience the same emotion, nor does it lessen the possibility of a reappraisal and thus a new emotional experience. The reappraisal may also cause the individual to return to the behavioral pattern that was employed before the emotion-triggering incident occurred.

However, although figure 13 is seemingly simple, it portrays a somewhat complex process. Indeed, subjective meditation might reveal that there is not always time for much cognition; some emotional reactions seem to be reflexive. As indicated above, affect, despite being commonly thought of as the product of cognition, may in fact precede and be independent of cognition (e.g. Zajonc 1980). Izard (2007) has answered this puzzle by making a division between basic emotions and emotion schemas. Fundamentally, the difference lies in *basic emotions* as evolutionary neurobiological substrates, and *emotion schemas* as a dynamic interplay between emotion and cognition.

In philosophical terms, basic emotions can be named *natural kinds*. Natural kinds are considered as given by nature, including observable similarity and being significantly alike. Basic emotions consist of neural components, expression, and affect. They are rapid, automatic, and non-conscious responses to stimuli. Despite their evolutionary nature, basic emotion responses are subject to development from infancy to adulthood. Their number, however, does not increase. In contrast, emotion schemas increase in number as a result of development. Each schema is also subject to content changes over time. Emotion schemas cannot be categorized as natural kinds due to their complex nature, which gives way to variation between individuals and cultures. Thus, emotion schemas include an affective state as well as learned associations and labels for describing said state. Emotion schemas are the main motivation behind everyday objectives. (Izard 2007). Figure 13 thus represents emotion schemas rather than basic emotions, and it is the emotion schemas that are most often considered in this study as emotions.

So what, then, are the possible emotional experiences triggered by appraisal? Although categorizing emotions is difficult, attempts have been made to classify emotions based on how they are experienced (Mandler 1999). Lazarus (1991a; 1993) suggested a division between nine negative and four positive emotions. In addition, there are two emotions that are rather more difficult to label and thus are referred to as *mixed*. What allows for Lazarus' division is the different relationships between an individual and specific contexts in which emotions arise—their relational themes. A relational theme portrays an individual's conclusions regarding a situation based on an appraisal of its personal relevance and importance. Following these relational themes, researchers can examine how specific emotions arise. The fifteen emotions suggested by Lazarus—and their corresponding relational themes—are presented in table 11. Here, the term *mixed* refers to emotions with complex appraisal themes. However, emotions may also be mixed in the sense that an individual may experience a myriad of different, even conflicting emotions at once. Therefore, emotions need not be sequential, but can also overlap. (Oceja & Carrera 2009.)

Table 11. Emotions and corresponding core relational themes (adapted from Lazarus 1993, 13, cf. Lazarus 1991a)

Emotion	**Core relational theme**
Negative	
Anger	A demeaning offense against me and mine
Anxiety	Facing an uncertain, existential threat
Fright	An immediate, concrete, and overwhelming physical danger
Guilt	Having transgressed a moral imperative
Shame	Failing to live up to an ego-ideal
Sadness	Having experienced an irrevocable loss
Envy	Wanting what someone else has
Jealousy	Resenting a third party for the loss of, or a threat to, another's affection or favor
Disgust	Taking in or being too close to an indigestible object or (metaphorically speaking) idea
Positive	
Happiness	Making reasonable progress toward the realization of a goal
Pride	Enhancement of one's ego-identity by taking credit for a valued object or achievement, either one's own or that of someone or a group with whom one identifies
Relief	A distressing goal-incongruent condition that has changed for the better or gone away
Love	Desiring or participating in affection, usually but not necessarily reciprocated
Mixed/Problematic	
Hope	Fearing the worst but wanting better
Compassion	Being moved by another's suffering and wanting to help

Of course, many other influential categorizations have been suggested (for a selective overview, see appendix 7). Nevertheless, Lazarus' suggestions are used in this study because of the clarity that he assigns to the thought process leading to each emotion. This allows for deeper consideration of the actual emotion triggers. Out of Lazarus' list, Izard (2007) categorizes interest, joy or happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear as basic emotions that are natural kinds. However, the same labels may also be given to emotion schemas. The interpretation depends on the context. For example, happiness at the sight of a loved one seems rather more intuitive than happiness as a result of a work review discussion.

As found with regard to affect in general, the negative and positive emotions have traditionally been considered opposites. However, more thorough research has shown that the concepts of pleasure and displeasure are more bipolar in nature.

Although exact correlations are difficult to predict, this entails that human emotions are more akin to a pendulum rather than separate stations between which one may travel. (Russell & Carroll 1999.) Thus, the division between positive and negative emotions is difficult. In addition to emotions that have a mixed nature, it is possible that the same emotion can be deemed both positive and negative depending on which standpoint is taken. Is the situation viewed from a contextual or a subjective point of view, or are the consequences of the emotion deemed as the deciding factor? In fact, emotions are organismic; they are complex reactions to individual perceptions of our well-being both physically and mentally; that is, how far along we are on the road to achieving our personal life goals. (Lazarus 1991a.) In addition, in distinguishing positive and negative states it is necessary to look at the level of activation the emotion entails. For example, anger and fear are both negative emotions, but due to the activation element they have very different behavioral outcomes. Anger is likely to aggravate and make an employee more impulsive, whereas fear may drive the same employee to withdraw from unpleasant situations. (Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017.) This warrants a closer look at emotions in the workplace.

3.2.5. Emotions in the Workplace Following Acquisitions

According to Ashkanasy (2003), emotions exist across five levels in organizations (figure 14). At the *within-person level* (level 1), daily work events trigger emotions. On this level, individuals experience the temporal effects of emotions. At the *between-person level* (level 2), dispositional variables influence emotions. For example, the tendency to notice and interpret positive or negative triggers (e.g. Watson & Tellegen 1985)—individuals' affective dispositions—shape how emotions affect organizations. At the *interpersonal interaction level* (level 3), perceptions of others' emotion expressions and emotional communication are considered. This level links the individual and the organization. At the *group level* (level 4), emotional contagion may occur. Here, individuals often seek cohesiveness, enabling the emergence of collective values. At the final *organizational level* (level5), the organization's culture and climate may create the grounds for the emergence of collective emotional states. (Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017.)

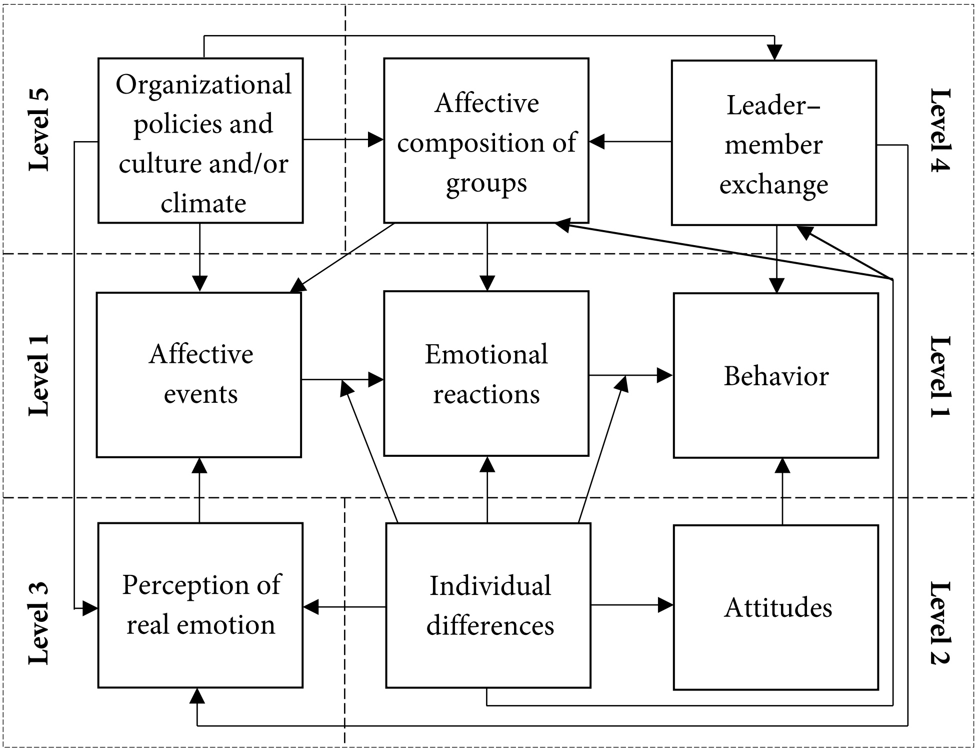

Figure 14. Emotional phenomena on five organizational levels (adapted from Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017, 81; cf. Ashkanasy 2003)

At work, emotions are often triggered because of change (e.g. Kiefer 2002). Particularly perceptions of insecurity, poor working conditions, or inadequate treatment by the organization can trigger employees' negative emotions during change periods (Kiefer 2005). Indeed, the previous change literature often focuses on the negative, discussing means to cope with stress or reduce resistance. However, change can trigger both positive and negative emotions, which can act as a significant motivation for work-related behavior. Emotions enable the construction of meaning during change, influence adaptation, and link the individual with the social surroundings. (Kiefer 2002.) How employees respond to change in terms of valence and activation thus forms a circumplex (figure 15).

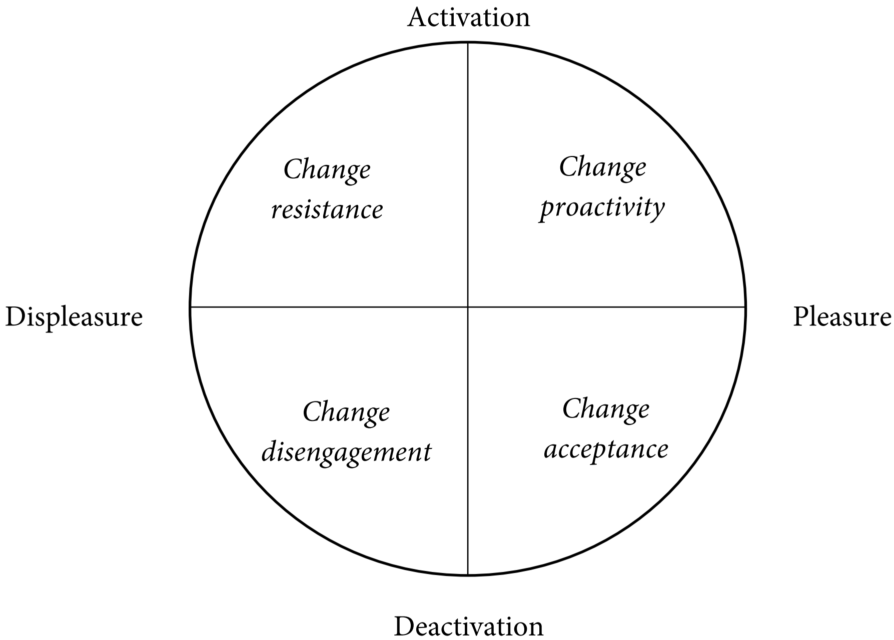

Figure 15. Employees' affective responses to change (adapted from Oreg, Bartunek, Lee & Do 2018, 69)

For employees to accept change, deactivated positivity such as calmness or relaxation is sufficient. However, for employees to become proactive toward change, activation is required. This can include emotional states like excitement or enthusiasm. Conversely, active change resistance occurs when employees are distinctly angry or stressed. Similarly, change disengagement includes despairing, helpless, and sad emotional states. (Oreg et al. 2018.) During change, employees' behavioral responses are indeed often a direct consequence of their emotional reactions. A change event at work triggers cognitive appraisal regarding the favorability of its outcomes, and thereby leads to neutral, positive, negative, or mixed emotions, depending on the perceived justice, extent, speed, and timing of the change event. This evaluation then leads to behavioral responses, moderated by the employees' consideration of the implications of certain behaviors. (Smollan 2006.)

As noted in the hierarchy above, emotions may converge to become group phenomena. An emotion is always a subjective experience, but should a number of individuals experience relatively similar responses to a single event, group emotions emerge (Kemper 2002). Membership in a particular social group gives rise to group emotions, as it increases the likelihood of similar reactions, which create similar responses to events perceived as relevant to the social group (Goldenberg, Saguy & Halperin 2014). Group emotions usually reflect perceptions arising *in* or *from* groups. Group-shared emotions, those arising *in* groups, necessitate co-presence: for example, a crowd experiencing collective excitement at a rock concert. Group-based emotions, those born *from* groups, do not necessitate co-presence but shared membership: for example, national pride. (Menges & Kilduff 2015.)

Emotion research in organizations has given rise to affective events theory (AET), which suggests that work events may trigger emotional reactions. AET seeks to counterbalance traditional judgment-based theories with a focus on affective experiences. It draws a line between the features of the contextual environment and an event within that environment that may cause an emotional reaction. It suggests that events that trigger emotions in the workplace have a direct link to work-related behaviors and attitudes, and takes into consideration how emotions fluctuate over time, regardless of the possible stability of the surrounding environment. Figure 16 portrays how, according to AET, work events and related emotions can lead to work attitudes and affect-driven behavior. (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996.)

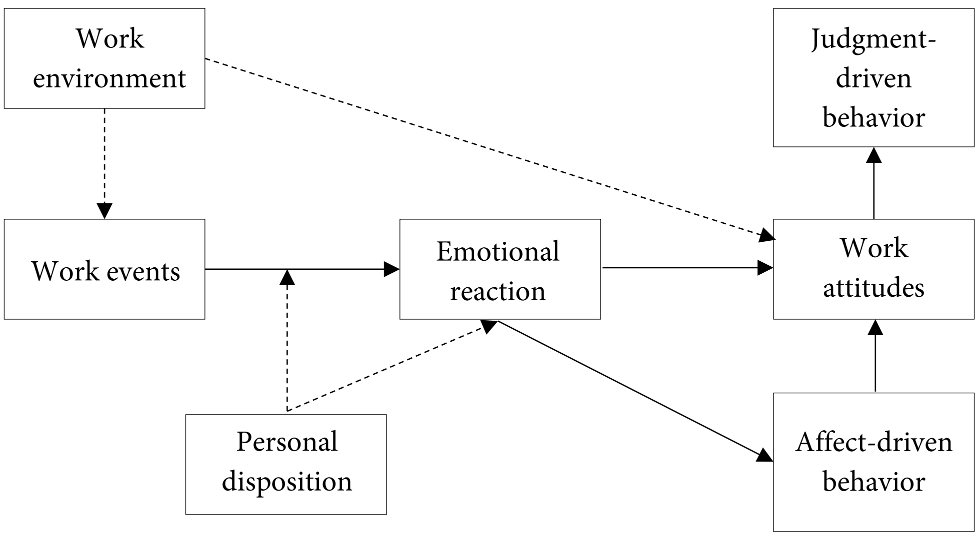

Figure 16. Affective events theory (adapted from Weiss & Cropanzano 1996, 12)

The AET is a perspective on emotion in organizations (Weiss & Beal 2005). By an event, it refers to a discrete episode, bound in space and time, which has an identifiable beginning and end. Such an event also carries a tone of discontinuity, separating it from organizational routine. (Morgeson, Mitchell & Liu 2015.) An affective event, in turn, can be defined as "An incident that stimulates appraisal of and emotional reaction to a transitory or ongoing job related agent, object or occurrence" (Basch & Fisher 1998, 3–4). Such events can be either interpersonal or task-related. Interpersonal events concern other people, like chatting with colleagues, whereas task-related events concern the execution of assignments. (Casper, Tremmel & Sonnentag 2019.) For example, in a stressful atmosphere (work environment), a superior may publicly criticize a subordinate (work event), causing that employee to experience anger (emotional reaction) that contributes to job dissatisfaction (work attitude). The experience of anger may also lead the employee to openly argue with the superior (affect-driven behavior). Similarly, job dissatisfaction may encourage the employee to ultimately leave the company (judgment-driven behavior). (Mignonac & Herrbach 2004.) This whole process can be influenced by the employee's personal disposition, as individuals generally tend to emphasize positivity or negativity (Fisher 2002).

It is possible that negative affect at work is experienced as more activating. Whereas positive events trigger positive emotions low in activation, negative events can trigger highly activating negative emotions. Nevertheless, positive experiences deemed particularly important for the self do trigger activating positive emotions. (Junça-Silva, Caetano & Rueff Lopes 2018.) Thus, apart from being complex, emotions are also dynamic (figure 17). Along the basic appraisal process (figure 13), four different stages can be perceived. An emotional experience often begins with anticipation; signals that an emotional experience is impending. Such anticipation allows time for preparation, or anticipatory coping. Anticipation can also allow an individual to change the immediate emotional response, as they depict beliefs about the expected emotional encounter and partly cause certain reactions. Such expectations toward the emotional encounter mean that individuals rarely face an emotional event wholly neutrally. For example, highly positive expectations can often increase the likelihood of disappointment, because it is difficult to meet such optimistic expectations. (Lazarus 1991a.)

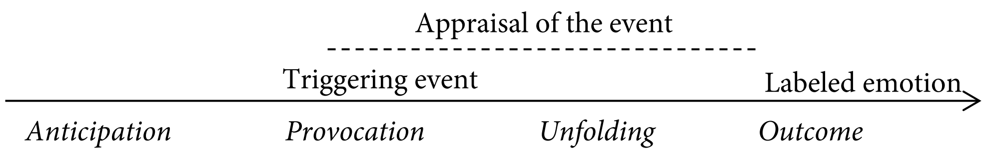

Figure 17. The dynamic nature of emotions (adapted from Harikkala-Laihinen 2018, 20; cf. Lazarus 1991b)

Following anticipation, provocation depicts the actual triggering event. An event here means any situation where an individual perceives a change in the relationship between the environment and the self. The change may be evaluated as beneficial or harmful—or as a failure to shift toward the beneficial from the harmful. Unfolding refers to this immediate emotional reaction; the occurrence of the cognitive, motivational, emotional, and coping processes. Finally, the outcome represents the resultant, labeled emotion. It reflects the result of the appraisal with regard to the well-being of the self; whether expectations were met and individual goals are more or less likely to be achieved. (Lazarus 1991a.)

For example, goal achievement or progress, involvement in decision-making or problem-solving, organizational reputation, and influence can trigger positive emotions at work. Conversely, mistakes, goal incongruence, task-related problems, lack of control, and workload often lead to negative emotions. (Basch & Fisher 1998.) During acquisitions, the work-related events that may trigger emotions include—but are not limited to—communication, management behavior, the surrounding environment, job design and roles, and the chosen integration approach. The emotions that arise often include anxiety, jealousy, sadness, pride, and joy, and can lead to attitudinal and behavioral outcomes such as stress, motivation, commitment, absenteeism, employee turnover, or conflict. (Sinkovics et al. 2011.) However, was this so at Alpha Group?

3.2.6. Emotions at Alpha Group

Indeed, at Alpha Group, many events and circumstances triggered emotions (for further evidence supporting the findings, turn to appendix 8). It was also possible to discern slight variations in the employee emotions between 2015 and 2016. In 2015, Alpha Group employees were experiencing the positive emotions of happiness, relief, and pride, the negative emotions of anxiety, anger, sadness, and jealousy, and the mixed emotion of hope. Altogether, 48 triggers for these emotions emerged (appendix 2). The discussion here is based on the found emotion triggers—thus the views and percentages presented portray the emotion-laden comments, disregarding the missing and neutral responses (appendix 6).

Happiness at Alpha Group was strongly related to the appreciation of the value workshops as a communication method and the values themselves as good guidelines for work. Employees felt that value workshops generated positive opinions about the new company, and that they increased unity and cooperation. The value workshops also encouraged employees to apply the values in practice and brought up a view of the values as building blocks of good work. The values were also seen as directing the company and enhancing employee motivation. In addition, happiness was triggered by the perceived strength and continuance the deal and subsequent integration evoked. The experienced similarity between the acquisition partners created happiness and the new organization was seen to offer more personal development opportunities. The expansion of international markets and the positive atmosphere created by the deal were also appreciated. These triggers portray happiness, as they reflect a goal-congruent development (cf. Lazarus 1993).

Happiness entails pleasure, and at Alpha Group, this was with regard to the values, value workshops, the deal itself, and the integration process.

> "The observation that we all, sometimes even unwittingly, have similar principles and values, was very constructive. In such a community it is easier to head in one direction—toward our common goal." *(Survey respondent)*

Relief was triggered by a sense of increased security. Employees felt that the organization of the value workshops showed that the company cared for and appreciated them. Similarly, especially among former Beta employees, fears about the future of the company were diminished through the deal, and the perception was that Alpha was *walking the talk*, keeping promises it had made. The integration period succeeded in restoring faith in job security and future progress. These triggers show that some of the fears that often accompany an acquisition were already beginning to fade—a distressing occurrence was changing for the better (cf. Lazarus 1993).

> "Relief: It had been known for quite some time that [Beta] was up for sale. For a company like [Alpha], this takeover would only have made sense if one would intensively continue to use the products, know-how, and, above all, the market importance of [Beta] for oneself, which would include the continued existence of the production facilities and the brand name." *(Survey respondent)*

Pride was triggered by appreciation of the employer and experienced prestige. Employees were proud to work for a company that emphasized values and perceived the company itself and being a member of it as valuable. Reaching integration objectives was seen as an achievement in building a stronger company. In addition, former Alpha employees felt pride in being employed by the buyer. These triggers reflect a boost in the employees' ego-identity (cf. Lazarus 1993) through creating a sense of ownership in the process.

> "Makes me proud to work at a company that values honesty and fairness! It´s good that we have outspoken values in the company." *(Survey respondent)*

Although positive emotions were dominant at Alpha Group, negative emotions were also expressed. *Anxiety* was triggered by uncertainties and perceived lack of progress in uniting the pre-acquisition organizations. That the acquisition partner was unknown was unnerving, and employees experienced insecurity with regard to the possible reallocation of resources and job losses. Employees also felt anxious that hoped-for progress had not been achieved and felt that some decisions during integration had been poor. The integration was seen to somewhat cloud the future of the company and it had failed to completely unite the acquisition partners. The employees felt like they were not heard enough during the process. These triggers reflect the feeling of facing an uncertain threat to one's objectives (cf. Lazarus 1993).

> "I am afraid that due to control and the fear of failure we will go years back in time, as responsibilities and decision-making, which were supposed to be brought closer to the field, have been taken further away." *(Survey respondent)*

Anger was triggered by actions that were perceived as unjust. Some employees felt that the value workshops did not offer any benefit, were poorly organized, and demeaned the employees, as the employer was perceived to believe no such values had existed among the employees before. The integrated company management was seen to violate the new values, and friction between units in terms of openness and honesty emerged. Employees felt like integration had failed to solve past and present problems. In addition, former Alpha employees felt like Beta was gaining all the control. These triggers portray feelings of a demeaning offense, which reflects anger (cf. Lazarus 1993).

> "It is an insult to the employees, since it is subliminally being suggested that no 'values' exist with the employees at [Beta]. The communicated values are self-evident 'virtues' in daily working life and have therefore always been in existence!" *(Survey respondent)*

Sadness was triggered by a sense of loss of former colleagues and the pre-acquisition organization, whereas *jealousy* emerged from difficulties in understanding the new organizational structure, where decision-making seemed to occur far away. These triggers reflect the experiences of an irrevocable loss and resentment caused by a perceived decrease in favor (Lazarus 1993). Nevertheless, many employees who experienced negative emotions were also *hopeful* for a better future. Especially the new values showed potential in creating improvements. Employees felt that the value work should be continued, and that the values must be lived up to throughout the company to create a better future. Similarly, the acquisition itself and the integration process that followed were seen as triggering hope for continuity and improvement. These triggers reflect a fear for the worst but of wanting better (cf. Lazarus 1993).

> "If the very top of the executive level gives an example of living up to these values, then the values and their claims become valid. In the interests of the [Alpha

> Group] and for the future of the company, I hope that these workshops will be carried out regularly in the future." *(Survey respondent)*

Many of the same emotions were also similarly triggered in 2016 (appendix 3). Employees still experienced *happiness* over a brighter future with more possibilities and opportunities, as well as valued cooperation and unity. The new management style and family atmosphere were mentioned as more novel happiness triggers. Employees also felt *relief* due to a perceived increase in security. In 2016, they also saw that changes were taking place, lessening uncertainties. Increased power was still experienced as a trigger for *pride*, and the brighter future of the company as well as the prestigious brands emerged as novel triggers.

> "Very positive! Remains a work in progress and all parties are continuing to communicate in order to form a harmonious entirety." *(Survey respondent)*

Nevertheless, employees still felt *anxious* that job losses might occur. Cooperation between units was still lagging behind, and changes caused insecurity. The lack of uniform guidelines for work, stress over increased workloads, concerns over maintaining quality, and apprehension over global decision-making emerged as novel triggers. *Anger* was again triggered by perceived inequality in decision-making, as well as perceived violations of the values. Novel triggers included perceived lack of communication, ill preparation, and a lack of self-authority.

> "Confused—we are now in a situation where the honeymoon is over, and the daily toil has begun. I feel that pigeonholes and bunkers are now starting to appear as people are trying to determine their positions in the new organization." *(Survey respondent)*

The loss of identity and colleagues continued to generate *sadness*, and former Alpha employees still felt *jealous* over Beta gaining control. Yet the employees were still also *hopeful*. Future progress and continuity were still seen as attainable, and the enactment of the values still felt important. However, many new triggers for mixed feelings emerged. Quality improvements, better communication and cooperation, shared working rules, improved HRM, and more flexibility were hoped for.

> "There are differences between the German regions, and also with Finland. A different mindset and mentality. The merging process will continue to be a slow process. [- -] There is still a lot of potential. I hope we will get more support, including staff, in Germany, and have our proposals taken into consideration." *(Survey respondent)*

In comparing the findings from 2015 and 2016, a slight change is visible. The emotion pool was shifting, with more anger compared to other emotions than before, and the object of hope shifting from value enactment toward increased clarity in daily conduct. Although the level of positivity remained relatively stable, the number of negative emotion triggers rose from 35% to 42%, while simultaneously the number of positive triggers decreased from 54% to 36%. Nevertheless, even in 2016 happiness was the most common emotion altogether, represented in 44% of the emotion-laden comments. Anxiety counted for 17% of the experienced emotions and anger for 15%. Thus, it can be seen that the immediate emotional response of Alpha Group employees was not dominantly negative, as suggested in much of the acquisition literature. Therefore, these findings are reflected on next based on the literature on emotions.

3.2.7. Matching Theory with Found Emotions

The emotions listed above reflect the categories and appraisal patterns suggested by Lazarus (1993). Based on these, the core appraisal patterns at Alpha Group can be determined (table 12). The found emotions are categorized based on their valence and the perceived core relational theme behind the discovered triggers.

Table 12. Core relational themes at Alpha Group

Emotion	Core relational theme	Key level of emotions[11]
Positive		
Happiness	Ensuring the continuity of one's employment and the company.	within-person and organizational level
Relief	Relieving distress about the future of the company.	organizational level
Pride	Taking credit of perceived organizational advancement.	organizational level
Negative		
Anxiety	Facing an uncertain future for one's job and the company.	within-person and organizational level
Anger	Experiencing a demeaning offense against employees.	within-person level
Sadness	Loss of colleagues or pre-acquisition organizational identity.	within-person and organizational level
Jealousy	Resenting the acquisition partner for perceived favoritism.	organizational level
Mixed/Problematic		
Hope	Fearing future turmoil but seeing synergy potential.	organizational level

Happiness triggers at Alpha Group centered on the continuity of employment. This was perceived not only as having a job, but also as the continued opportunities for development. Such perceptions were evaluated as goal-congruent and thus created positive emotions. In addition, positive future development was a key relational theme triggering relief. The experience of relief was slightly different between the acquisition partners, as former Beta employees experienced relief from the deal itself as an assurance of continuity, whereas former Alpha employees mainly felt the relief in the dissolving of fears regarding potential worst-case scenarios (i.e. job losses). Pride was also triggered slightly differently. Former Alpha employees felt pride over being the buyer, whereas former Beta employees felt more pride over the new company values.

Although many employees experienced happiness and relief over continuity, almost equally as many experienced uncertainty—the key relational theme for anxiety. In general, anxiety was triggered by perceived uncertainty over the future of

11 The level of emotion reflects Ashkanasy's (2003; Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017) arguments. The key difference for this study is between individual-level emotions and organizational, collective emotions. The table mentions the level that best reflects the data regarding each separate emotion. All of the found emotions may also still appear on other levels.

the company and its employees. Anger centered on any perceived offensive attitude against the employees such as seeing management violate the new values. Sadness focused on loss; the loss of pre-acquisition identity or of former colleagues. Resentment was the key relational theme for jealousy, which focused on the perception that the acquisition partner was somehow better off. Interestingly, jealousy was mainly felt in the acquiring organization. Nevertheless, hope was experienced based on perceived future synergy potential. Although employees feared that perceived problems would continue or worsen, they hoped that the future would prove such fears incorrect.

Based on Alpha Group, it seems that at least happiness, relief, pride, anxiety, anger, sadness, jealousy, and hope can occur following an acquisition. However, these emotions can appear and be discussed under many different labels (cf. appendix 7). Happiness, for example, is often talked of as joy, optimism, encouragement, or enthusiasm (cf. Laros & Steenkamp 2005). Similarly, anxiety can be labeled as fear or nervousness, whereas anger can be expressed as irritableness, hostility, scorn, or disgust (cf. Watson & Clark 1999). Thus, many emotion labels seem applicable to the emotions found at Alpha Group. However, it is possible to categorize these different expressions into the abovementioned groups based on the similarity or the appraisal patterns they reflect, as suggested in cognitive appraisal theory (cf. Lazarus 1993).

Apart from naming emotions in several ways, employees may indeed experience several, even contradictory emotions at close intervals. This is possible because positive and negative emotions are not necessarily mutually exclusive opposites (cf. Watson & Tellegen 1985), and emotions in general are highly dynamic (cf. Scherer 2009). For example, the same employee may experience happiness and relief over job continuity simultaneously with sadness over the loss of colleagues. Although the cross-sectional data collected for this study are imperfect in describing the dynamicity of experiences, it is possible to discern variation not only between emotion triggers but also between individuals, time points, and different groups within the organization (cf. Scherer 2009; Solomon 2003).

The dynamic nature of emotions is perceivable, for example, in the change from the initial excitement about the deal toward frustration, when progress was not perceived (cf. Smith & Ellsworth 1985). This example also reflects the role of anticipation in the dynamicity of emotions: unmet expectations easily turn into negativity (cf. Lazarus 1991a). Unmet expectations could be behind the anger felt when managers were perceived to violate the new company values, for example. Dynamicity was also visible in the differences of emotion triggers between acquisition partners, such as between pride over the new company with strong values, or pride over being the acquirer. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of emotions is perceivable in how the same event could trigger both positive and negative experiences. For example, the integration triggered both relief due to restored job security and anger due to its inability to fix past and present problems. This dynamic nature of emotions and the role of anticipation, provocation, and unfolding (Lazarus 1991a) are illustrated in the imaginary appraisal patterns in figure 18.

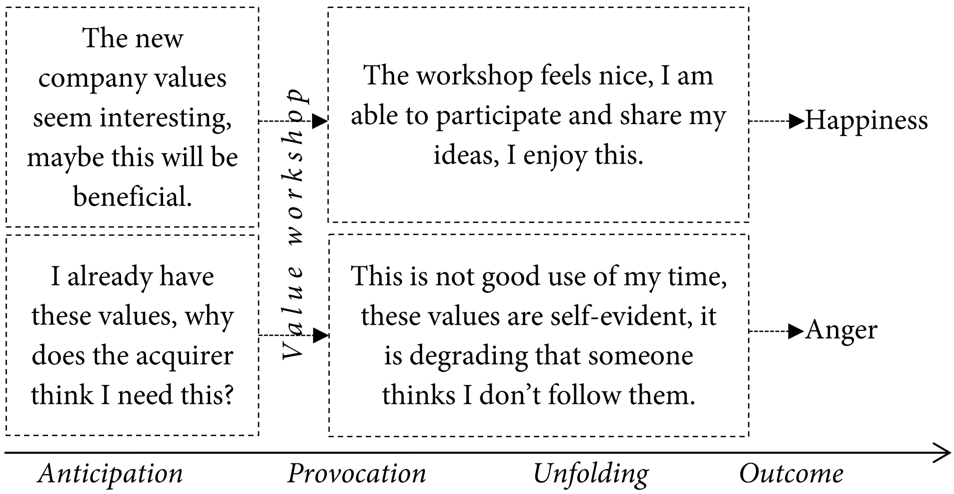

Figure 18. The dynamic process of emotions at Alpha Group (adapted from Harikkala-Laihinen 2018, 38)

Figure 18 shows how different expectations can provoke different thought processes and thereby trigger different emotional outcomes—in these examples, happiness or anger. It is also entirely possible that anticipation and the outcome can have a different valence. For example, an employee expecting to be bored (negative) could have experienced the workshop as pleasant (positive), whereas an employee anticipating an interesting (positive) discussion could have been disappointed (negative) in terms of the depth of the event. Although in the examples some likely thoughts are conjured up, the appraisal need not be conscious. The findings also reveal group elements in how emotions emerged. At the very least, it is clear that Alpha Group employees did experience emotions, and that those emotions were similar enough to enable categorization (cf. Goldenberg et al. 2014). Moreover, it was possible to discern some in-group favoritism in the differences of the emotion triggers between the acquisition partners. Pre-acquisition membership enabled the feelings of loss when the old company identity changed, and former colleagues were laid off. Similarly, pre-acquisition membership triggered the pride employees felt in being employed by the acquirer, as well as the jealousy over perceived favoritism.

Such differences depict group-based emotions, whereas the enjoyment of the value workshops reflect group-shared emotions (cf. Menges & Kilduff 2015).

As seen from the above, the dedicated value workshops, which were a massive communication effort at Alpha Group, mainly triggered positive emotions in the employees. In addition to the workshops, Alpha Group followed many other routes to endorse the new company values. For example, the values were a reoccurring topic in the personnel magazine. The unification work was also visible in the reoccurring wish to erase the former company names Alpha and Beta from usage in order to promote the existence of Alpha Group. Whereas these communication efforts were welcomed, in 2016, the employees reported several problems. Cooperation between the units was not optimal, there was confusion regarding work tasks, joint guidelines were missing, managerial example in following the values was lacking, and overall, the work was considered as more complicated. This led me to consider the role of communication and especially participation more closely, as they were clearly linked with employee experiences.

3.3. Interaction Following Acquisitions

3.3.1. Internal Communication Following Acquisitions

Organizational communication is often used by employees to interpret events and their meanings. This suggests that organizations can influence employees' perceptions through different means of communication. (Roundy 2010.) However, during change periods such as an acquisition, the related experiences of stress and perceived threat may hinder effective communication (Lotz & Donald 2006). Nevertheless, communication that is open, effective (Angwin et al. 2016), and frequent (Weber, Rachman-Moore & Tarba 2011) is essential following acquisitions (Schweiger & Denisi 1991). Indeed, it has been suggested that without successful employee communication, any change is impossible (Barrett 2002). Clear, reliable, considerate information delivered through a variety of media can help employees cope with acquisition-related uncertainty and thereby increase productivity (Appelbaum, Gandell, Yortis, Proper & Jobin 2000).

Communication will only be effective if it is informative and educational on the one hand, and motivating on the other hand. (Barrett 2002.) Effective communication helps manage employee reactions, foster perceptions of justice, and guide the internal climate toward assurance rather than uncertainty (Lotz & Donald 2006). This can also aid the completion of planned structural and cultural changes (Teerikangas & Irrmann 2016). Conversely, ineffective communication may lead to increased ambiguity and uncertainty, as well as lower commitment (Angwin et al. 2016).

One of the key factors in determining the effectiveness of communication is its richness in terms of the variety of media employed (Angwin et al. 2016). For example, companies can utilize one-on-one meetings with the immediate supervisor, face-to-face team meetings, organization-wide gatherings, video chats, phone calls, emails, internal magazines, intranet sites, or notice boards. Large employee meetings, internal magazines, and intranet notices are examples of *pull* media; following them must be actively chosen. Therefore, key information cannot be communicated solely based on such media, but they can be used to provide a uniform message. Conversely, the delivery of need-to-know, day-to-day information is more often left to local communicators, for example, middle management. (Balle 2008.) Such day-to-day information often centers on describing the acquisition partner, reporting on the progress of the integration, and revealing the involvement of a certain function in the integration process (Weber et al. 2011).

The richness of the used communication media themselves also plays a role. The extent to which different media allow the conveying of not just words, but also intonations, emotions, and reactions can significantly increase the effectiveness of communication. The more distant the communication medium, the more difficult it becomes to read body language, facial expressions, or emotional ques. This is why face-to-face communication is often thought to be the most effective means. (Lee 1994; Daft & Lengel 1986.)

The message itself also makes a difference. During change, communication must ensure that clear and consistent information is disseminated throughout the company. Communication should help in motivating employees to support the change, enable employees to rally behind the objective, and encourage extra effort. Communication should also limit misunderstandings and cut out rumors that may impair efficiency. (Barrett 2002.) Indeed, communication highlighting positive outcomes such as personal advancement or organizational growth can help increase employee commitment (Roundy 2010). Nevertheless, the fact that something is communicated may be, in the long run, even more important than what is actually communicated (Schweiger & Denisi 1991). Still, in order to be beneficial, communication should always be designed and purposeful (Zhu, May & Rosenfeld 2004).

However, employees have a habit of believing the worst. Thus, attention should be paid both to formal and informal communication channels. An open communication strategy could thwart some of the issues related to negativity and rumor mills through informing employees about what is known, what is not yet known, when it is likely that decisions will be made, what the answers are to the questions posed by employees, and why some questions cannot be answered. Communication should highlight that employees are not intentionally being deceived, and it should prevent the formation of strong in-groups that might undermine cooperation. (Lotz & Donald 2006.)

Another key factor to consider is the audience of the message. Different stakeholders will likely need different information and may prefer different communication means. Employees may react to communication differently based on their job description, position in the organization's hierarchy, geographical location, or type of employment contract. Similarly, the acquisition is likely to trigger different reactions in different groups, and the need for communication is likely to be cumulative as the integration progresses. (Balle 2008). The audience may also influence the type of communication needed. Cornett-DeVito and Friedman (1995) distinguish four different categories of communication following an acquisition. First, participative activities refer to the involvement of both acquisition partners in building cooperation. Second, supportive activities refer to the extent to which management supports the implementation of integration-related changes. Third, informative activities refer to the dissemination of current information in and between acquisition partners. Finally, directive activities refer to information exchanges meant to guide or direct employees.

Especially when crossing borders, it is also important to consider the role of language. In international business, effective communication in general requires an understanding of the surrounding socio-cultural context (Adair et al. 2016). Especially in cross-border acquisitions, such sensitivity in communication is decisive, as subjective experiences set the tone for the process (Risberg 2001). However, greater diversity complicates communication, as differences in cultural and linguistic preferences make it more difficult to create common, shared experiences (Piekkari, Vaara & Tienari 2005). The quality of communication thereby becomes essential in terms of the effectiveness of the exchange (Isaacs 1999). Quality in this sense refers to perceptions of message clarity, responsiveness, and comfortability (Liu et al. 2010).

However, following a cross-border acquisition, the new corporate language is often different from the native language of the acquisition partners. This can increase uncertainty and ambiguity, and even signal power differences between the organizations. Employees may experience problems in interacting effectively in a foreign language or find new communication requirements difficult to fulfill. English is often chosen as a corporate language due to its *lingua franca* nature, or to signal neutrality between different, non-English-speaking locations. However, often only top management operates in the corporate language on a daily basis, with lower level employees sticking to their native tongue. The development of sufficient language competency throughout the organization may take a long time, and differences in skill levels may lead to the formation of in- and out-groups based on language skills. (Piekkari et al. 2005.)

Not just the language, but also the words we use make a difference in communication. For example, there may be differences in what kind of communication is considered polite or motivating in different cultures. Examining an acquisition between a US and Chinese company, Gao (2014) found six possible mismatches. Communication preferences may vary between directness and subtlety, aggressiveness and modesty, courtesy and command, competitiveness and obligingness, rule-based and good will-based, or simply through the meaning placed on words.

Finally, the communication process plays an important role. Dynamic communication delivered in a timely manner can facilitate employees' strategic commitment to the acquisition. This necessitates a stream of coherent communication rather than isolated instances. Viewing communication as an ongoing process can help prevent information shortages (which often give rise to rumoring) on the one hand and information overload (due to the necessity to communicate too many things at once) on the other hand. (Angwin et al. 2016.) Moreover, involvement can greatly influence employees' willingness to commit and cooperate (Appelbaum, Lefrancois, Tonna & Shapiro 2007). Participation can allow employees to understand the motivation behind the change better, and increase their perceptions that change is necessary and positive. Participation also gives employees a sense of ownership and control, which motivates them to work toward the change, increasing its success. Moreover, participation allows for identifying the positive aspects of change better, thus prompting more positive emotions toward change. (Rafferty & Jimmieson 2018.) However, in order to be engaging, it is important for participation to be direct; that is, employees need to be involved directly instead of via representatives. (Simonsen Abildgaard, Hasson, von Thiele Schwarz, Løvseth, Ala-Laurinaho & Nielsen 2018.) Indeed, the literature on organizational socialization suggests that social cohesion is achieved primarily through interaction (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006; Morrison 2002).

3.3.2. Key Principles of Social Interaction

Social interaction refers to "a situation where the behaviors of one actor are consciously reorganized by, and influence the behaviors of, another actor, and vice versa" (Turner 1988, 13). This makes interaction a special form of communication, as it necessitates reciprocity. In a social setting, an individual constantly makes perceptions and interpretations (Bargh & Pietromonaco 1982). Social interaction in general consists of sending and receiving messages through which actors attempt to influence each other in a dynamic way (Buller & Burgoon 1996). In addition to the socially shared perceptions, communication includes a signaling system that is biologically shared and unconscious. The basis of modern research on communication can be traced back to Darwin (*Expressions of the Emotions in Man and Animals, 1872*). He argues that social coordination requires displays that convey information regarding the inner states of the expresser. Therefore, for successful social interaction, the inner states are connected to the expression, and the interpreter must be able to read the cues embedded in the expression and respond accordingly. In effect, Darwin posits that encoding, interpreting, and responding to a communicative message have coevolved to create adaptive value for the signaling system. Following this, it can be argued that due to such coevolution, individuals conveying and responding to signals *appropriately* will be favored. (Buck & VanLear 2002.)

Social communication can be divided into three categories: spontaneous, pseudo-spontaneous, and symbolic (figure 19). Spontaneous communication can be thought of as biologically shared, involuntary, non-verbal communication. However, it is possible to mimic the gestures of spontaneous communication. This is called pseudo-spontaneous communication, where the encoder purposefully manipulates the expression to resemble spontaneous displays. Pseudo-spontaneous communication is the essence of entertainment; for example, actors or advertisers habitually seek to manipulate the interpreters' reactions. Symbolic communication is also intentional. However, symbolic communication has clear, learned, and shared associations. Verbal communication falls under this category. In addition, sign language and pantomime can be thought of as symbolic, since they are not signs of an internal state. Communication can include all three forms simultaneously. (Buck & VanLear 2002.)

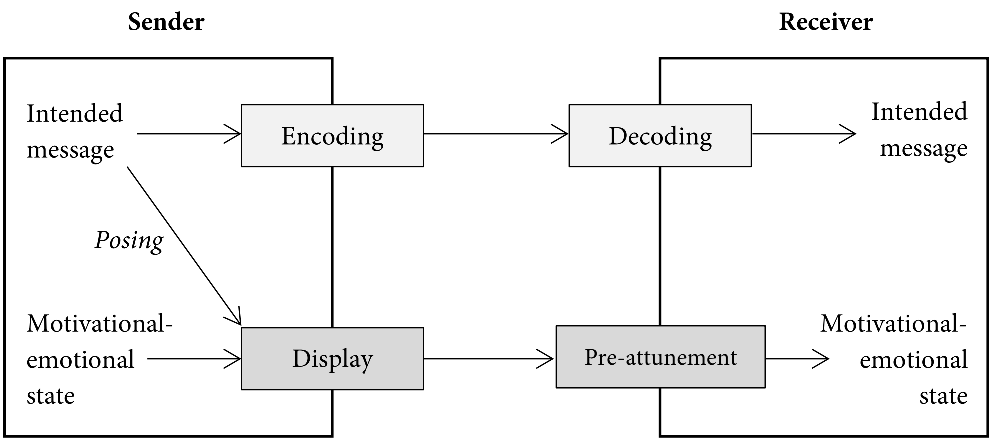

Figure 19. Streams of communication (Buck & VanLear 2002, 527)

The upper part of figure 19 captures symbolic communication: The sender encodes a message, which is decoded by the receiver. Simultaneously, spontaneous communication is described in the lower part of the figure, where the internal state of the sender (encoder) is expressed in a display, which the receiver (decoder) interprets according to pre-attuned perception rules. The lower part of the figure may not be conscious but exists as a *gut feeling* or a *vibe*. However, the sender may purposefully attempt to manipulate the expression through posing a spontaneous display, thereby utilizing pseudo-spontaneous communication. Within these streams, the distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication is not critical. (Buck & VanLear 2002.) In addition to the communicative messages, the interactive element is influential. If social interaction consists of a dynamic exchange of messages where participants attempt to influence each other, it is likely that in social interaction the roles of the sender and receiver will switch between participants.

According to the expectancy signaling perspective, recipients are likely to match their behavior to the interaction behavior they have anticipated from the sender prior to interaction. This would lead to acting pleasantly toward a counterpart who is expected to be pleasant, and unpleasantly toward one that is expected to be unpleasant. The dyadic interaction perspective, on the other hand, expects recipients to adapt to perceived communication styles. This is partly dictated by biology and reinforced by social norms, and it partly stems from a deliberate strategy. In practice, it has been found that perceived, present communication behavior as well as reciprocity are the driving factors behind recipient behavior. (Burgoon, Le Poire & Rosenthal 1995.) Following the above, the interpersonal expectancy perspective predicts that actors may use the dyadic interaction effect to their advantage by exhibiting desired modes of behavior in order to generate reciprocation (Burgoon, Stern & Dillman 1995). Accordingly, the interaction adaptation theory (Burgoon, Stern, et al. 1995, 128–29) suggests six different basic patterns of interaction accommodation:

- *matching* exhibited behavior to that of the counterpart;
- *mirroring* the opposing party's static behaviors (such as posture) identically;
- *converging* to an increasingly similar behavior style;
- portraying *interactional synchrony* in using similar rhythms and coordination;
- showing *reciprocity* in a comparable response to an action by the counterpart;
- showing *complementarity* in dissimilar behavior to that of the counterpart;

- *diverging* through adopting increasingly dissimilar behaviors; and
- *compensating* through offering equally valuable but directionally opposite behaviors.

As implied above, these are not necessarily mutually exclusive; for example, matching also includes many of the subcategories.

There is an element of adaptation in any human interaction. Even a mundane conversation requires accommodation and adjustment to the other/s by, for example, taking turns to speak, or choosing a suitable pace or vocabulary, as well as signaling understanding, for instance, by nodding. (White & Burgoon 2006.) Because culture influences the meanings an encoder embeds in a message as well as the meanings a decoder interprets from the message, cultural diversity in a social situation will increase the complexity of communication. In order to be able to interpret messages encoded by an individual from another culture correctly, the interpreter depends on sufficiently proficient social perception skills. Experience in intercultural communication can also increase the ability to interpret intercultural messages correctly. (Porter & Samovar 1996.) Therefore, when individuals' cultural backgrounds suggest different behavioral norms, adaptation may be critical in order to reach an agreeable outcome. What this means in effect is that individuals may need to modify their behavior toward the norms of the opposing party's culture and away from their own. (Adair, Okumura & Brett 2001.)

In periods of uncertainty, employees often turn to their peers for support. However, peer interaction—that is, informal communication with colleagues—can create a significantly negative attitude toward the change,[12] as group topics often center on uncertainties, changes, skepticism, and the possibility of layoffs. Thus, employees reinforce each other's anxiety. (Marmenout 2011.) Such negativity, instead of diluting, can get more serious over time (Schweiger & Denisi 1991). Therefore, attempts at generating more positive interaction seem fruitful for change. Indeed, interaction perceived as clear, engaging, and comfortable is experienced as positive and can enable improved communication outcomes (Liu et al. 2010). If successful, social interaction and employee involvement can create a feeling of belongingness to an organization (Rouzies & Colman 2012). This is a key element in dialog, a particularly interactive mode of communication.

3.3.3. Dialog: Moving from Communication to Interaction

Isaacs (1993, 25) defines dialog as "a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience." The word *dialog*

12 A negative attitude here refers to perceiving the change as negative and thereby being unwilling to help the change efforts.

comes from the Greek words *dia* (*through*) and *logos* (*word*). In essence, dialog connotes a flow of meaning. (Bohm 2003; Senge 1990.) Most problems with achieving group objectives stem from an inability to think and talk *together*. Dialog is one way of learning to do just that and necessitates joint discussion and reflection. Dialog cannot be done *to* someone, only *with* someone. (Isaacs 1999.) It entails embracing different viewpoints without prioritization (Oliver & Jacobs 2007). Successful dialog includes a learning curve where the perceived importance of the self decreases in favor of a view of the self in relation to others. Simultaneously, the perceived necessity to make others understand one's own thoughts and points of view decreases. (Isaacs 1999.) The suspension of judgment and the embracement of others' viewpoints allows groups to move from discussion toward dialog (Schein 1993). Whereas the goal of negotiation is to reach agreement, the goal of dialog is to reach understanding. Therefore, in truly effective dialog, problems are not merely solved, they are dissolved. (Isaacs 1999.) Through dialog, group members can move toward converging beliefs and values (Oliver & Jacobs 2007) and build a shared culture (Bohm 2003; Schein 1993). During dialog the aim is in creating an atmosphere of collective exploration into thought, attention, and assumptions. Such an atmosphere allows for the free flow of information. Thus, successful dialog is able to bring out shared patterns of thought and emotion. Instead of debating between differing views or aiming at building consensus, dialog allows individuals to create shared meaning. In effect, dialog is a way for individuals to learn to think together rather than focus on finding a single, least contested solution to a specific problem. (Isaacs 1993.)

Isaacs (1999) sees dialog as a singular, particularly deep form of conversation. However, in everyday situations, dialog can be thought to cover verbal and non-verbal communication paired with collaboration. The *verbal* dimension is characterized by words. However, it is not always possible to use the complete range of verbal expressions. For example, written, formal text can have a very different style and vocabulary to informal, spoken language. *Non-verbal* communication is most obvious face-to-face. Non-verbal communication includes the whole variety of non-verbal action, but most prominently, actions connected to what is being said. Most notably, non-verbal communication is perceivable in the face, in gestures, or in the sound of the voice. However, non-verbal communication can also differ in styles according to what is considered appropriate. For example, behavior in a board meeting differs from behavior during a lunch break. Non-verbal elements are especially difficult to build into written communication. The *collaborative* element underlines the social interaction perspective; dialog is a two-way activity. Dialog is not an exchange of monologues, but an interactive process where speakers can overlap, and listeners are attentive and interested. A further feature of collaboration is the pursuit of understanding. In face-to-face situations understanding can be expressed both verbally and non-verbally, but through media, the non-verbal element becomes more limited. (Bavelas, Hutchinson, Kenwood & Matheson 1997.)

Organizational transformation necessitates dialog. Through dialog, mutual trust can be created. In addition, dialog enables the development of valid communication; a shared understanding of what is being said. Trust and communication are the basic elements of all effective group action. Cultural understanding is equally important for organizational transformation. In intercultural situations it takes a longer time and more elaborate dialog to build an arena of trust and valid communication. (Schein 1993.) Thus, dialog can be seen as a distinct form of conversation, which differs from the everyday definition of dialog as discussion (figure 20).

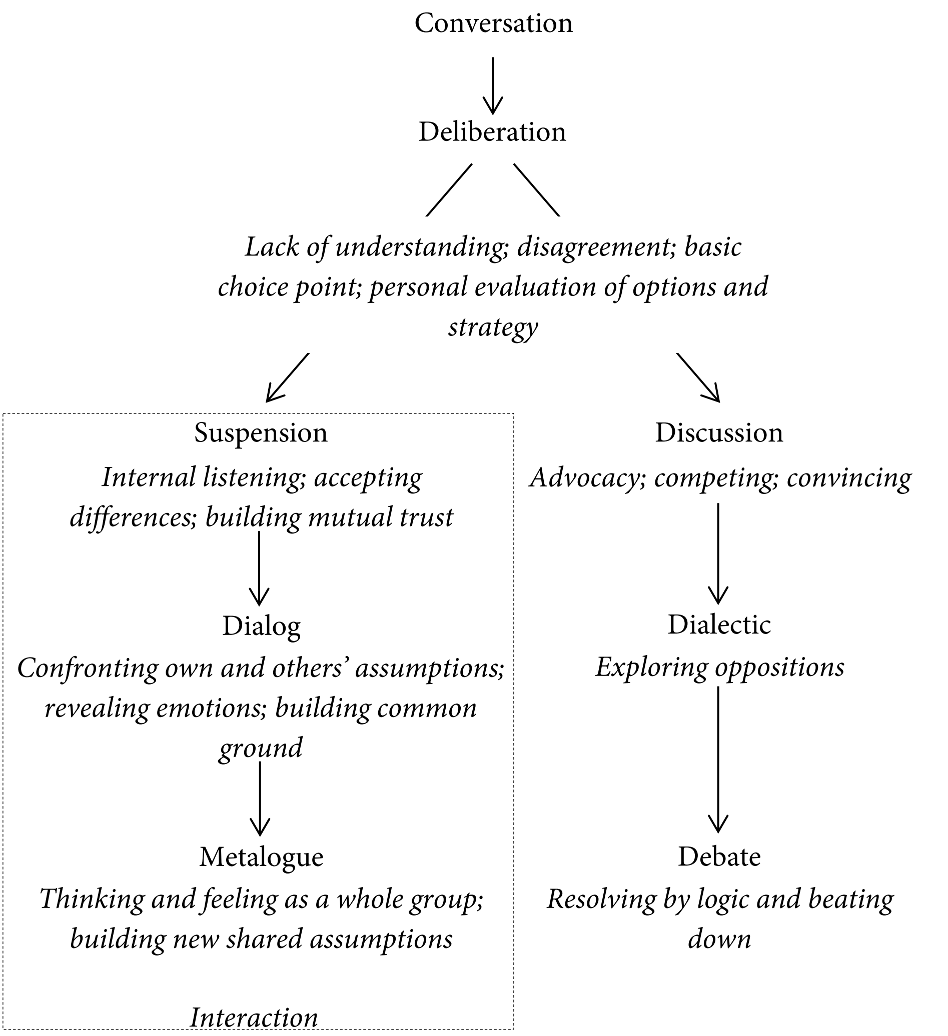

Figure 20. Routes of conversation (adapted from Schein 1993, 46; cf. Isaacs 1993, 34)

For a problem to be resolved, it must first exist. Thus, for dialog to be necessary, a lack of understanding or a disagreement must precede it. Suspension occurs when disconfirmation arises; often when a point is not understood or there is disagreement. In order to move toward dialog instead of debate, individuals must understand that disconfirmation may arise from differences in perceptions, and that such perceptions may be incorrect. With such understanding, problematic perceptions can be suspended, or *let go*. If a sufficient number of group members are willing and able to suspend reactions based on possibly erroneous perceptions, the group as a whole is able to move toward dialog. Nevertheless, the everyday discussion route may be entirely valid if the group members already *share a language*. Dialog is useful when, in order to find a solution, a common understanding must first be built. (Schein 1993.) As stated above, in practice, dialog entails distinctly collaborative communication utilizing both verbal and non-verbal means (Bavelas et al. 1997).

Dialog closely resembles what is also called open-minded discussion (Tjosvold, Wong & Chen 2014) or constructive controversy (Tjosvold 2008). Different opinions can be used to benefit situations where aligned goals necessitate the creation of new solutions and commitment to new positions. Such constructive controversy necessitates specific skills. The development and expression of opinions builds on available information and past experience. Questioning one's own opinions and hearing the opinions of others encourages an active attempt to understand the problem at hand better. Integrating differing understandings ultimately leads to more practically useful solutions, which can in turn be approved and applied more easily. (Tjosvold 2008.) This utilization of interpersonal communication skills depicts the open-minded discussion cycle of expressing, understanding, integrating, and agreeing (Tjosvold et al. 2014).

In dialog, this cycle involves voicing, listening, respecting, and suspending. Voicing refers to the presentation of the participants' true selves and their true emotions. Listening necessitates active empathization with the speaker. Respecting all the participants' entitlements to their own positions allows for the understanding that one may not ever fully understand others' opinions. Respecting therefore creates space for voicing. Suspending judgment is necessary in order to create room for true dialog. (Isaacs 1999.) Authentic dialog includes both reason and emotions based on epistemic, social, and compassionate information-processing motivation (Choi 2014). Epistemic information processing highlights a willingness to make extra effort toward achieving a thorough understanding (De Dreu, Nijstad & van Knippenberg 2008). This is where the rationality of group decision-making is born (Choi 2014). Conversely, social information processing considers the information itself (Steinel, Utz & Koning 2010) in terms of what kinds of group outcomes are considered desirable (Choi 2014). The increase in one's own benefits is considered as pro-self-motivation, whereas pursuing group goals is considered as pro-social motivation

(Steinel et al. 2010). As an emotion, compassion signals being moved by perceived suffering and wanting to help (Lazarus 1993). Compassionate information processing thus depicts an inclination toward empathic responses (Choi 2014).

In order to be successful, dialog should also be facilitated. Facilitation indicates the enactment of authority during dialog, most often to empower or constrain participants (Kristiansen 2013). The facilitation task is not easy, as dialog is a sensitive sphere of communication. For example, there is a fine line between a movement toward a debate over emotions, and dialog becoming depleted due to a lack of emotional consideration. (Ballantyne 2004.) Thus, a dialog facilitator is responsible for encouraging participants to balance their propensity to speak and to listen. Balanced dialog entails both the need to voice, and the need to listen and understand. A facilitator may also need to steer the group back toward dialog if they err toward debate. (Burson 2002.)

Considering the above, it is possible to characterize the whole integration process as dialog, especially when a symbiotic (Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991), collaborative (Cartwright & Cooper 1993) approach is chosen. In such projects, integration can be seen as a continued process of social interaction aiming at harmonization. This is well in line with the objective of dialog—forming a mutual understanding. Furthermore, as seen in figure 20, successful dialog can lead to the creation of a new, shared culture—which is also a fundamental objective of collaborative acquisitions. In fact, dialog is especially important specifically with regard to culture. Individuals tend to protect culture as part of group identity; for example, changing an organizational culture is difficult and time-consuming. Such attachment to culture creates an expectation of others to value the culture equally and learn to become a part of it. This can lead to difficulties in intercultural situations. Thus, cultural learning must precede organizational learning. (Schein 1993.)

In intercultural dialog interaction determines effectiveness. Thus, it is important to note that emotion impacts thought, and thoughts influence talk. (Isaacs 1999.) Furthermore, in intercultural situations the behavior and core beliefs may differ between parties (Sebenius 2002). Therefore the cultural backgrounds of the parties can have a decisive role in intercultural communication (Herbig & Kramer 1992). Thus the learned norms of social interaction, for example, courtesy and politeness, are of great importance (Buss 1999; Morand 1995). The social context also has implications for the emotions that emerge during interaction such as dialog.

3.3.4. Emotion in Interaction

The social norms of expressing emotions are learned through interaction. Thus, the norms may differ between cultures. Individuals consider learned rules of emotional expression as natural, and differing expressions as unnatural. (Porter & Samovar

1996.) An observer becomes aware of others' emotional states mainly via behavioral signs; most notably facial and bodily expressions. Facial expression is one of the key signals of experienced emotions, and as such a means toward adapting to the present situation. Interpretations of others' facial expressions enable individuals to predict future behavior and thus manage social encounters more efficiently. (Lanzetta & Englis 1989.) Facial expressions of internal emotional states are involuntary, even unconscious. However, individuals also have voluntary control of their face, thus enabling assuming an expression of an unfelt state. Thus, individuals can manipulate their expressions, for example, according to learned rules such as avoiding portraying anger toward an authority figure. Apart from what emotion is felt (or expressed), the face can show whether this emotion is mixed with another one, and how intense the emotion is. In addition to emotion expressions, the face can convey emblems such as winking, pouting of the mouth, or raising an eyebrow. (Ekman 2009.) Different internal states appear best on different parts of the face. For example, disgust is best visible in the cheeks and mouth, fear and sadness in the eyes, surprise in the brow and forehead, and happiness in both the eye and mouth areas. (Boucher & Ekman 1975.)

In social interaction, de-synchrony can be disruptive. Therefore, individuals tend to mimic others. Emotional contagion is a concept defined as a habitual tendency to imitate and coordinate facial expressions, verbalization, bodily stances, and the movement of another individual and, as a result, to converge emotionally. (Hatfield et al. 1994.) In general, the more attention is awarded to others' emotion expressions, the more likely contagion is to occur. Both positive and negative emotions, both in their high or low activation states, can be contagious. Such contagion will in turn influence groups' emotional states, but also subsequent group dynamics. For example, the contagion of positive emotions leads to decreased conflict and increased cooperation. (Barsade 2002.)

Individuals are often only aware of a small part of the vast amount of information they possess. Since the conscious mind is often occupied by the most significant, unusual, or challenging information, it happens that emotional reactions can arise without the experiencing individual realizing the reasons for the response. This non-conscious process is named primitive emotional contagion. (Hatfield et al. 1994.) This mimicry denotes a hereditary flexibility and responsiveness to a social context (Fiske & Taylor 2013). However, emotional contagion can also be the outcome of a more conscious process. This can occur when individuals consciously pay attention to and compare their own emotions with others' emotions. This comparison tends to trigger an appraisal of what is considered appropriate behavior in a certain situation, and thus it increases the likelihood that the individual will conform to the perceived emotion norm. (Barsade 2002.)

Historically speaking, in addition to acting as internal controls, emotions have evolved as communication systems that promote group survival. This is visible, for example, in the similarities between visceral expressions of emotions in different cultures. The social expression of emotion acts as a means of inclusion, thus the development of emotional skills promoted human survival. Because of such evolution, five strategies of expressing emotions in social settings exist. *Simulation* refers to the expression of a socially acceptable emotion even when the emotion is not experienced. *Inhibition* is the opposite practice of hiding an experienced emotion. *Intensification* means a heightened expression of a mildly experienced emotion, whereas *de-intensification* conversely means the toned-down expression of a strongly experienced emotion. Finally, *masking* is the expression of an emotion completely different from the one experienced. (Andersen & Guerrero 1996.)

In light of the above, it seems to be possible to utilize emotional expressions strategically. Although it may be considered unethical, the strategic expression of emotions nevertheless is a usable tactic. The utilization of strategic emotion expressions has two implicit fundamental assumptions: that communicators can control the expression and that the expression can be effectively communicated to the opposing party. Communicators can express actual emotions as well as imitate the expression of feigned emotions in order to influence the behavior of the observer. Emotion expressions can be used to convey information and influence judgment, or for persuasion. The creation of a positive emotion increases cooperation and improves agreement quality. On the other hand, by creating negative emotions, a communicator may be able to pressurize the opposing party to make larger concessions. In contrast, communicators may choose to hide all emotions, as sometimes suggested by common folk wisdom. Assuming a *poker face* may protect from unwanted leverage that the opposing party may have based on an expressed emotion. (Kopelman, Rosette & Thompson 2006.)

Indeed, facial expressions have the ability to arouse responsive emotional experiences. An observer not only sees an emotional display, but also interprets the display and thus comes to a cognitive judgment of the situation, which evokes an emotional response. It is often assumed that the responsive emotional experience is similar or identical to the observed expression. For example, empathic reactions often occur as a result of interpreting the situation from the expresser's point of view. However, completely opposite responses may also occur. It seems that a positive disposition toward the expresser is likely to lead to empathic responses, whereas a negative disposition contributes to non-empathic responses. Similar reasoning seems to be valid when considering cooperative or competitive situations; in cooperative situations, the observer is likely to respond with similar emotional experiences, whereas in competitive situations the response is likely to be the opposite. For example, if a competitor expresses signs of pleasure, the observer is likely to be worse off and thus respond with signs of displeasure. Conversely, if a cooperative partner expresses signs of pleasure, the situation is likely to be mutually beneficial and thus evoke a similar response. Thus, the interactive situation is significant in determining response patterns. (Lanzetta & Englis 1989.)

In addition to what emotions look like, studies have tried to pinpoint how emotions sound. It has been found that although there are typical vocal expressions (here considering the sound qualities of vocal expressions rather than the language), in everyday usage, these expressions may be somewhat far away from the most representative examples. When thinking of what any emotion sounds like—how people speak when they are, for example, happy or angry—, it is not difficult to find differing examples from subjective experience. (Laukka, Audibert & Aubergé 2012.) In speech, eleven acoustic cues have been identified: the pitch of the voice, intonation, variances in the pitch (jitter), loudness, variations in the loudness, velocity, pauses, voice quality (sharpness or softness), resonances in the voice quality, articulation, and the patterns of air flow in the glottis. Following these signals, for example, anger is characterized by precise articulation with few pauses, conveyed in a relatively high pitch with lots of jitter. Sadness, on the other hand, is characterized by a low precision of articulation with several pauses, a low voice pitch, and little jitter. (Juslin & Laukka 2003.)

The emotion expression signals discussed above can be seen as fundamental for the performing arts. For example, the accustomed vocal cues of speech enable performers to express emotion in musical performance (Juslin & Laukka 2003). Similarly, bodily movement is successfully used to convey emotional information in dance performances (Sakata, Shiba, Maiya & Tadenuma 2004). Thus, it can be said that emotion expressions are a powerful tool. Therefore, it is plausible that expressions similar to those used consciously to manage and create emotional responses in customers or audiences can occur in and influence any type of social interaction.

In order to elicit an interpretation, an emotion expression must also be decoded. The characteristic signals of emotion expressions discussed above convey meaning to the interpreter. It has been long known that both non-verbal and verbal communication play a role in how a message is interpreted in interpersonal communication (Schul & Lamb 1982). However, the continuously changing nature of emotion expressions proposes a challenge in social interaction (Sacharin, Sander & Scherer 2012). These difficulties in interpreting emotion in social interaction underline the notion that despite distinctive characteristics, emotion expressions are not uniform. This is also visible in the fact that human beings are not able to interpret each other's emotion expressions completely accurately. (Hurley 2012.) So how did employees at Alpha Group decode emotion-laden communication?

3.3.5. Communication and Interaction at Alpha Group

> "The most important thing is to understand the people and speak with them, and to be open. It is communication—I cannot think of anything that would be more important." *(Integration Manager)*

Alpha carried out many initiatives to ensure sufficient communication. The deal announcement, for example, was made in person in the four largest locations of the new Alpha Group. For this purpose, a private jet was hired to transport the key people between Finland, Germany, and Poland. The specific value workshops engaged all employees in the integration. The in-house employee magazine, translated into key languages at Alpha Group locations, maintained the integration and the values in the employees' minds. A set of comic strips (for an example, see appendix 9) in the employee magazine illustrated the values in everyday work at Alpha Group. Every company presentation mentioned the new, unified values, and particularly the CEO was careful always to refer to the joint values explicitly. Staff meetings, recruitment, as well as personnel development discussions began to incorporate the new values as yardsticks. Much of the integration communication centered on the new company values because they were seen as the way to build unity. Alpha was also conscientious regarding the old Beta logo on top of the old office building as they were moving premises and wanted to make sure that it would come down respectably rather than be bulldozed in front of the employees. Although integration management took great pains to ensure communication toward Beta, Alpha was sometimes left to its own devices.

Beta had formerly been accustomed to a rather hierarchical structure, which complicated communication somewhat. For example, people seemed hesitant to take responsibility and the fact that Finns were all on a first name basis caused quite a lot of friction in the beginning. The fragmented earlier communication style at Beta had often left people guessing what was said to whom, which took a while for Alpha members to become accustomed to. Nevertheless, the incoming integration manager was met with politeness, although the initial information flow toward her was somewhat sparse due to unfamiliarity. Beta employees, for example, found it difficult to get accustomed to the integration manager wishing to keep the door to her office physically open. However, she felt that one of the most important things she managed to do was to create good connections with the employee representative from the outset.

The adoption of English as the new corporate language created some problems in fluency, especially with older employees and blue-collar employees. Alpha Group members described the new corporate language as *bad* or *broken* English. A lot of everyday communication including the intranet was still in the local language—most notably in Finnish, German, Polish, and Czech—and some employees were not interested in learning English at all or were ashamed to use their less-than-perfect language skills. This was also an issue when the software was updated to an English version, as well as during virtual communication. Thus, it was also understood that in order to get everybody on board, local languages could not be eliminated. However, Alpha Group did offer language training to all those who wanted it and some employees did show extreme effort in wanting to improve their skills, for example, through purposefully always using English and even booking holidays in English-speaking countries. Nevertheless, knowledge of the German language was seen as an asset by former Alpha members, although the change toward also using English in everyday communication was slowly taking place.

> "Since I haven't installed the German language checker, spell checker, it doesn't know the German words. Which trigger me to think about whether or not I'm just gonna switch all of my communication over to English. [- -] If there is communication in Finnish going on and then all of a sudden, a colleague from a different location is supposed to be involved. Now you have to get it somehow into English." *(Vice President, Manufacturing and IT)*

Although many virtual communication means were adopted to save on travel costs, traveling between and assignments in other Alpha Group locations were seen as important both for everyday communication and for deepening the ties between the acquisition partners. Expatriation was encouraged but had not been realized to the desired extent. Only a few employees had expressed interest in or actually started expatriation periods, and most overseas assignments only lasted a few weeks or months. It was noted that traveling between the key locations in both directions was important, not just from the acquirer to the acquired, or vice versa. Such experience was seen as vital in creating a true group mentality. A wish to erase *headquarters* from the group language was expressed as a sign of a true matrix organization. Headquarters' role was seen more as a legal entity, whereas relationships between different locations and the common ways of working were not to be dictated by a single office. Nevertheless, some found new colleagues from overseas locations very difficult to work with due to different practices and expectations. In addition, the distance between management and the team members was experienced as troublesome, as it hindered the exchange of everyday knowledge. This resulted in some overlaps in management, which was seen as inefficient. Nevertheless, the importance of some conflict was also noted. Resolving conflicts was seen as a way to bring people closer together.

One of the early issues to be noted was that the nature and role of company values were understood differently in Finland and Germany. Thus, a lot of work went into forming mutual understanding, especially on what values-based management meant for Alpha Group. Although cultural differences seemed rather minor, they complicated interaction in that Germans preferred a very straightforward, vocal, argumentative style, whereas Finns preferred a more hands-on, commonsense approach. Another issue was the previous organizational culture, which could hinder the acceptance of changes.

> "When you manage change remotely, it becomes harder. But I picked a young team, so I have a very young team everywhere so it's… [- -] Since it's a very young team, and they don't have that much [Alpha] history, they're open to change as well still. So, I don't have that many walls to break through." *(Vice President, Purchasing and Logistics)*

One of the challenges in communication related to the efficiency of information flows and differing perceptions of what constitutes enough information. One of the ways to solve this issue was by introducing a newsletter delivered every other week that was translated into the key local languages. This method of communication was seen as rather old-fashioned, but on the other hand, it ensured that employees knew that they would always hear something, as this newsletter was written even if there was nothing much to tell. The efficiency of communication flows also depended on trust. It was noted that if employees were really not honest about their opinions and knowledge, many problems would arise. Thus, an increase in trust was seen as crucial.

> "When you don't have one hundred per cent trust and things are not talked about with their proper names, our greatest risk is that we will make completely wrong decisions, when we believe what they say, and cannot read between the lines regarding what they actually meant." *(Vice President, Product Management)*

The downside of intense communication efforts was that some employees seemed to experience an information overload. Especially in the very beginning, employees felt that new notices were coming in too fast, and often contained mainly negative information. Nevertheless, a reoccurring issue with communication was the rumor mill that spread through the grapevine. It was thought that Beta employees, because of the former hierarchy, were used to management sitting behind closed doors, and employees hearing very little, which gave rise to anxiety. In such an atmosphere, rumoring is a coping mechanism. However, such informal information practices were seen as quite common, especially on the factory floor. Also, in former Alpha, where communication was sometimes less frequent, rumor mills emerged to fill in the gaps. Conversely, the grapevine also gave rise to *goodwill ambassadors*, who attempted to make their colleagues understand and accept the changes that were introduced. A few people even sought the company of the integration manager to present and discuss development ideas.

> "People appreciate that they are now much more involved than before." *(Vice President, Sales in German-Speaking Areas)*

In organizing the value workshops, the character of the workshop facilitators was seen to be of great importance. That the facilitators should be able to interact openly and genuinely, and adopt a coaching attitude toward work, was seen as the key to making the workshops a success. Moreover, the facilitators were chosen from among those who were thought to be *change agents* within the organization, who were thought to believe in the development of the group. As perceived by the informants, one issue that could have been dealt with better concerned the presentation of the new values. It was noted that employees could have been more involved in deciding on the words to describe each value. Nevertheless, the workshops were a great effort in engaging all the employees.

3.3.6. Matching Theory with Communication Experiences

It is evident that following the acquisition, Alpha Group attempted to influence employee perceptions through communication (cf. Roundy 2010). This is perhaps most evident in the value workshops, where the new *code of conduct* of the company was introduced to the employees. Altogether, through adopting a myriad of communication means—including the workshops, newsletters, team meetings, CEO announcements, etc.—, Alpha Group attempted to establish communication that employees would find informative on the one hand, and motivational on the other hand (cf. Barrett 2002). Much of Alpha Group's communication was built based on introducing and emphasizing the new values, as the values were to be at the core of socio-cultural change. The usage of multiple communication means, as well as the introduction of the values in everyday conduct seems to have aimed for a richness of communication (cf. Angwin et al. 2016). Apart from the value-specific communication efforts, following the new matrix-like organizational structure, Alpha Group adopted new means for everyday interaction. Emails and phone calls were habitually in use between and within different locations, and the internal magazine as well as intranet site and local notice boards were updated constantly to offer acquisition-related news (cf. Weber et al. 2011).

As predicted from the literature (e.g. Lee 1994; Daft & Lengel 1986), the richness of the media was noticed by Alpha Group members. Although due to language difficulties email was sometimes preferred as a means to ensure the usage of the proper words on the one hand and the ability to come back to the message on the other hand, employees felt that richer media was more comfortable—especially in the beginning. Face-to-face meetings were mentioned as the most desirable means of communication, especially when parties were unknown to each other. Following face-to-face meetings, employees felt video chatting was easier than emailing or calling overseas. Physical closeness thus seems to be an important part in the clarity of the message during the initial meeting, whereas familiarity with the parties makes more distant communication means easier to use as the relationship is built.

Based on the findings, Alpha Group was not entirely successful in cutting out rumors with constant communication (cf. Barrett 2002), as many employees reported fears and uncertainty (cf. Lotz & Donald 2006). It can be argued that this is to be expected following a major change such as an acquisition. Indeed, the fact that at the same time as the rumor mills were active, others felt relieved and convinced by communication efforts, suggests that Alpha Group was able to build employee commitment (cf. Roundy 2010). The realization of the integration manager that frequent, timed communication, even when there was really nothing new to communicate, seems to coincide well with the existing literature (e.g. Schweiger & Denisi 1991).

Language issues were clearly felt at Alpha Group. Although communication in general seemed effective, and employees were offered the chance to participate in language training, many employees at all levels of the organizational hierarchy had difficulties in communicating in the new corporate language (cf. Piekkari et al. 2005). Language sensitivity thus became a key issue in communication with regard to change (cf. Risberg 2001), not just in terms of which language was used, but also in terms of appreciating each other's communication style preferences and building a true understanding of what was meant. In order to increase the clarity and comfortability of the message, communication was also offered in local languages. This quality assurance (cf. Liu et al. 2010) applied especially to the value workshops, where the responsiveness of communication was key.

As predicted (cf. Clayton 2010; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006), participation and reflection were appreciated in communication efforts. This was particularly noteworthy in the value workshops, where employees had the chance to participate in embracing each other's viewpoints and moving toward shared beliefs and values—in effect, joining in with the dialog (cf. Oliver & Jacobs 2007; Isaacs 1999). The value workshops functioned as a communication arena where the employees were able to work toward mutual goals and commit to found solutions, leaving behind possible differences of opinion (cf. Tjosvold 2008). Employees were able to present their own viewpoints, listen to and understand those of others, and look for similarities between perspectives that allowed them to build agreement (cf.

Tjosvold et al. 2014). The facilitators were able to guide the workshop dialog toward a positive, collaborative, shared understanding (cf. Ballantyne 2004; Burson 2002), where both reason and emotion were given space (cf. Choi 2014). Figure 21 portrays the value workshops at Alpha Group as dialog.

Welcoming employees to the workshop

Deliberation of the purpose of the workshop
Personal evaluation of how the new organizational values affect one's job

Suspending judgment
Internal listening; accepting differences of opinion; building mutual trust

Dialog
Confronting own and others' assumptions regarding values at work; revealing emotions related to values; building common ground on the meaning of the organizational values

Metalogue
Thinking and feeling as a whole group; building new shared assumptions regarding the organizational values

Figure 21. Value workshops as dialog

Building an atmosphere where dialog could occur began immediately when welcoming the employees to the value workshops. In addition to the workshop facilitator, employees were welcomed by a video greeting from the company CEO. This aimed at establishing an atmosphere of equality and openness. Next, the purpose of the workshop was clarified and contemplated. Each employee had the opportunity to reflect on his or her initial opinions on how the new values would affect his or her job. During the workshop discussions, employees were asked to suspend all judgment and listen to both their own and their colleagues' opinions openly, accepting possible differences and building mutual trust. This aimed at creating an atmosphere of sharing. Dialog occurred in a constructive way by confronting different opinions and assumptions together, thus seeking to build common ground on how the new organizational values would affect work at Alpha Group. Finally, the workshop groups were able to move toward metalogue in building shared assumptions regarding the new values and their influence at Alpha Group.

Despite dialog at the value workshops, in everyday conduct, adaptation to new communication partners was necessary (cf. White & Burgoon 2006), as the customary communication styles between Alpha and Beta differed. Employees felt that it was more difficult to understand the members of the acquisition partner, or someone in a faraway geographical location. The extra effort in coding and decoding messages was felt not just because of language differences, but also because of missing cultural frames of understanding. (e.g. Porter & Samovar 1996.) This feeling of unease during social interaction with members of a different cultural sphere could stem from the wish for synchrony yet difficulty in the unconscious processing of facial, vocal, and bodily cues (cf. Hatfield et al. 1994; Lanzetta & Englis 1989). However, a deeper look into the emotional context of the organization is necessary in order to decipher the degree of contagiousness or the extent of the strategic display of emotions at Alpha Group.

3.4. Emotional Climate Following Acquisitions

3.4.1. Evolving Emotions at Alpha Group

As suggested above, slight changes were visible in the emotions at Alpha Group between 2015 and 2016 (figure 22). Based on the literature, it can be assumed that a variation between different emotions had also occurred between as well as within individual employees in the short term. The very beginning of the value unification process was largely experienced as positive and passed in a kind of *honeymoon state*. The change was experienced as novel, interesting, and unifying, and even triggered momentary euphoria. This is reflected in the overwhelmingly happy responses to the employee satisfaction survey in 2015. Although happiness also continued to dominate at Alpha Group in 2016, the triggers were changing. This reflected a return to *business as usual*, as everyday occurrences in the workplace became more important compared to plans, expectations, and initial excitement.

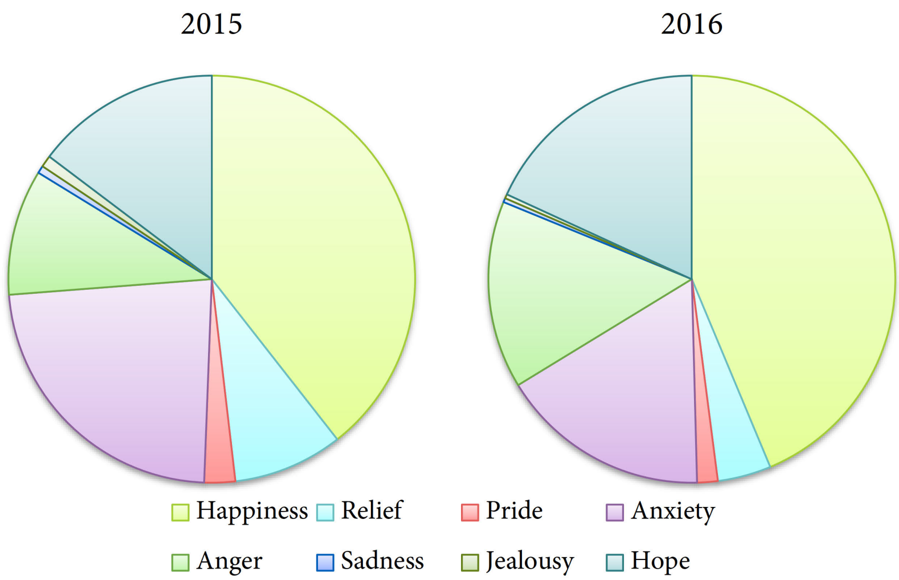

Figure 22. Evolving emotions at Alpha Group

It is possible and even likely that most change took place between the data-collection periods in 2015 and 2016, leaving the latter representing almost a new *status quo* at the time. From figure 22, it is visible that the comparative amount of relief and anxiety was lower in 2016, whereas the level of anger seemed slightly higher. This may reflect the lowering number and speed of changes in the integration process. However, as many employees reported that change had not been as rapid as expected and that a lot still remained to be done, it can be argued that change was not yet complete.

According to the acquisition literature (e.g. Kusstatscher & Cooper 2005; Cartwright & Cooper 1993), cultural change may take years to complete. Arguably, and based on the employee responses to the surveys, very little actual cultural change had occurred between 2015 and 2016. However, employees were reacting differently both within and between the data-collection periods. It seemed that something was changing much more rapidly and dynamically than the overall organizational culture, thus influencing employee emotions. This led me to consider the organizational context more closely, eventually centering on the emotional climate of the company.

3.4.2. From Organizational Culture to Emotional Climate

An organizational culture is the *glue* that gives cohesion to practices and binds individuals together. Organizational cultures serve to preserve order and regularity, thus enabling harmonious coexistence between individuals. Any strong culture is set against change. An organizational culture is akin to human personality; the change thereof is extremely difficult and time-consuming. (Cartwright & Cooper 1993.) Within an organizational culture, three levels of analysis can be identified: artifacts, beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions. Artifacts are the most visible level of culture such as the physical environment, concrete in- and outputs, style, language, published statements, observed behavioral patterns, etc. Although artifacts are easy to observe, they carry a meaning that is impossible to decipher based on sight. Artifacts portray beliefs and values. There are three sets of beliefs and values distinguishable in the organizational context: ones that are compatible with underlying assumptions; ideology-inspired ones (that may not match assumptions); and aspirational ones (that may in the future become assumptions). The deepest level of organizational culture, the underlying assumptions, guides behavior. These are the notions that are taken for granted due to positive past experience. These assumptions are so entrenched that debate over them is inconceivable; they have become realities. (Schein 2010.)

Organizational culture is most effectively learned through socialization. Organizational socialization is the process through which organizational members, or employees, learn the necessary social knowledge about the organization and skills to carry out their role within the organization (van Maanen & Schein 1979). Organizational socialization is most intense whenever a member joins a new organization. Arguably, this is the case following an acquisition if socio-cultural unification takes place. Successful organizational socialization can benefit integration in several ways. Socialization decreases employee turnover, increases employee commitment to the organization, ensures the continuity of organizational values and norms, and reveals the organizational power dynamics to new members. (Bauer, Wolfe Morrison & Roberts Callister 1998.) Organizational socialization is also a building block of the surrounding organizational climate.

An organizational climate refers to “the collective mood of organizational members toward their jobs, the organization, and management” (Ashkanasy 2003, 38). An organizational climate constitutes the more visible, surface features of an organizational culture (Momeni 2009). An emotional climate is a sub-category of the organizational climate, referring to a kind of felt working atmosphere. It is socially constructed and perceived, but forms an objective element in the organization, as it exists independently of employees’ personal emotions. An emotional climate also entails the relationships between organizational members. Thus, it includes the experiences of power dynamics, trust, and security within an organization. Fundamentally, the emotional climate of an organization is visible in the predominant collective emotional states that are created through social interaction between organizational members. (DeRivera & Páez 2007.)

The emotional climate of an organization defines the norms of appropriate emotion experiences and expressions within the organization. It is born from shared organizational values, goals, and beliefs, and thus regulates as well as embodies employee emotions. (Tran 1998.) Thus, an emotional climate includes both individuals' reactions to events as well as acting as a tool for individuals to make sense of subjective reality and govern behavior. An organizational emotional climate, then, consists of members' individual emotionality adjusted to group processes such as conformity or emotional contagion. (Ruiz 2007.) Although dynamic, emotional climates are relatively stable. Nevertheless, they are more susceptible to change than organizational cultures are. For example, changes in management can prompt changes in an organization's emotional climate. (DeRivera 1992.) Thus, it seems possible that an acquisition can induce changes in the emotional climate of an organization.

Apart from the innate tendency to mimic and *catch* each other's emotions, the emotional climate may prompt employees to consider and regulate their emotions. EI plays a significant role in organizations. Although technical skills and even more so cognitive abilities are the drivers of outstanding performance, it has been suggested that EI is the *sine qua non* of leadership. EI is, for example, a key skill in effectuating change. In the workplace, EI depicts itself in five aspects. Through *self-awareness* individuals with a high EI are able to recognize and understand their own affective states and contemplate the consequences of these states for others. Through *self-regulation* such individuals can control their exhibition of those affective states that can be disruptive, as well as avoid hasty, unconsidered judgments. Individuals with high EI also have high *motivation*, which stems from reasons beyond money and status. They are thus more likely to be driven; to pursue objectives enthusiastically and determinedly. *Empathy*, being able to understand others' affective states, is a further element of high EI. Empathic individuals are able to take others' affective states into consideration in how they treat those others. Finally, *social skill* portrays a high EI in the ability to attend to relationships and build networks based on perceiving mutual interests and creating mutual understanding. (Goleman 1998.) Building on the notion of self-regulation, emotion regulation refers to the means through which the nature, timing, experience, and expression of emotions can be influenced. Emotion regulation is different from coping in that the latter specifically focuses on levitating the impact of negative emotions, whereas emotion regulation applies to the whole spectrum of emotions. (Gross 1998.)

Emotion regulation happens through five steps. First, *situation selection* refers to how certain situations, environments, or individuals are either approached or avoided. Second, *situation modification* refers to how individuals can actively modify events to guide emotional impacts. Third, *attentional deployment* refers to how certain specific aspects of the situation are focused on. Fourth, *cognitive change* refers to how a specific meaning is chosen for the aspect the individual is focused on. Finally, *response modulation* refers to how individuals can attempt to influence their emotional responses once the response has been elicited by either increasing or decreasing expressive signals. (Gross 2002.) Taking a simple example of preparing for an important business meeting, a nervous employee may choose to socialize with a colleague who makes him laugh rather than prepare with a colleague who makes him nervous on the last day before the meeting. The employee can attempt to modify the situation by letting colleagues know he would rather not discuss the meeting. If a colleague still does so, the employee can divert his interest into the environment they are in, for example, by counting ceiling tiles. Furthermore, the employee can choose to think of the meeting as either *just a meeting* or a measure of his worth as a human being—this modification will have a major impact on which and how intense the emotions are that either success or failure will elicit. Finally, the employee can modulate his emotional response for an unsuccessful meeting by attempting to hide embarrassment. (cf. Gross 2002.)

Similar to response modulation, emotional labor is a concept that connotes the inducement or suppression of an emotion to enable an outward expression that portrays what others consider the appropriate state of mind. It is the working life equivalent of private emotion management. Emotional labor necessitates a coordination of mind and affect. In the course of emotional labor, an individual can, therefore, become estranged or alienated from an aspect of the self; the outward expression becomes a tool that is separate from the inner state of mind. Nowadays, most jobs include an element of dealing with people. Therefore, interpersonal skills have become of greater importance. Emotional labor has exchange value in that it can be sold for a wage. (Hochschild 2012.) Consider, for example, a human resource manager; despite her mood or her emotions, she must perform certain tasks. However, it is not enough for her to perform the mechanicastic functions of HRM; she must do so while portraying interest in and sometimes compassion for the customer—the employee faced with an HRM problem. Thus, her emotion expressions become separate from her inner state; a tool for work. (cf. Hochschild 2012.) Thus, in some situations, it can be considered that the manipulation of emotion expressions, instead of being deceitful, is actually a part of the work task (Hochschild 2012). Indeed, it has been found that in addition to reflecting perceptions of events, an emotional climate may predict behavior (DeRivera & Páez 2007). Following an acquisition, for example, it may be beneficial to express more positivity than is felt.

3.4.3. Building a Positive Emotional Climate

Considering that during organizational change it is important to create and maintain a healthy emotional climate (Ashkanasy & Daus 2002), positivity seems crucial for successful integration (Birkinshaw et al. 2000). Indeed, positive emotional climates have been found to help support organizational transformation. When employees come together to work toward achieving a mutual goal, they are more likely to experience positive emotions that feed into a more positive emotional climate. (Sekerka & Fredrickson 2008.) In addition, positive emotions enhance organizational identification and promote intra-organizational cooperation (Fischer & Manstead 2008), which support post-acquisition change.

A positive emotional climate refers to "an organizational environment where managers take into consideration the emotional needs and personal growth of employees and encourage the sharing of positive emotions" (Ozcelik et al. 2008, 187). A positive emotional climate does not mean the absence of negative emotions like anger or fear, but the greater influence of positive factors like trust and security over the negative (Bar-Tal et al. 2007). A positive emotional climate has been found to have a direct relationship to organizational outcomes such as strategic growth (Ozcelik et al. 2008). It has also been suggested that when positive emotions are harnessed to create a positive emotional climate, organizational identification, performance, and relational strength can be improved—and organizational change facilitated (Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka & Fredrickson 2010). Furthermore, a positive climate can encourage harmonious relationships between colleagues, where encouragement, inspiration, and uplifting become central as opposed to finding the culprit should a failure occur (Geue 2018). Organizations can influence the development of positive emotional climates through a focus on employee contentment as well as through the efficiency of the physical working space and leadership style (Maimone & Sinclair 2010). This can include sensitivity to employees' emotional needs, positive encouragement, or active initiatives designed to create a pleasant working atmosphere (Ozcelik et al. 2008).

Nevertheless, both acquirer and target employees react to acquisitions in many ways. For example, employees can be satisfied by improved conditions. However, sadness and a longing for the pre-acquisition organization can also occur, along with anxiety and worry. (Lawlor 2013.) As discovered above, this is also what happened at Alpha Group. As in the organization's emotional climate both positivity and negativity are contagious (cf. Maimone & Sinclair 2014; Tran 1998; Hatfield et al. 1994), it is important to remember that although emotions are inherently subjective, they can also become group phenomena (Menges & Kilduff 2015; Kemper 2002). In contrast to the majority of the acquisition literature (e.g. Graebner et al. 2017), it has been found that uncertainty is not always dominant; employees may also be steered by motivation. If the consequences of the acquisition are perceived as positive, as bringing out opportunities, attitudes tend to shift toward motivation. If, however, the consequences are viewed as negative, uncertainty prevails. (Teerikangas 2012.) Thus, a key question in creating a positive emotional climate can be how the acquisition will affect employees—and more importantly, how employees perceive the effect of the acquisition.

Viewed from the perspective of AET, positive affect at work is also likely to predict a higher number of positive interpersonal and task-related events at work in the future, whereas negative affect predicts an increase in negative events (Casper et al. 2019). During integration, negative emotions likely therefore lead to negative attitudes and actions, and ultimately may cause integration failure (Vuori et al. 2018). Thus, it is important to pay attention to positive emotions as well. Simplified (figure 23), a negative climate is likely to cause negative emotions and outcomes, whereas a positive climate is likely to increase positive emotions and outcomes (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007). This reasoning builds on the framework of Sinkovics et al. (2011), where they describe the role of emotions in acquisitions as a continuum from antecedent events, through emotional reactions, to outcomes such as employee attitudes and behavior. This logic is based on cognitive appraisal and AET. As discovered above, cognitive appraisal theory argues that emotions are reactions to stimuli. Emotions arise based on how an event is appraised—pleasing or displeasing, positive or negative. (Lazarus 1991b.) In turn, AET links emotions to the workplace, explaining the structure, sources, and consequences of emotions in organizations (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996).

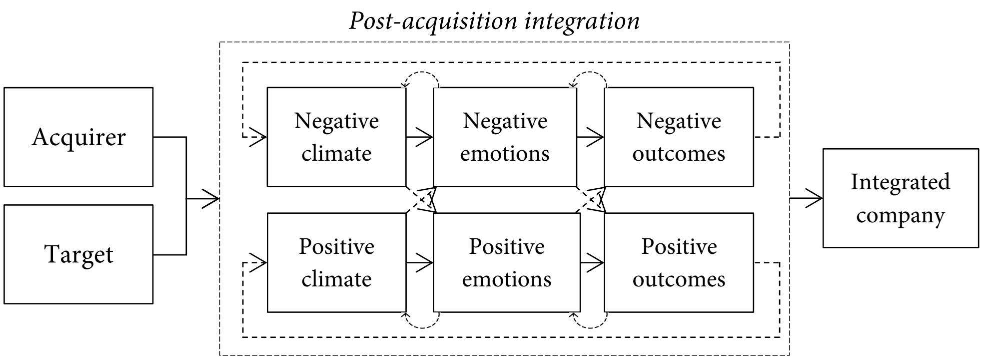

Figure 23. The influence of emotional climate on integration

In figure 23, cognitive appraisal theory and AET are built into the integration period, suggesting that should the surrounding work environment appear negative, appraisals and behavioral outcomes are more likely to be negative as well. Conversely, if the work environment is perceived as positive, more positive appraisals and behaviors are likely to emerge. Although it is possible for negative experiences to turn into positive outcomes (e.g. when anger prompts quick and effective changes to a criticized piece of work), or positive experiences to turn into negative outcomes (e.g. pride over positive feedback turning into lower productivity), in the long term it is more likely that both negativity and positivity turn into similarly valenced behaviors.

Because an emotional climate is a human construction, it can include negative or positive features, which again correlate with negative or positive beliefs and emotions. A threatening, stressful environment is likely to evoke anxiety, whereas a peaceful, harmonious environment is more likely to arouse security and hope. Whereas negative emotional climates likely lead to negative behaviors, positive climates encourage positive behaviors. (Bar-Tal et al. 2007.) However, it is important to acknowledge that because the integration process is often very lengthy, the emotional climate, employee emotions, and organizational outcomes are not one-off events, but are involved in a constant cycle, feeding into each other. Thus, the emotional climate may at some point during integration appear positive, while at another point it may appear to be negative. Nevertheless, this framework suggests that when the emotional climate is more positive than negative, employee emotions are more pleasant, and integration is easier.

The emotional climate can predict collective behavior through repeated emotion experiences. A predominant, collective emotion suggests an underlying shared perception or belief, which can influence social interaction and thereby collective behavior. For example, collective anger seems to suggest that a desired end state is challenged, which leads to adopting behavior patterns that aim at the removal of the challenge. Conversely, a collective climate of hope is likely to support future-mindedness and encourage group activity. A healthy emotional climate, then, seems to build into increased perceptions of security. (DeRivera & Páez 2007.) Following a friendly acquisition, it is possible that the type of deal influences the emergent climate. For example, a hostile takeover is more likely to lead to a climate of fear, whereas a friendly takeover is more likely to give rise to a climate of security. (Fink & Yolles 2015.)

Nevertheless, as organizational cultures can give rise to sub-cultures, organizational climates can divide into group climates (Härtel & Liu 2012; Ruiz 2007). A work group's emotional climate[13] (figure 24) is built on the social sharing of emotional experiences, as interaction includes both verbal and non-verbal

13 A group emotional climate is different from group emotions in that the climate is more lasting and objective than specific emotion experiences. Group emotions are a part of the group's emotional climate and shape the climate in the long term. Nevertheless, the emotional climate of a group is most visible in what kinds of emotions are commonly expressed within the group. (cf. Momeni 2009; DeRivera & Páez 2007; Tran 1998.)

emotion expressions. Over time, the work group establishes a history of expressions, experiences, and responses, which shapes future attitudes and behavior within the group. Consequently, a work group's emotional climate can be described as the interplay between two dimensions: the valence of the emotion and the degree of social engagement. (Härtel & Liu 2012.)

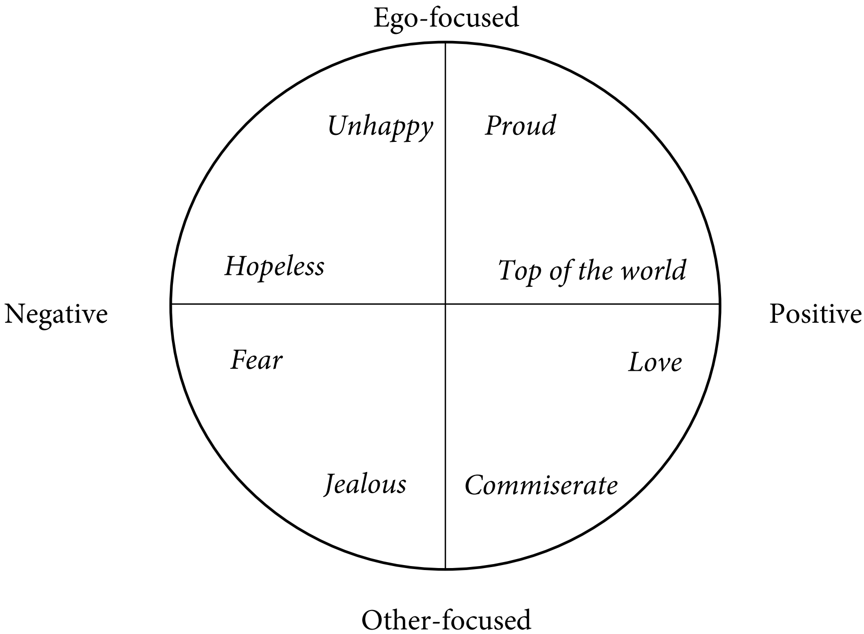

Figure 24. Work group emotional climate (adapted from Härtel & Liu 2012, 576)

In figure 24, ego-focused emotions refer to a preference for the self as the central concern; that is, depicting social disengagement. Conversely, other-focused emotions refer to a preference for interdependence; that is, depicting social engagement. (Härtel & Liu 2012.) Ego-focused emotions, for example, anger or pride, place the individual's own attributes at the core of the evaluation. Thus, the individual's own needs, objectives, or skills also become central in a group setting. Contrariwise, other-focused emotions such as shame or sympathy place another individual at the core. Such emotions often arise because of sensitivity to others' perceptions and perspectives. (Markus & Kitayama 1991.) In the following, these principles are viewed from the viewpoint of Alpha Group.

3.4.4. Emotional Climate at Alpha Group

The different emotions and their triggers at Alpha Group were described above. However, their dynamic nature and the influence of the surrounding climate is the key concern here. From the onset, it seems noteworthy that at the time of this research, a joint organizational culture was not yet built, making it more likely that the emotional climate also varied between locations and groups. There was still *us* versus *them* thinking:

> "I think this must, you must wait. I think I feel like [Alpha Group] but I'm ... I think, what I say, wait two or three years. Then, we knit together. I think it's the same in [Alpha]. The people are thinking we are the best. And [Beta] thinks we are the best. [- -] And they must learn to speak together. Look for the mistakes and then ... do away with it." *(Internal Services Manager, Union Representative)*

Considering that Beta members in general saw Alpha as a *savior*, it is notable that the pre-acquisition emotional climate at Beta was described as a *climate of fear*. This led Beta members to be on guard with regard to open communication at the beginning of the integration process, which again turned into an increase in rumoring. Coming from an organization where openness had always been a key concern, it was difficult for Alpha members to understand the German communication style, which led to some misunderstandings regarding the principles of communication at Alpha Group. Similarly, the previous climate of fear rendered some Beta members reluctant to take the initiative and responsibility for decisions, which was a challenge in Alpha Group.

> "[Beta] had a quite heavy hierarchy. We were used in old [Alpha] to making quick decisions, to be really agile. [- -] So, there are mentally a lot of changes ongoing here in my opinion. And still some people are struggling with this." *(Vice President, Sales Central and Eastern Europe)*

This was also felt from the viewpoint of the new organizational structure. Former Beta management that now had subordinates in Finland found the Finnish consensus-seeking, open decision-making structure puzzling.

> "Yeah it's, well takeovers are emotional. [- -] And then if you cannot express your emotions, they might come over the wrong way. And the recipients get it the wrong way. And then, it leads to misunderstandings. And I had a couple of these run-ins." *(Vice President, Purchasing and Logistics)*

On the contrary, at Alpha, the initial emotional climate was rather positive in the beginning. The continuity of the company and pride in being the buyer dominated. As a whole, the deal was:

> "Positive, unquestionably, because—like mentioned, thinking about this now, and I cannot speak for anyone's emotions but mine—I saw that we needed to be able to acquire one or more companies, or we would be lost, in a ten-year term. [- -] And when we suddenly caught a nice salmon in our fishing net, of course it was a great thing, and it was that enthusiasm which helped us through." *(CEO)*

Nevertheless, the initial enthusiasm in Alpha quickly neutralized in Alpha Group when the start of the integration process was experienced as confusing. Especially in former Alpha, the realization that they would also need to change caused negative emotions. In Alpha Group, there were many people involved in decision-making and implementation, and responsibilities were not perfectly clear, which made progress feel somewhat turbulent.

Still, when the integration workflows became clearer, Alpha Group management took the initiative and carried on with the implementation efficiently. A key concern in fostering a positive atmosphere in Alpha Group was making sure employees knew what to do, and that the process felt managed. This also included enough freedom to allow for achieving objectives, which created trust in the future and a willingness to do good work. However, it was also mentioned that there was always a bit of caution in the air. People in general tend to be wary of being critical in business in order to protect their own future.

It was also noted that the sufficiency of the available information was viewed differently between locations; for example, Polish employees were perceived to experience a communication lag. One potential reason for this was the limited English-language skills in Poland. Employees also reflected that emotions at Alpha Group were mirrored from others. It was also noted that emotions were visible in facial expressions just as well as in spoken language. For example, especially in Alpha, the notion that *the Germans are making all the decisions* was spread through the grapevine, and created strong negative emotions, even though some knew it to be false. Most notably, changes in power were sometimes experienced so strongly that they even led to resignations.

> "In a way, because we are used to acting and doing, and that everything is close, and everyone has power over what to do and what decisions are made. And now we are a large small company, and we have reorganized, we cannot do things in the same way, we are in that size bracket. And in many places. So, in a way, people have experienced that as power being taken away." *(HR Manager)*

In addition, the fact that Beta employees in the old German headquarters were to move to a new office with former Alpha Germany employees created a lot of nostalgia and negativity, especially as the old headquarters building was to be demolished. Moreover, from having their own doors, Beta employees had to conform to a new, open office layout. Conversely, for others the change provided a new opportunity for building a more international career at Alpha Group.

As for managing emotions, employees felt that predictability was a key reassurance. It was considered important that managers would be able to keep their own emotions in check even when faced with uncertainty or stress, and would never raise their voice at employees, and would always think about what they were saying. For managers to engage in open dialog with employees even on negative issues, to find true reasons for perspectives and not just interpreting the meaning randomly was equally expected. At the same time, that managers would notice and do something if employees were unable to cope with work-related stress was called for. It was believed that managers should have a strong sense of empathy and a belief that there was no one correct way to think. Strong leadership and creating faith in the future were seen as positive initiatives, along with management visibility, constant communication, and personal interaction. In a word, the key to management was presence.

> "By presence. I was practically, I would say, six days a week for several months out of house. Just being present in the countries, discussing things with people, explaining the strategy, explaining [Alpha Group]." *(Vice President, Sales Central and Eastern Europe)*

On the downside of great emotional leadership, the managers did feel the pressure of such responsibility rather strongly.

> "That is my problem with this, that I know just as well as my subordinates do that our resources and competences that we have in the organization are not sufficient. And the conflict here is that I am never allowed to admit that. [- -] It is especially difficult not to be able to say to your subordinate that you are absolutely right." *(CFO)*

One way in which managers were able to cope with such pressure was with the reassurance that when difficult decisions had to be made, they were always trying to do the right thing in the long term. Even if it felt difficult in the moment, in two or three years the employees would come back to them to say that it was the right thing to do. Comparing these findings to the found literature, Alpha Group's emotional climate was largely positive, yet showed signs of negativity especially within subgroups.

3.4.5. Matching Theory with the Experienced Climate

It seems clear that no joint organizational culture had yet arisen at Alpha Group to give cohesion to practices and bind individuals together (cf. Cartwright & Cooper 1993). This is visible in the still frequent *us* versus *them* attitude, as well as employee experiences of differences and confusion in everyday conduct. Although the organizational values, which build the groundwork of organizational culture, were jointly developed and well communicated, and although the artifacts that were to embody those values were put in place, for example, at the new offices in Germany, the underlying beliefs were yet to change. (cf. Schein 2010.)

Nevertheless, organizational socialization endeavors were undertaken to teach the employees the new social knowledge and skills necessary to become members of Alpha Group (cf. van Maanen & Schein 1979). Such socialization efforts were most clearly visible in the value workshops where open interaction was encouraged. During the value workshops, most employees reported experiences of a good atmosphere, which translates into a positive emotional climate. The positivity of the climate is visible not only in the positive emotions triggered, but also in the appreciation of good communication and cooperation between colleagues. Feelings of equality, trust, and security also fed into the climate. (cf. DeRivera & Páez 2007.)

However, what indicates that not only cultures but emotional climates still varied between the acquisition partners is that the norms of emotional expression seemed to be different (cf. Tran 1998). For example, whereas in Germany employees communicated with caution, in Finland employees felt that they had the right to communicate openly and honestly, even aggressively. This caused friction when managers and subordinates were mixed in the new matrix structure.

The interviewees brought up desirable characteristics of emotional leadership congruent with the notions of EI (cf. Goleman 1998), emotion regulation (cf. Gross 1998), and emotional labor (cf. Hochschild 2012). Managers were hoped to have self-awareness in knowing their own emotions, self-regulation in keeping those emotions in check when necessary, to be motivated and empathetic in helping employees cope, and have the necessary social skills to conduct their activities in a positive way. With regard to regulation, it was hoped that the managers would take the situation and the involved individuals into consideration, focus on the employees' point of view, look for the correct meaning of actions, and moderate their own responses accordingly. Managers also felt awareness of these hopes and the employees' desire for them to willingly carry out their emotional leadership roles. They reported difficulties in not being able to show their true emotions or being forced to hide something from the employees. At the same time, the wish for managers to check their vocal response indicates the importance of what emotions sound like (cf. Laukka et al. 2012). Such demands indicate the necessity for managers to be able to simulate, inhibit, intensify, de-intensify, and mask emotions according to the situation (cf. Andersen & Guerrero 1996).

The above indicates that managers were willing to use emotion expressions strategically (cf. Kopelman et al. 2006). Similarly, the managers' willingness to consider the employees' emotional experiences reflects a wish to create a positive emotional climate (cf. Maimone & Sinclair 2010; Ozcelik et al. 2008). As suggested (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007), this did not mean the absence of negative emotions, but a wish to highlight trust and security in overcoming the anxieties involved in post-acquisition integration. Indeed, where positivity prevailed, change seemed more accepted and encouraged (cf. Vacharkulksemsuk et al. 2010). For example, the value workshops seemed to motivate employees (cf. Teerikangas 2012). This occurred even though employees experienced sadness and loss of the pre-acquisition organization along with the feelings or interest in and satisfaction with conditions that they perceived as improved (cf. Lawlor 2013).

The contagion of emotions (cf. Maimone & Sinclair 2014; Hatfield et al. 1994) was also evident in the direct reflection of mirroring others' emotions and perceptions. It seems that employees caught emotions from both intended verbal messages as well as displayed non-verbal messages (cf. Buck & VanLear 2002). An example of the former is the grapevine through which the notion that Beta was gaining all the control spread at Alpha, whereas an example of the latter is the notion that language is not required to perceive emotion, for example, during a video chat. Although not explicitly mentioned, it seems likely that due to the experienced pressure of emotion regulation, management also needed to pose positivity on occasion. These findings somewhat reflect the interaction modes of matching, mirroring, and converging (cf. Burgoon, Stern, et al. 1995), and indicate the importance of facial emotion expressions (cf. Ekman 2009; Lanzetta & Englis 1989).

In addition, the influence of expected counterpart behavior (cf. Burgoon, Le Poire, et al. 1995) seems to have influenced interactions especially between the acquisition partners. For example, managers reported considering the different, more unpleasant communication styles of subordinates from the acquisition partner, which could reflect the acquisition partner employees' negative emotions toward *the other side*. However, adaptation to perceived communication styles (cf. Burgoon, Stern, et al. 1995) was not evident in the findings. Nevertheless, de-synchrony was experienced as unpleasant (cf. Hatfield et al. 1994). Indeed, it seemed that negativity brought about even more negativity, whereas positivity also gave way to more positive experiences and outcomes (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007; DeRivera & Páez 2007). Indeed, as the acquisition was friendly, a climate of security was to be expected (cf.

Fink & Yolles 2015). However, the climate of security, which was experienced as evidenced by the myriad of positive emotions, did not manage to exclude negative emotions altogether. This seems rather logical following a major organizational change.

Indeed, many of the grievances seemed to occur in and between different subgroups, or within group climates (cf. Härtel & Liu 2012; Ruiz 2007). It seems that, for example, blue-collar groups tended to be slightly more ego-focused, show pride over their own practices, and unhappiness when called on to change those practices. This is visible, for example, in the heightened negativity found in blue-collar worker responses in general (31% found the news of the acquisition negative compared to 16% of white-collar employees finding it so), and the survey responses from one particular plant where 49% of the employees found the news of the deal negative. As one employee from said plant mentioned, at the time of the news "I expected layoffs and salary reductions, I was not at all sure that our business would be preserved in its present form." Another employee from the same plant contemplated how "some of our colleagues from the sister plant in Germany continue not to be sufficiently aware that they have become employees of a large international company, and they constantly feel as if they were its owners." Another employee from said sister plant noted feeling "Somewhat abandoned, because I do not believe that Alpha can positively implement its objectives if the superiors in the plant do not change their attitude and behavior with regard to the employees." Still, after the initial shock, many employees did report their fears had diminished. Nevertheless, a German plant employee expressed the "hope that the intentions of Alpha are honest with us. There is still some insecurity on that." As an example of a more other-focused group, the top-management team seemed to commiserate with the employees' experiences. (cf. Markus & Kitayama 1991.) This indicates that the emotional climate indeed can play a major role in building positivity following an acquisition.

3.5. A Framework for Positive Integration

3.5.1. A Framework Based on Alpha Group

Looking over the findings from Alpha Group in the light of the pre-understanding (figure 4), I find it evident that the chosen concepts do play a major role in how employees experience and thereby influence post-acquisition integration. However, in light of the findings, I believe the interplay between the concepts must be reconsidered. Based on the Alpha Group case, it seems fruitful to consider the emotional climate as predating perceptions regarding integration endeavors. Figure 25 illustrates the key steps I found along the way to integration at Alpha Group.

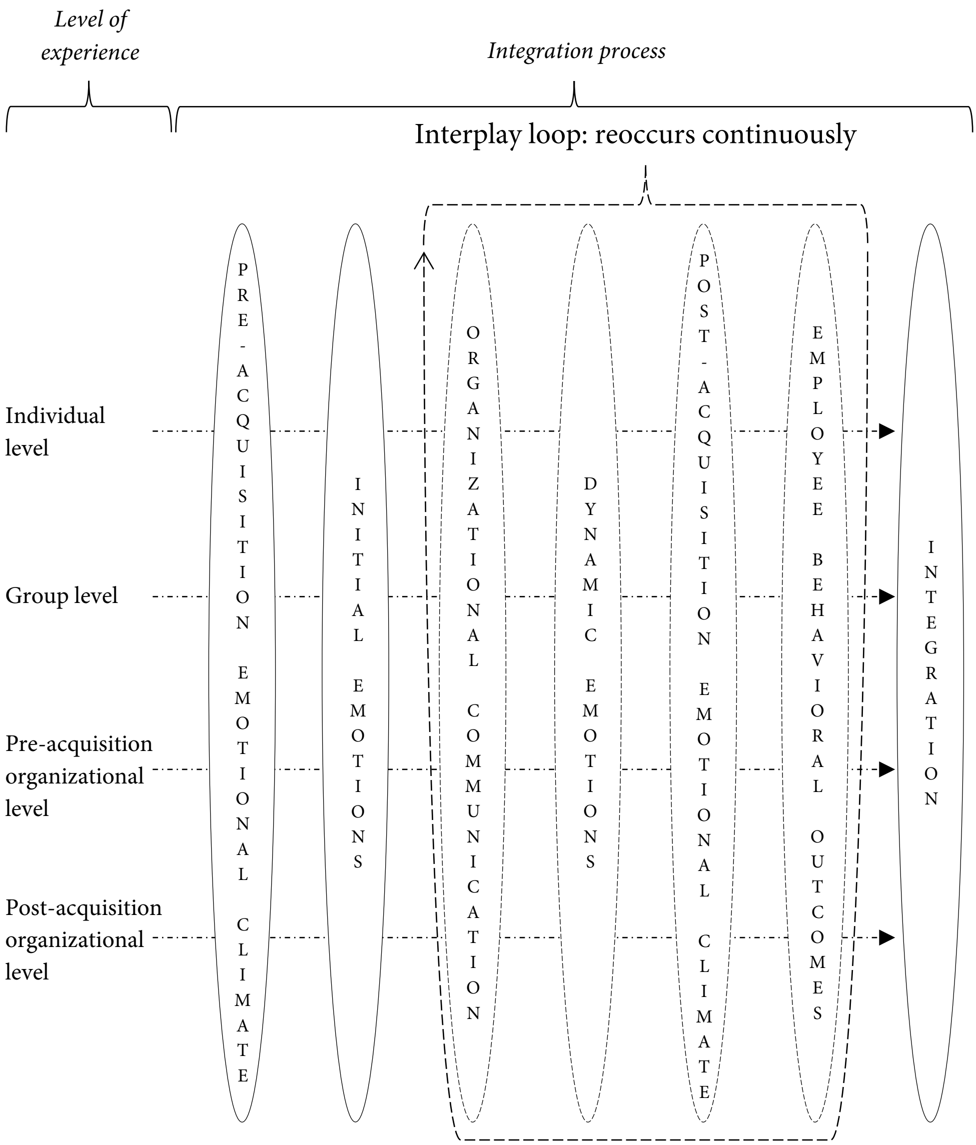

Figure 25. Empirical framework for emotion-conscious integration [14]

14 The level of experience refers to the individual, team, group, and organizational levels where emotions may occur (cf. Ashkanasy 2003). In general, the number of involved individuals grows the further we move down the figure. The group level reflects organizational teams and sub-groups such as different functions. The pre-acquisition organizational level reflects the former Alpha and Beta, which now form sub-groups of Alpha Group. The post-acquisition organizational level reflects the new Alpha Group. The interplay loop signals the effects of integration-related changes on employees, and thus occurs several times during the process, in possibly overlapping cycles.

At Alpha Group, the pre-acquisition emotional climate was reflected in the initial emotional response of the employees. At Alpha, the positive climate triggered the experiences of pride and happiness, whereas at Beta the negative climate triggered relief. These initial emotions were influenced by the communication efforts undertaken by Alpha Group and fed into the evolving emotional climate following change. At the same time, communication efforts and emotional experiences influenced employee behavior, for example, through encouraging adopting the new organizational values, or raising skepticism over following an overseas manager's advice. During the integration process, communication, emotional reactions, the evolving emotional climate, and short-term behavioral outcomes were in constant interplay, which eventually produced a state of cooperation and shared understanding that can be called successful integration.

Apart from the pre-acquisition organizational level mentioned above, individual, group, and post-acquisition organizational levels can be identified. The post-acquisition organizational level acted as a key instigator of communication efforts and included all of the employee reactions that were similar throughout the company. At the individual level, the differences between each employee's emotional reactions created his or her subjective experience of integration, whereas at the group level these subjective experiences were shared with the individual's closest colleagues. The pre-acquisition organization was still visible, for example, in the anxiety over the company's future, pride felt at being the buyer, or relief over being bought by a family company.

This empirical framework warrants a closer look at the key concepts of emotion, emotional climate, and interaction. At Alpha Group, a myriad of emotions arose for a variety of reasons. These emotions were connected with the employees' personal perceptions of goal-congruency as well as the employees' experiences of the surrounding emotional climate. Emotion triggers, experienced emotions, and the emotional climate appear slightly differently on several organizational levels (table 13).

Table 13. Key principles of emotional experiences following acquisitions

	Emotion triggers	**Emotions**	**Emotional climate**
	Emotions are born out of how goal-congruent or goal-incongruent events are perceived.	Emotions are experienced as positive or negative.	The emotional climate influences and is influenced by the emotions that arise.
Individual level	Will I have a job? What will my job look like?	Positive and negative emotions related to the self.	A climate of security will ease anxieties, whereas a climate of fear will increase them. Individual emotions feed into the climate.
Group level	Will my colleagues have a job? How are my colleagues experiencing emotions?	Positive and negative emotions related to group membership or co-presence.	Group-shared emotions become the key factor in the group's emotional climate.
Pre-acquisition organizational level	Will we still remain *us*? Will we be absorbed by *them*?	Positive and negative emotions related to group membership or co-presence.	Individuals and groups are affected by the organizational emotional climate, and vice versa.
Post-acquisition organizational level	What does the future look like for the joint company?	Positive and negative emotions related to the self in new surroundings.	A joint organizational emotional climate is difficult to achieve in the short term, as emotions vary between pre-acquisition organizations, locations, groups, and individuals.

At the individual level, based on Alpha Group employees, the key concerns are keeping one's job and the possible changes within that job. The emotions reflect the personal objectives of the self and are positive if the job is preserved and possible changes to the job description are deemed sensible, but negative if layoffs occur or if the job is seen to have changed for the worse. Security in the surrounding climate can alleviate job-related anxieties, whereas a negative climate will likely increase them. The key perspective is *me*; what will happen to me, and what will happen to my job.

On a group level, employees attach themselves to their nearest colleagues, also wondering whether their jobs will be preserved. Employees also mirror and reflect on each other's emotions to look for synchrony and harmony within the group. Positivity occurs if the change is perceived as positive for the group, or if members of the group are experiencing positive emotions. Negativity arises if the change or colleagues' emotions are perceived as negative. Again, the overall emotional climate may influence the triggered group emotions akin to individual emotions but concerns over group membership are likely to dominate within the group's own emotional climate. The key perspective is *us*: what will happen to us, and what will happen to our jobs?

At the pre-acquisition organizational level, the key concern is also group membership. Employees are likely to experience positive emotions when change is seen as positive from the viewpoint of the pre-acquisition company, but negative emotions when the change is perceived as somehow deteriorating the company they are accustomed to. Experiences of group membership increase identification with the pre-acquisition organization and co-presence with former colleagues is likely to trigger group-shared emotions. The surrounding emotional climate initially influences the experienced emotions but is subsequently influenced by the emerging emotions throughout the company. The key perspective is *us* versus *them*: will we still remain *us* or will we be absorbed by *them*?

Finally, at the post-acquisition organizational level, positivity and negativity are triggered by perceptions of the new surroundings as well as the future of the combined organization. Based on Alpha Group, a joint organizational emotional climate is difficult to achieve in the short term due to all the previous sub-groups within the acquisition partners. However, positivity arises when the deal is perceived to create opportunities, whereas negativity is triggered by uncertainty. This is the level where post-acquisition organizational management can try to create a shared identity. The key perspective thus is *we*: what does the future look like for the joint company?

Turning to the third key concept, interaction, the findings illustrate the necessity of a duality. Both more traditional top-down communication, or information sharing, and the more dialogical participative interaction seem necessary for a positive change experience. However, the means and purposes of these communication styles vary (table 14).

Table 14. Information sharing and interaction following acquisitions

	Information sharing	Interaction
Key means	Presentations, newsletters, bulletin boards	Workshops, team meetings, informal gatherings
Voice	Mainly top-down, organization-led	Often initiated top-down, but most successful when all employees are invited to participate
Key purpose	To ensure that employees are informed	To ensure that employees are engaged
Language choice	Aim for individual understanding	Aim for shared understanding
Involvement	Level of individual involvement is minimal	Level of individual involvement is higher
Importance	Ensures day-to-day functionality	Ensures long-term motivation

The Alpha Group case makes it clear that although interaction is central in creating engagement, information sharing is equally essential (for an elaboration on the actual messages shared at Alpha Group, turn to appendix 10). More traditional, mainly top-down, organization-led communication that occurs through company presentations, newsletters, bulletin boards, etc. has the important task of keeping employees informed. Such information can decrease rumoring and ensure the day-to-day functioning of the new organization. Because the aim is to ensure individual employees understand the information that is shared, language choices are routine. Local languages are used whenever necessary. As the information is shared mainly in a top-down manner, the individual has a very passive role in the communication.

Conversely, interaction allows employees to take a more active role. Interaction most commonly occurs in workshops, team meetings, or at social gatherings. It is often initiated top-down but requires openness and participation to succeed. The purpose of interaction is to increase employee engagement—to create a sense of ownership over the change, which can help make the change successful. This ensures long-term motivation. As interaction is based on shared understanding, the language choice should reflect this. The official company language may be preferred when crossing borders, for example, between different locations, but local languages can function equally well on smaller scales.

The emotions that these different communication styles triggered were also somewhat different. In general, the lack of information sharing mainly triggered negative emotions, whereas the existence of interaction mainly triggered positive emotions. At Alpha Group, employees experienced a lack of information sharing as increasing anxiety. However, a lack of interaction may not have even been noticed. Similarly, in describing their emotions, most employees did not reflect on information sharing that had occurred, but they did reflect on interaction. Although the questions presented to the employees encourage reflecting on the value workshops, these findings highlight the possibility that information sharing may be necessary to neutralize negative emotions, but interaction may be the key toward triggering positive emotions. In the following, I will take these empirical findings back onto a more theoretical level based on systematic combining.

3.5.2. The Abductive Framework for Positive Post-Acquisition Integration

Based on the findings from Alpha Group and the pre-understanding, the key issues to consider in boosting positivity following a cross-border acquisition are the communication efforts taken, the emotions that arise, and the emotional climate that surrounds the change. What is equally important, however, is the perspective that is taken to look at these issues. Figure 26 presents my suggestion for a framework for positive post-acquisition integration.

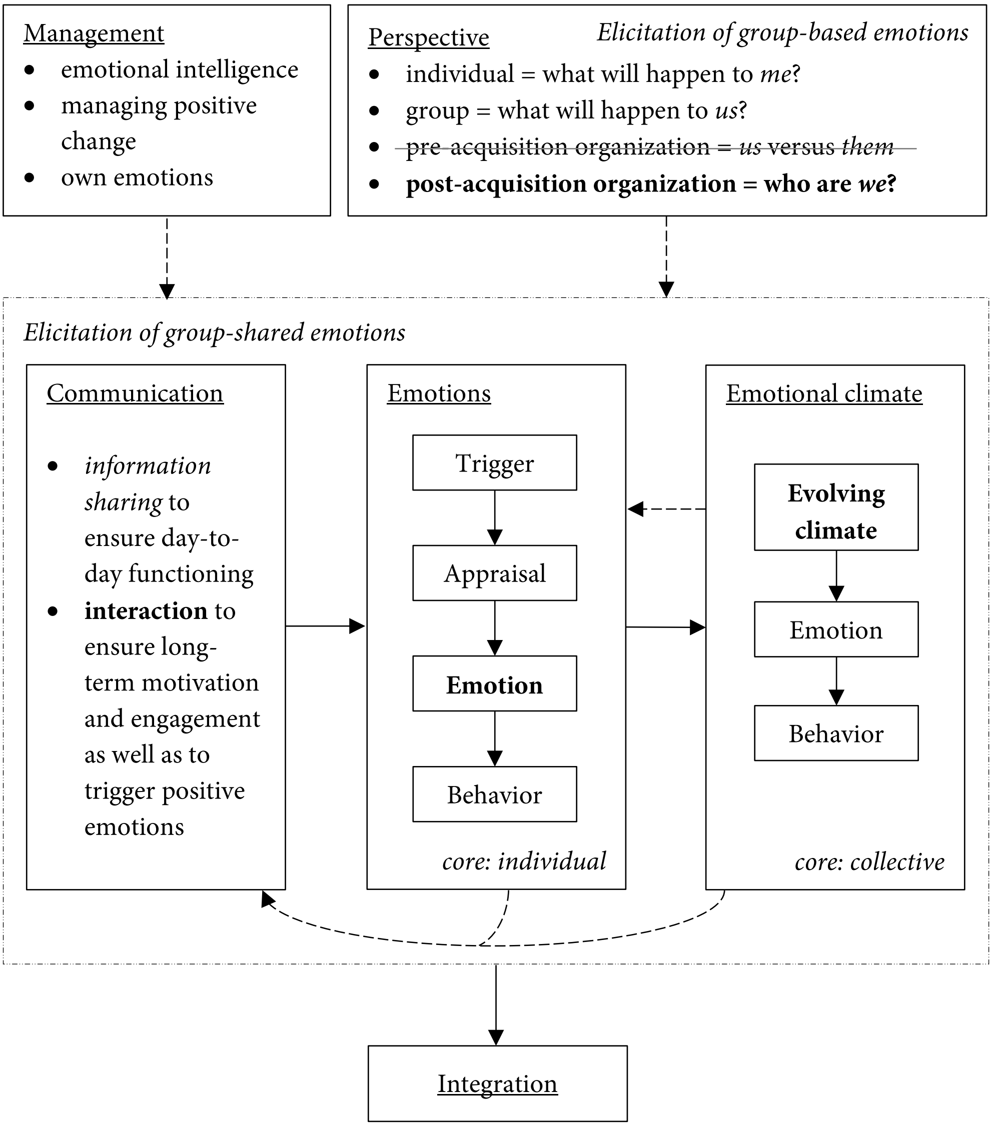

Figure 26. A framework for positive post-acquisition integration

In this framework, in terms of boosting positivity, the emphasis is on interactive communication, positive emotions, and a positive emotional climate. However, information sharing is considered necessary to create the playing field where true interaction can occur. At the same time, negative emotions and a negative emotional climate cannot be forgotten, as negativity can spread and prevent the creation of positivity. The main emphasis, if successful integration is the objective, should be on the new *we*, the post-acquisition organization, in order to create positivity regarding unification and cooperation. However, in order to create the image of *we*, the individual must not be forgotten. Similarly, different groups in the organization may influence the outcome. Nevertheless, in order to create positivity regarding the new organization, it may be necessary to downplay the pre-acquisition organization in order to prevent *us* versus *them* thinking.

Looking back to the nature of positive organizational change, it entails efforts that increase perceptions of affirmation rather than harm (Avey et al. 2008). A key way for doing this is through offering a variety of positive triggers (Cameron 2008), which lead to positive emotions and thereby positive behavioral outcomes (Fredrickson 2001). The suggested positive triggers may include managers' displays of positive emotions (Newcombe & Ashkanasy 2002) or their attempts to increase engagement (Cameron & Green 2012). EI may help managers not only to monitor their own experiences and behavior, but also to detect those in their employees (Salovey & Mayer 1990). This can help managers in their endeavor to increase positivity (George 2000). As discovered in table 8, the managerial task in creating positive post-acquisition integration entails five steps: (1) Detecting and understanding employee emotions in order to encourage positivity. (2) Communicating the positive aspects of integration, which creates a sense of excitement and readiness. (3) Forming a compelling vision of the future of the integrated company. (4) Responding to employees' emotions in ways that encourage commitment to the integrated company. (5) Strengthening the achieved integration through encouraging employees to identify with the new organization.

By linking the emotional experiences found at Alpha Group to the levels of emotions in organizations discovered by Ashkanasy (2003), four key perspectives from the viewpoint of acquisitions are identified. The individual represents the within-person level, where daily events at work following the acquisition trigger perceptions of personal relevance. The group perspective entails features of the between-person, interpersonal interactions, and group levels. Here, emotions are displayed and shared, and possibly converged. The pre-acquisition organizational perspective reflects the groups and organizational levels. As a pre-acquisition entity, the organizations still carry their distinctive history and identity, triggering group-shared and group-based emotions, and giving rise to an emotional climate. Finally, the post-acquisition organizational perspective carries the same links to the levels of emotion, but this time in a forward-looking manner, linking them to a new company identity.

These perspectives influence how and which emotions arise. For example, at Alpha Group, individuals could perceive the acquisition as a trigger for happiness due to perceived personal development opportunities. Groups saw the deal as triggering, for example, anxiety when communication seemed lacking. The pre-acquisition organizations had distinguishable reactions, for example, in the pride felt at former Alpha over being the buyer, or the relief felt at former Beta over being bought by a family company rather than by an investor. The post-acquisition organizational perspective seemed the most difficult at Alpha Group, as cohesion was not completely achieved. However, it was reflected in the welcoming of the new company values. Based on the Alpha Group findings, it seems likely that these are the concerns that mainly trigger group-based emotions, where group membership is the key concern for appraisal (cf. Menges & Kilduff 2015).

As was discovered at Alpha Group, some of the key emotion triggers following the acquisition related to how the process was managed, how managers behaved, and what kind of communication was used. Thus, it seems evident that management influences the integration dynamics, and that communication can act as an emotion trigger. This is a key relationship between emotion and communication following acquisitions. Based on the findings from Alpha Group, it seems that organizations can indeed influence employee perceptions and behavior through communication (cf. Roundy 2010). A variety of media (cf. Angwin et al. 2016), the matching of the medium to the intention of the message (cf. Balle 2008), and the richness of the chosen media (cf. Lee 1994) all also played a role at Alpha Group. The findings show that the necessity to communicate clearly and consistently (cf. Barrett 2002) even when nothing really new was to be said (cf. Schweiger & Denisi 1991) was recognized.

Still, rumoring occurred through informal communication channels, spreading negative emotions (cf. Lotz & Donald 2006). However, without consistent communication efforts, such rumors would be even more difficult to stop. As predicted from the literature (e.g. Piekkari et al. 2005), the choice of language also played a key role in the effectiveness of such communication. The positive influence of participation (e.g. Clayton 2010; Cornett-DeVito & Friedman 1995) was evident in the response to the value workshops at Alpha Group. Having the possibility to consider the subjective and practical meaning of the new company values allowed employees to feel more engaged and thereby commit to the change (cf. Appelbaum et al. 2007). In addition, participation allowed employees to recognize the benefits of the deal for themselves, triggering positive emotions regarding the change (cf. Rafferty & Jimmieson 2018). For this to occur, it was important that all employees were invited to the value workshops (cf. Simonsen Abildgaard et al. 2018).

If it is accepted that emotions are judgments (Solomon 2003), it follows that they must have a trigger to be judged (Fredrickson 2001). At Alpha Group, apart from communication, employees expressed a myriad of other triggers. Offering positive triggers is important because should the arising emotions be positive, it is likely that the behavioral outcomes they lead to are more desirable from the viewpoint of the company (cf. Fredrickson 2013). In practice, this was most evident in the positive reactions toward the new values encouraging employees to adopt new ways of working. However, the converse was also visible in employees' negative emotions having a negative impact on their willingness to engage in the change. For example, employees perceiving that the values had been violated had little motivation for adopting them in their own work. Such attitudes seemed to be somewhat related to intra-organizational groups, suggesting that synchrony-seeking and emotional contagion were taking place (cf. Hatfield et al. 1994).

Such contagion or mimicry—that is, the formation of collective emotions—did result in the creation of an emotional climate at Alpha Group. Negativity seemed to lead into even more negativity, whereas positivity increased positive outcomes (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007). However, as predicted (cf. Härtel & Liu 2012), different subgroups enforced a variety of emotional climates at Alpha Group, in part reflected in the different appraisal patterns and resultant emotions. In order to increase positivity in the collective emotional climate, and thereby encourage the emergence of positive emotions and behavior, the emotional needs of employees must be taken into account (cf. Ozcelik et al. 2008). At Alpha Group, such efforts were reflected in managers' emotional labor. At the same time, the attempt to be mindful of employee concerns can influence the communication efforts. For example, communication can be mindful of which emotions employees are displaying and why in order to successfully boost positive triggers and alleviate worries regarding the negative ones.

Looking over the formation of collective emotions at Alpha Group, apart from the group-based emotions reflecting the different levels of emotion within organizations, group-shared emotions seemed to occur in the integration process in the interplay between communication, individual emotions, and the surrounding emotional climate. Based on the Alpha Group findings, following an acquisition, group-shared emotions seem to be triggered, for example, when jointly hearing news about the deal or integration (information sharing), when jointly contemplating the meaning of integration-related changes (interaction), or when engaging in other types of formal or informal social interaction where colleagues' emotion cues become visible. Co-presence is a key element in emotional contagion (cf. Barsade 2002; Hatfield et al. 1994), highlighting the necessity of interaction with colleagues in the formation of not only an emotional climate, but also of group-shared emotions (cf. Menges & Kilduff 2015).

Due to the nature of systematic combining, the suggested framework has a clear connection to real-world evidence (cf. Dubois & Gadde 2002). However, the key limitation of single-case studies is the possibility of idiosyncrasy. Thus, in the following, I will reflect on the built framework through a second case, which is sufficiently similar to allow for a meaningful comparison, yet sufficiently different to make conclusions regarding the transferability of the suggested framework.

4. Phase Two: Substantiation

4.1. Integration at Delta

At the time of the deal, Delta management was hesitant to sell as the company was experiencing a downturn and thus was valued at a lower price than desired. However, the established relationship and good negotiations convinced them the deal was the way forward. As Gamma was much larger and more powerful than Delta, they chose a traditional, acquirer-led integration strategy. However, Gamma's chosen integration approach was rather slow, with relatively few visible signs of unification having taken place in the first six months after the deal. For example, the company and brand names of Gamma and Delta remained separate. This was due to Gamma's willingness to learn, as their previous acquisition experience involved companies even smaller than Delta. Nevertheless, Gamma was driving a unification of quality standards and procedures such as internal and external reporting, financial systems, and management structures. Similarly, a new deputy managing director position, filled by a Gamma manager, was added to Delta's organizational structure and the different functions linked to Gamma's overseas counterparts (figure 27).

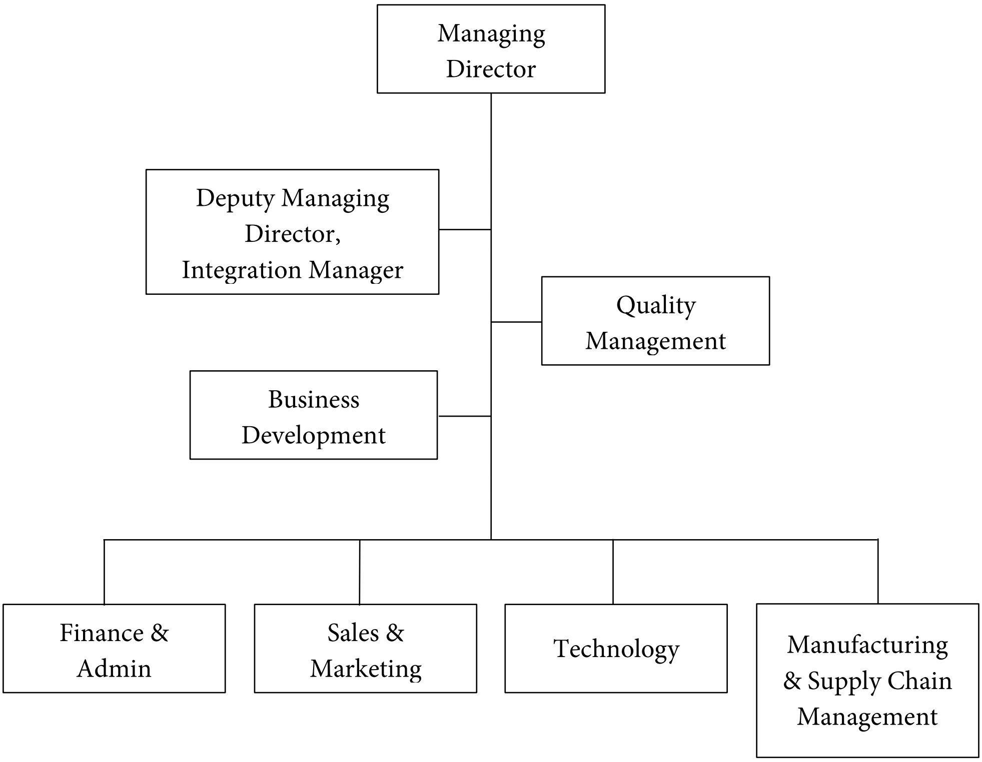

Figure 27. Delta's organizational structure

At Delta, what Gamma did was mainly to enforce task-related integration (cf. Birkinshaw et al. 2000), with very little (if any) human integration taking place—especially in the first six months following the deal. Thus, Gamma was clearly looking for operational synergies, but somewhat risked employee satisfaction. The chosen approach resembled a symbiosis mode (cf. Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991), where Gamma deemed it necessary for Delta to be integrated into the strategic focus of the entire group, yet was convinced that in order to bring out the synergy effects of complementary product lines, Delta needed enough autonomy to enable manufacturing like before the deal. Possibly due to the intended level of integration or perceived similarity between German and Finnish cultures, the cultural fit did not seem like a key concern. In this way, the deal resembled an extension merger. (cf. Cartwright & Cooper 1993.) Gamma seemed willing to maintain most if not all power, and left Delta with little strategic or operational independence (cf. Brueller et al. 2018). Nevertheless, Gamma expressly wanted to learn from this experience, as it was its first acquisition of a company that size.

> "I personally think that's the key because if we would just ... Do this integration process from one side and say, 'This is what we do and you have to accept it and you have to adapt to everything.' That would probably have not worked, and I always try to understand what happened here so far and try to explain what we do so far and where we can find the best way for both of us. To not dictate what we have to do, to find a solution together." *(Deputy Managing Director, Integration Manager, 2017)*

Nevertheless, the employees still felt that they had to adapt to a new normal (cf. Cartwright & Cooper 1995), meaning that the employees very likely experienced some level of acculturation and organizational socialization (cf. Larsson & Lubatkin 2001; Bauer et al. 1998), even though this was not prompted by a full unification of organizational cultures. At the same time, employees were aware of the power disparity between the acquisition partners (cf. Björkman et al. 2007; Stahl & Sitkin 2005), and felt a decrease in their autonomy (cf. Larsson & Lubatkin 2001). This seems to coincide with the argument of Birkinshaw et al. (2000) on the importance of a well-balanced integration endeavor; employees seem to experience human integration, even if the companies choose the route of task integration.

In terms of the key positive change management steps identified in table 8, Gamma and Delta seemed to be struggling somewhat. Although the necessity of understanding employee perceptions was recognized and communication was used to alleviate worries, a lasting sense of excitement and readiness was not achieved. Although Delta employees saw the deal itself as increasing future potential, the vision of the future was hazy. Employee commitment was encouraged mainly through communication and occasional social activities, but possibly due to the company names and brand lines staying separate, identification with Gamma was not achieved.

As the integration approach did not directly aim at melding the organizational cultures, acculturation as such was minimal. This was visible, for example, in the employees' appreciation of the Delta name and brand remaining intact. Nevertheless, Delta employees responded very well to social controls such as informal gatherings (cf. Larsson & Lubatkin 2001). Socialization was, however, not entirely successful as many employees still reported confusion over responsibilities. Thus, the social knowledge that would allow for the successful completion of tasks (cf. van Maanen & Schein 1979) was not yet complete. In such a dynamic context, many emotions emerged.

4.2. Emotions at Delta

Delta regarded Gamma as an interesting, efficient, forward-looking company that made long-term investments. The employees in general found Gamma to be a good buyer—a buyer that would invest in Delta and thus allow for a brighter future for Delta. This image remained strong throughout the different sets of data.

> "Now we have more resources backing us so that we can develop production. I have been saying for years that we need certain things, more investments and improved efficiency, but it has always been so that we have no money. Now I am hoping there will be some." *(Manufacturing Supervisor, 2017)*

It was important for Delta employees that Gamma remained family-owned, as they interpreted this as the company having good values. It increased Delta employees' comfortability with the acquiring company and brought about the feeling that Gamma cared for its employees. Delta employees also appreciated Gamma's attention to quality standards and reported finding their Gamma colleagues to be professional, open, and friendly people. Nevertheless, the employees at Delta felt that Gamma had not embraced them as part of a new organization. For example, over the period of data collection, Delta employees were increasingly of the opinion that Gamma did not listen to their ideas adequately.

One key difference was that Delta had always had a very flat organization, whereas Gamma had a clear hierarchy. This caused some frustration and puzzlement. Still, Delta employees appreciated that as an international company Gamma was able to understand and adjust to such differences. Some employees even saw the good in the hierarchy, as Gamma managers were free of everyday functional tasks, making management a top priority.

Nevertheless, Delta employees were relieved that despite the recent trend in acquisitions between competitors in their field, the buyer in this case was not a direct competitor but offered a complementary product line. Due to the difficulties in their recent history, the deal made the future seem brighter for Delta in terms of longevity and potential investments. Delta employees were also excited about the chance to increase sales due to improved international networks. The employees were appreciative of the continuity of work, even though they anticipated that the nature of their work might yet change due to the acquisition. This perception was justified by Gamma's previous acquisitions where no major layoffs had occurred.

> "When the new owners were here to introduce themselves, it gave me a good feeling. And that they had production all over Europe, they are not concentrated in just one country—I mean, if all their production was in China it would feel like we will be gone too—but now I don't feel like that, as they have production

> in Europe in many countries, so in that way I feel peaceful." *(Production Employee, 2017)*

Employees saw the wider networks of suppliers, customers, and colleagues Gamma brought to Delta as very positive. However, the wider networks caused some confusion regarding responsibilities. Employees saw many challenges in the future of Delta, and the future itself felt foggy; a clear goal to work toward was not visible. Due to the uncertain future, motivation was sometimes difficult to find. Similarly, changes in the organizational structure caused concerns over the continuity of some positions at Delta. Although some employees were anxious regarding Delta's place in Gamma's hierarchy, most believed that Delta would continue to exist—at least in some form. Employees were hoping that Delta would remain Delta, but at the same time they feared that at some point in the future Gamma would take over completely.

Despite positive first impressions when the deal was announced in January 2017, by the time of the interviews in the summer of 2017 Delta employees saw that growth had brought challenges for production, as is usual in the industry. By the spring of 2018, the outlook was becoming even more negative in some areas. For example, changing the financial reporting system was a long, stressful process. Similarly, the intended harmonization of the enterprise resource planning system was dreaded, as employees expected it to increase workloads significantly and cause many problems before it was up-and-running. Altogether, integration-related tasks made employees at Delta feel more stressed and mentally tired.

> "People are tired and frustrated. I hear deep sighs and frustrated comments." *(Diarist, 2017)*

At the same time, it was clear that the acquisition was more visible to some than to others. Indeed, very few changes were visible for Delta employees six months into the integration period. In 2017, employees were even hoping to see more changes as proof of integration and the completion of the deal. For example, employees were eagerly looking forward to changes that would improve quality. Despite these expectations, employees saw some changes that did occur as poorly timed. Changes were too slow, or requirements changed too fast, without the time to digest them. In 2018, changes were becoming more visible. At the same time, employees felt that processing several changes simultaneously caused a lot of pressure.

> "We have no choice; things just have to move forward, so we just grit our teeth. And then you can't even take a look around yourself or do anything else, you just have to get the job done and that's it." *(Chief Financial Officer, Personnel Director, 2018)*

The future of the company was not as clear as initially hoped, and in 2017 employees were left to wonder about the strategic direction of the company. As uncertainty was prevailing, some thought it difficult to find motivation for working, as they did not know whether the future that they were building was going to offer continued work at Delta or if it was moving toward shutting down operations in Finland altogether. In addition, employees felt that changes to job descriptions due to the acquisition were sometimes demotivating.

> "One [challenge] is making out the future. What we are going to continue, what is left here, and what might move somewhere else. And what it is sensible to do here. There are still many questions; this integration is still in such an early stage." *(Supply Chain Director, 2017)*

In addition, in 2017, sales numbers had not grown as much as was hoped, and some previous clients had discontinued their orders. This trend was almost alarming in 2018. Employees were hoping that Gamma would take a more active role in boosting internal sales, as that had been a key strategic shift planned for the acquisition. However, internal sales were not picking up, even though external sales shifted to local subsidiaries of Gamma. This caused the bottom line of Delta to look rather bleak. Still, more work in general was a positive improvement. Nevertheless, the hoped-for investments were raising questions regarding future workloads and possible recruitment. These questions were still topical when the welcome investments in machinery as well as new personnel began to materialize in 2018.

Similarly, employees felt frustration over the new chain of command. Whereas Delta had always been a small company with informal power structures, Gamma was much more hierarchical. This caused some concern over communication and workload requirements, as Gamma had many employees working on the same tasks for one counterpart at Delta. The same trend continued in 2018, with the addition of concern over Delta's practices actually deteriorating when adopting Gamma procedures. Employees missed the old flexibility of Delta and believed that Gamma's new ways of working were laborious and sub-optimal.

> "Well, it doesn't feel all that nice, when … When things happen that you don't see as very sensible." *(Chief Financial Officer, Personnel Director, 2018)*

Employees felt that their workloads were unsustainably heavy in some parts of the organization throughout the data-collection period. Especially those affected by the requirements of investigative work to facilitate integration and those in charge of carrying out changes were experiencing major stress. Similarly, those who were in positions to see the upcoming changes felt overwhelmed by the turmoil of different, overlapping projects. A reorganization of human resources seemed desirable. In addition, employees felt that work was scattered due to communication delays or defects in machinery or supplies and were hoping for more clarity and fluency to ensure efficiency.

> "The beginning, maybe it was not so, but we imagined it went well. That was our feeling, but realism and fact began to emerge a little later. Maybe I am being too pessimistic; we have made good progress on many things. This disappointment is colored by our bottom line and how it was received in the parent company." *(Managing Director, 2018)*

Nevertheless, the new colleagues from Gamma were welcomed and face-to-face meetings with them were highly valued throughout the data-collection period. Communication regarding the deal in 2017 was rather insufficient, motivating management to take extra initiatives that did seem to improve employee views on internal communication in 2018. Still, the employees felt that quite often information spread through the grapevine. Especially communication from Gamma felt lacking to the employees. Similarly, employees felt like Gamma did not really understand the processes at Delta. Therefore, a closer look at communication and interaction at Delta follows.

4.3. Communication and Interaction at Delta

In general, employees found that communication with their immediate Gamma colleagues was easy. However, especially written communication raised concerns over the cultural level of understanding. In addition, employees preferred top-down communication from within Delta, as they were hesitant about considering themselves a part of Gamma.

The employees appreciated that management announced the deal in a big staff meeting, where the new owners were also present. They considered the event to have been interesting, positive, and well organized. However, some mistakes were made, as a few employees actually heard the news on the radio or read it in the newspaper in the morning before coming to work. In addition to the staff meeting, a special issue of the in-house magazine introduced the acquisition partners to each other, and this also allowed employees to show the news to their families at home. Employees reported that communication with their immediate supervisors was easy and efficient, and informal get-togethers often occurred within the office to talk over day-to-day matters. Employees commended supervisors on their ability to calm down potentially anxious subordinates.

> "For example, when the deal was announced, [Gamma] management was present and the current, then future, Board of Directors, and they explained the background well and clearly. That [Delta] was not bought because they wanted to close down shop, but to increase investments. I believe this definitely had a positive influence on the employees." *(Chief Financial Officer, Personnel Director, 2017)*

Between Gamma and Delta, the employees greatly appreciated face-to-face meetings as they made communication easier and more pleasant. However, at first, communication regarding the deal was very limited as employees only found that two staff info meetings had really considered the acquisition. Frequent communication was necessary for employees to be able to keep up to date with changes and plans, even if they had not yet materialized. Employees found that bottom-up messages often disappeared somewhere and were hoping to hear back from Gamma regarding how they dealt with messages from Delta. Similarly, employees felt like strategic decisions made in Gamma were not communicated throughout Delta clearly and efficiently.

At Delta, employees often saw communication between different functions and levels of the organization lacking, causing annoyance and rumoring. Openness and honesty were called for to discourage rumoring and speculation. Employees suggested, for example, a weekly note to the bulletin board or company-wide emails to tackle this point.

> "The only thing I look back on negatively is that communication emphasized that for customers or employees nothing will change. In reality, changes will occur and especially for customers the channels will change." *(Survey Respondent)*

Employees considered improvements in the flow of communication throughout the company especially important. Management was encouraged to focus also on the way in which it delivered messages; employees felt that creating a positive image would increase unity and motivation. The employees felt that management was not listening to all employees equally and may not have cared about the uneven workloads or correct resourcing. In addition, employees felt that Delta needed a full-time human resources manager as the position was combined with other management tasks.

Employees at Delta also asked for communication that was more informative—instead of only what, employees wanted to know why and how. If possible, employees wished to know about changes well in advance in order to get used to the idea. Similarly, employees most affected by a change wished to know about it before its announcement to the whole company. In addition, employees wished that there were fewer differences between units in terms of what kind of information they received. Keeping up with communication, offering occasional recaps even when nothing new had occurred, seemed important. Asking questions in front of everyone at big staff meetings was quite frightening for the employees, so they called for immediate supervisors' readiness to answer questions more freely during team meetings. Employees also wished to receive positive feedback when earned and appreciated communication in a positive tone as it enhanced their motivation.

Language was a concern for some employees, especially as not everyone at Gamma spoke English, so both English and German were necessary to communicate most efficiently. Employees at Delta were also frustrated because their Gamma colleagues did not always reply to messages in a timely and informative manner. Communication with unfamiliar Gamma colleagues was especially difficult and an atmosphere of *us* versus *them* persisted.

> "I don't think it's the language itself. It's more, understanding and, sometimes if I say yes, it's not a yes on the other side. It's as simple as that. [- -] If they always say 'them', then it's more challenging to grow together. I always pay very much attention to that." *(Deputy Managing Director, Integration Manager, 2018)*

Employees also expressed a wish to know the strategy and future plans of Delta more thoroughly. Employees considered this as a key way in which to build unity and alleviate anxiety. Employees also felt like they had very few chances to participate in acquisition-related discussions, which they would have welcomed. Similarly, employees felt like they did not have an adequate chance to participate in the planning of changes that were directly related to their job. They considered such participation important in terms of ensuring that the change could also be implemented in practice, as the employees themselves had the best first-hand knowledge of the workings of the company. At least some level of participation would have allowed employees to feel ownership of the change and thereby increase motivation. More interaction with other units was also mentioned as a way to build unity and form a shared understanding of the entire company.

> "So, when it is a project or thing that will influence a certain group or something, it needs to be dealt with by including them. So that it is not that one is told, and others are left out. I don't know … That the stakeholders would be present, involved in decision-making as much as possible." *(Country Manager, 2017)*

Based on the above findings, Delta did increase communication, which showed as appreciation in the data collected in 2018. Nevertheless, most of the above concerns remained, even if they were diluted. Employees still felt the *us* versus *them* attitude. With regard to inter-organizational communication, it felt like the same words gained different meaning between the acquisition partners. What was especially negative was the experience that Gamma blamed Delta for everything that was *wrong*, even if Delta had no power to change the issue.

> "We can express our opinion, but so far it has had no influence. It is their rules, and we have to … [follow]." *(Managing Director, 2018)*

Overall, at Delta, some employees reported being able to express emotions when wishing to do so, whereas others felt like they had to hide their emotions. Employees noted that this was in part to do with personalities, with others being innately more open about their emotions, but also with their position. For example, some managers found it more difficult to portray their true emotions when it was part of their job to encourage and motivate subordinates. Employees also noted that especially negative emotions seemed to spread quite easily at Delta, especially among employees within the same functions, who often socialized and shared their concerns with each other during breaks. This brings us to the evolving emotional climate at Delta.

4.4. Emotional Climate at Delta

Employees reported that the climate at Delta had always felt mostly positive. This also helped it to stay positive following the acquisition. The positivity of the emotional climate was visible in that employees enjoyed coming to work and were able to joke and laugh together. Delta had very low levels of employee turnover and employees got along well. During breaks, the conversation would flow into social issues, not just work-related matters. Employees also felt that they could talk to anyone at the company—including top management. Delta treated the employees well, which in turn motivated the employees to treat the company well. Feelings of success such as achieving, or even surpassing objectives increased positive emotions regarding work. The ability to truly concentrate on the task at hand without having to rush was also appreciated.

> "I think everyone has been in positive spirits. There has been joyful chat around the coffee and lunch table." *(Diarist, 2017)*

The positive climate improved work in many ways. Employees were proactive and often completed tasks that were not directly part of their job description. They helped each other and cared about their colleagues' well-being. They felt free to ask questions related to their work and always received constructive advice. The employees also reported that the positive climate increased productivity in terms of working pace. In 2017, one employee considered that:

> “It [a positive emotional climate] is—in terms of working atmosphere—it is essential. That it is nice to come [to work] and work goes well. That there is more than just completing tasks at your post, that you have breaks and what not. It is essential. If we didn’t have that, this would be quite a gloomy toil.” *(Assembly Supervisor, 2017)*

Nevertheless, some problems also existed. The acquisition had led to many rumors arising, which were not subsiding, and which raised anxiety levels, leading to a deterioration in the emotional climate. Many considered this a consequence of too little communication. Many employees also experienced a lot of stress following the acquisition, which caused, for example, tempers to shorten, so that interactions with colleagues became less pleasant. The disparity between individuals’ workloads also seemed unfair, causing friction.

> “The workload doesn't allow us to carry out tasks properly. Many tasks cannot be handled at all.” *(Survey Respondent)*

At the same time, some employees felt like they could barely influence their own future at the company, leading to a deterioration in their motivation to work. Altogether, many employees were anxious about the continuity of their work, despite assurances from management that their work would continue. A feeling of rushing and not progressing was the main cause of *bad* days at work. Employees felt expectant, wanting to find clarity regarding the future of Delta.

> “[I feel] Hopeless. Because there is too much work.” *(Diarist, 2017)*

In 2018, the employees felt that the atmosphere at Delta had become more critical and achievement-centered than before. In fact, employees believed the pressures of integration were the likely cause of some resignations that had occurred. It still felt like Delta was *us* and Gamma was *them*. Rumors had not ceased to circulate and concern over Delta’s future still existed. Especially the continuance of two separate brands was raising questions. Additionally, the worry over Gamma’s interpretation of Delta’s books was becoming more apparent. The feelings of having to rush their work and of increasing pressure made employees wary of being able to cope in the future, and their colleagues seemed tenser than before.

> "People are rather irritable and tired, and you can see that the positivity I always thought was our strength has decreased considerably." *(Country Manager, 2018)*

Nevertheless, employees experienced the successful completion of some of the integration projects as positive. Despite some deterioration in overall positivity, the friendliness and helpfulness that had characterized Delta's emotional climate were still strong, and teams enjoyed a good collegial atmosphere. Similarly, a positive atmosphere existed when meeting Gamma colleagues and during company gatherings such as the Christmas party. The continuance of work was a very positive thing and the investments that had been made increased employees' security over the future of Delta.

> "In the end I feel better than last autumn, and we have now had many positive things like investments and such, so of course they build faith in the future." *(Supply Chain Manager, 2018)*

In 2018, employees suggested that the company could make task priorities clearer. Employees also hoped that Gamma might return some of Delta's old flexibility and boost other subsidiaries' efforts in Delta sales. Delta employees also wished that Gamma would allow for some differences in practices, especially when Delta's old way of doing things might be better than what Gamma wanted to enforce. The role of immediate supervisors was very important in boosting morale, and they were asked to take an even more proactive role in trying to increase positivity. At the same time, the supervisors themselves were expressing confusion over feeling one way and acting another.

All in all, in 2017, the diarists evaluated their working days at Delta at 6.85 out of 10, and in 2018, it was 6.75 out of 10. In 2017, the responses varied between 3 and 9, and in 2018, between 2 and 9. In October 2017, the wider group that responded to the employee satisfaction survey evaluated their job satisfaction at 7.8 out of 10, clearly signaling a very good level of overall job satisfaction. Thus, these can be considered rather positive results. Nevertheless, when considering the wide range of diary entries, many employees were experiencing much pressure and many negative emotions at work. Although the number of respondents is too low for trustworthy statistical analysis, the figures support the qualitative findings.

4.5. Matching Delta Findings with the Framework

4.5.1. Seeking Explanations for the Findings

At Delta, the acquisition also triggered a myriad of emotions. The key triggers for these emotions (table 15—for a more in-depth view of the data supporting these findings, please turn to appendix 11) largely resemble those from Alpha Group (table 12). The deal as such created faith in the future of Delta, triggering relief and happiness. After some difficult years, Delta employees saw the deal as a means toward greater investments and development opportunities. Pride was somewhat visible in how Delta employees saw their former best practices as superior to any others. Perhaps this pride and identification with the pre-acquisition organization caused a lot of turmoil in becoming a part of Gamma, as employees clearly feared greater trouble even though they expressed hope for a mutually beneficial future. Gamma's attitude toward Delta's previous best practices, which Delta employees still saw as better than those offered by Gamma, was deemed offensive. Especially Gamma's attitude to Delta's inferior bottom line, and a refusal to listen to the logical explanations of its cause in the new organizational structure where all overseas sales were marked for the local subsidiaries, triggered major negativity toward Gamma's Board of Directors. Delta's future within Gamma caused a lot of uncertainty and fears for the employees' own jobs as well as for the existence of Delta altogether. Employees grieved the loss of what had made Delta great, especially regarding its former agility and low levels of organizational hierarchy.

Table 15. Core relational themes at Delta

Emotion	Core relational theme at Delta	Key level of emotions
Positive		
Happiness	The increased opportunities for development at Delta	within-person and organizational level
Relief	Relief over continuity	organizational level
Pride	Pride over Delta's best practices	organizational level
Negative		
Anxiety	Uncertainty over Delta's future within Gamma and one's job	organizational level and within-person level
Anger	Gamma's attitude toward Delta's best practices	organizational level
Sadness	Loss of Delta's best practices	organizational level
Mixed		
Hope	A wish that Delta would fall into place within Gamma	organizational level

Delta employees also showed signs of group emotions. Group membership triggered pride and happiness over survival, as well as anger over perceived offenses. Group-shared emotions were visible, for example, in the employee reports of emotions spread through rumors and coffee table discussions. The key levels found at Delta reflect those at Alpha Group, with only slight differences in the emphases. This indicates that although a myriad of emotion triggers are likely to emerge in any deal, employee experiences will relate to both organizational and personal concerns to some extent. It also seems likely that both positive and negative emotions along with hope for a better future will be triggered.

Some employees had noticed that their personality indeed influenced their emotion experiences at work (cf. Weiss & Cropanzano 1996; Watson & Tellegen 1985). Especially one production employee mentioned being a positive person on the whole and saw the acquisition as an interesting and exciting development. Rather than fearing change, she said she welcomed change as a chance for improvement. Her attitude did influence her coping strategies, as she mentioned that she did not dwell on negative issues but tried to solve them one way or another. At the same time, many employees reported that the positive climate at Delta created positive behavioral outcomes (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007). These findings reflect the principles of AET (cf. Weiss & Cropanzano 1996).

Employees did connect their experiences to certain events at work and judged whether those events seemed pleasing or displeasing to them in the workplace. Most employees were able to describe their subjective experiences but were not able to pinpoint why they thought their colleagues were experiencing certain emotions.

Often it was stated how they could *just see it in their faces*. This points toward the importance of physiological signs of emotions (cf. Fredrickson 2001) but opens up for debate the accuracy of emotion perceptions in this volatile context.

Also at Delta, the organization was able to influence employee perceptions through communication (cf. Roundy 2010). The frequency (e.g. Weber et al. 2011) of communication was a key factor in how employees experienced the acquisition-related changes. As expected, employees wished for a variety of media (cf. Angwin et al. 2016), appreciated face-to-face meetings (cf. Lee 1994; Daft & Lengel 1986), and asked for clear messages (cf. Barrett 2002). Employees also valued positivity in the messages (cf. Roundy 2010). Employees especially expressed a wish to be notified differently of changes directly related to their work, which is in accordance with the notion that different stakeholders require different forms of communication (cf. Balle 2008; Cornett-DeVito & Friedman 1995). At Delta, informal communication channels also arose as sources for rumoring when formal communication was lacking (cf. Lotz & Donald 2006). Although employees would have welcomed participation, very few interactive or dialogical communication opportunities were available.

As expected (e.g. Piekkari et al. 2005), language issues also caused some concern at Delta. Although technically English was the mutual language and it was adopted by management, employees' proficiency in communication with members from the acquisition partner varied greatly. Employees who were able to communicate in German at least to some degree experienced language issues much less than those who were able to communicate only in English, or especially those who even had very little English. Similarly, differences in accustomed communication styles (cf. Gao 2014) caused some concerns where Delta members were considered too passive, or Gamma members as rather distant or aggressive.

The emotional climate at Delta seemed rather positive and stable when this research began. It reflected the members' perceptions regarding their work and the organization (cf. Ashkanasy 2003), with the influence of the deal mostly visible as a means to secure the future of Delta. Managers at Delta reported that they tried to always be open to the concerns of their employees and motivate them through open communication and positive feedback. This shows an attempt at building a positive emotional climate (cf. Ozcelik et al. 2008). Similarly, employees did feel the need for psychological and physical comfort at their workplace (cf. Maimone & Sinclair 2010). However, the emotional climate was dynamic (cf. DeRivera 1992) in that changes in the organization triggered changes in the surrounding climate. By the second round of data collection, when more changes had become visible, the climate was deteriorating somewhat. The changes showed differently in different functions at Delta, which created slight variations between the emotional climates within groups (cf. Härtel & Liu 2012; Ruiz 2007). For example, the sales team felt rather positive as their tasks were not changing that much, whereas the financial team felt overwhelmed and stressed because their work was undergoing major reform.

Motivation to make the deal a success was experienced with regard to a future brightened by the acquisition (cf. Teerikangas 2012). However, the strategy of Delta seemed foggy to the employees, and the anxiety regarding the future that in the beginning was overpowered by excitement did not reduce when the *honeymoon period* ended. Thus, it seems that a mutual goal to work for was not clearly present at Delta, and thereby could not trigger positive emotions in the long term (cf. Sekerka & Fredrickson 2008). Motivation started to disappear and turn into increased stress, anxiety, and inferior performance—thus highlighting the need for positivity for successful integration (cf. Birkinshaw et al. 2000). An *us* versus *them* attitude persisted in Delta in 2018—possibly related to the need for positive emotions in promoting organizational identification and intra-organizational cooperation (cf. Fischer & Manstead 2008).

As was predicted in figure 24, both positive and negative experiences of the climate seemed to trigger similarly valenced emotions. For example, employees who reported experiencing the climate at Delta as positive also seemed more positive toward the deal itself and toward the changes that occurred at Delta. Conversely, employees who reported experiencing a deterioration in the emotional climate also reported feeling stressed and anxious regarding the deal. Thus, as discussed, these experiences seemed to be cyclical in nature: the climate triggering emotions and outcomes, and vice versa. Although employees did report negative emotions and perceptions of the climate, positive features seemed to be stronger in 2017. However, viewpoints became slightly more negative in 2018. Thus, the emotional climate at Delta shortly after the acquisition seems to have been positive but showed signs of deteriorating as the integration progressed. This is slightly alarming in that should employees lose the experience of a positive emotional climate in the workplace, they would likely become less productive and less prone to positive emotional triggers, making change much more difficult. Nevertheless, it also seems that at Delta, the key elements of the suggested framework played a role. This will be discussed in further detail next.

4.5.2. Evaluating the Transferability of the Framework

Comparing findings from Delta with findings from Alpha Group, it seems clear that the pre-acquisition emotional climate can influence acquisition experiences (figure 28). At Delta, employees experienced the pre-acquisition emotional climate as very positive, which helped the initial emotions regarding the deal to also be positive. When integration began and acquisition-related communication became more frequent, the emotions became dynamic. Both positive and negative emotions emerged, caused by different judgments as to the emotion triggers' desirability (table 13).

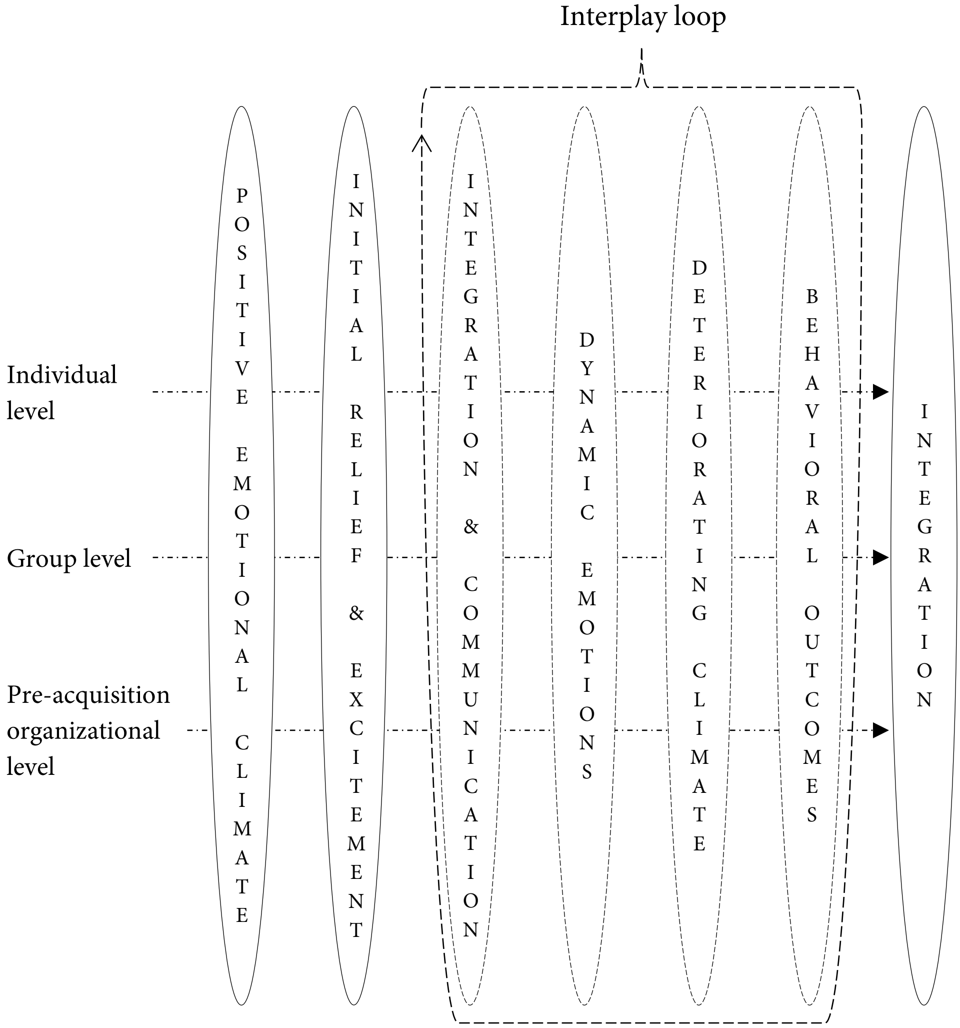

Figure 28. Emotion-conscious integration at Delta

When negative emotions took more hold, the previously positive emotional climate began to deteriorate. This had equally negative behavioral consequences, for example, in terms of lower morale and motivation, resignations, and increased rumoring. However, when employees experienced positive communication and integration efforts, the resulting positive emotions encouraged equally positive behavior such as increased effort. Thus, the interplay loop found at Alpha Group was also in place at Delta.

As discovered in the existing literature (e.g. Fredrickson 2013; Lazarus 1991a) and indicated in the suggested framework, many emotion triggers were also found at Delta. The positive triggers did encourage positive behavior, whereas the negative triggers did not. Employees also saw that negativity had a way of spreading through the company, suggesting emotional contagion (cf. Hatfield et al. 1994) and the dynamicity of the emotional climate (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007). Group emotional climates (cf. Härtel & Liu 2012) were also visible, for example, in the different experiences and concerns of production employees and office workers. The group emotional climate of the top management also reflected the mental toll of putting on a brave face for subordinates when simultaneously experiencing anxiety (cf. Hochschild 2012).

At Delta, the different levels of emotional experience were also congruent with those found at Alpha Group. At the individual level, employees experienced emotions regarding their own job. At the group level, employees expressed concern over their immediate colleagues, team members, and friends. At the pre-acquisition organizational level, employees expressed a wish for the continuity of Delta. The strong *us* versus *them* attitude was clearly visible. At the post-acquisition organizational level, expected investments and increased resources created positivity, but overall, Gamma was not successful in creating a compelling vision of a joint future. It is very possible that Gamma's choice of integration strategy gave Delta employees a sense of too much independence, allowing them to believe that things would continue as usual at work. However, since when following a synergy-seeking acquisition this is hardly ever the case, negative emotions were bound to emerge because of unforeseen changes. The principles of emotional experiences following acquisitions as noted in table 13 thus also seem to hold true at Delta.

Communication at Delta was very clearly top-down centered. The employees gathered at big staff meetings to hear presentations and received information from bulletin boards. The messages were mainly in Finnish, apart from Gamma representatives' presentations, which were in English. The messages themselves mainly concerned the day-to-day functioning of the company and employees had a passive role in listening. The purpose of such communication was to keep the employees informed, but this was not entirely successful as many still considered communication as lagging behind. Although regular team meetings were in place, employees did not find them truly interactive. Informal gatherings were very welcomed by the employees but were considered to occur too infrequently to have a lasting effect. No acquisition-related workshops or other purposeful involvement occurred. Thus, reflecting on table 14, Delta remained mainly on the top-down communication level, with very little dialogical interaction taking place. Employees did report that a sense of participation would have felt engaging and motivating. Thus, it seems likely that should Delta have been able to create acquisition-related interaction, they may also have been able to trigger more positivity toward the post-acquisition organization. The lack of participation seems a likely cause of the difference in positivity between the Gamma–Delta and Alpha–Beta acquisitions. Overall, when fitting the Delta findings into the suggested framework (figure 29), key hurdles to more positive integration can be found.

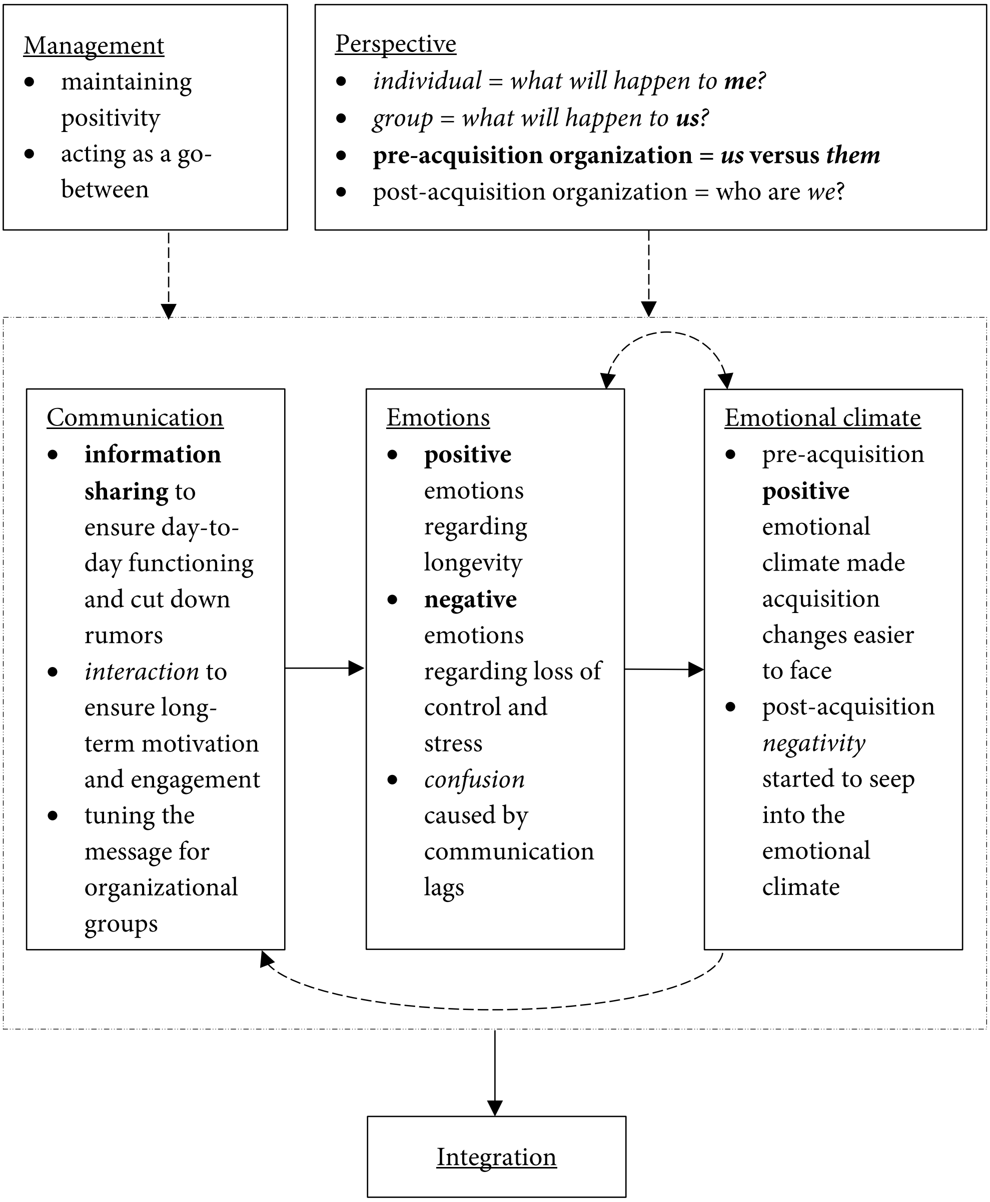

Figure 29. How Delta findings match the suggested framework

As very little interactive communication took place at Delta, it is natural that the overwhelming positivity related to participation that occurred at Alpha Group did not emerge. Instead, at Delta, one-sided, top-down communication dominated. Information sharing was the key and interaction mainly occurred in team meetings in a limited manner. However, Delta was somewhat successful in tuning the communication to employee wants, increasing it when employees' worries were discovered. Negativity was especially visible in feelings of a loss of control and increased stress. Nevertheless, positive emotions also emerged due to perceived longevity. Still, communication lags caused slight confusion, which together with the negative experiences began to eat away at the positive emotions.

The positive pre-acquisition climate triggered initial relief and happiness, but when negativity began to take hold, the emotional climate fluctuated. Still, management attempted to maintain positivity. Especially the integration manager also acted as a go-between, seeking to improve Gamma's and Delta's impressions of each other. Nevertheless, the employees were greatly concerned over their own and their colleagues' future within Gamma, heightening the undesirable *us* versus *them* thinking. This in turn resulted in the downplaying of the post-acquisition organization in Delta employees' minds.

When reflecting on managing positive organizational change at Delta, it seems that during the integration, the employees did not always perceive more affirmation than harm. Although some positive emotion triggers emerged, leading to positive behavior, employee engagement remained at a relatively low level. Managers were able to detect and somewhat influence their subordinates' emotions, which helped alleviate negativity but did not drastically increase positivity. Communication did not effectively highlight the positive aspects of integration and a compelling vision of the future was not successfully formed. Employees' emotions were responded to somewhat, but such responses centered on decreasing worries rather than boosting positivity. Very little encouragement to identify with the post-acquisition organization was offered to the employees, and a preference for the pre-acquisition organization prevailed.

Thus, it seems that although positivity also helped at Delta, true positive change was not achieved. This supports the functionality of the suggested framework as both an analytical tool and a guideline. The framework, adhering to the existing literature (e.g., Angwin et al. 2016; Roundy 2010; Balle 2008), posits that consistent, frequent, rich communication is crucial for integration. Moreover, the framework highlights the role of interaction as a means to increase employee engagement and motivation, and thereby encourage positive behavior (cf. Clayton 2010; Appelbaum et al. 2007; Cornett-DeVito & Friedman 1995). Whereas Delta did well on the former, the latter seemed to be missing. At the same time, the emotional climate at Delta showed less positivity than the climate at Alpha Group, indicating that the lack of interaction and participation may indeed be a key toward more positive integration. Based on the abductive building of the suggested framework and the deductive substantiation of the framework, the employees' emotional experiences, communication perceptions, and the emotional climate surrounding change do indeed influence post-acquisition integration. In order to harness the power of positivity, positive emotion triggers need highlighting, communication necessitates elements of interaction, and the emotional climate requires maintenance. Next, I will discuss these findings once more in light of the presented research questions.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Discussion

In this study, I set out to discover how employee emotions influence cross-border acquisition integration. In order to find an in-depth answer, I used three sub-questions to guide the study:

1. What triggers emotions following acquisitions?
2. What is the relationship between interaction and emotions?
3. How does an emotional climate evolve following acquisitions?

In the following, I will crystallize the answers to these questions before evaluating the theoretical contribution this study makes as well as the managerial implications the findings carry.

Due to the complexity of the triggering context and the cognitive processing, the emotions that arise following an acquisition fall under the category of emotion schemas rather than natural kinds (cf. Izard 2007). In this study, I found that during post-acquisition integration, employees experience happiness, relief, pride, anxiety, anger, sadness, jealousy, and hope. Although not found in this study, it is also not impossible that other emotions would arise following an acquisition. Indeed, they may also have arisen in the cases studied here, but their objects were not recognized as acquisition-related. For example, it seems highly plausible that employees who felt anger due to their colleagues' dismissals would also have felt compassion for those laid off. These findings extend the discussion on emotions following acquisitions in portraying a more balanced view of both positive and negative experiences (cf. Graebner et al. 2017).

As for what triggers emotions following acquisitions, I found several answers corresponding to several emotional experiences. Viewing the experiences of Alpha Group and Delta employees through the lens of cognitive appraisal theory (e.g. Fredrickson 2013; Lazarus 1991a), the negative experiences following a cross-border acquisition are largely related to the uncertainty of the new situation, perceptions of offenses against the employees of the pre-acquisition organization, and experiences of resentment caused by favoritism or inequality. Positivity, however, is strongly related to perceptions of continuity and opportunity, as well as relieving stress and perceived credit in either the pre- or post-acquisition organization. The mixed emotion of hope combines the two, with fears of the negative shadowing the hopes of the positive. These findings are congruent with the early notion of emotions as indicators of nurturance or harm (cf. Izard 1984), but the object of the experienced emotions seems to have developed from pure survival to self-promotion. This highlights the necessity of personal significance for emotional arousal (Lazarus 1991a).

These findings show that employee experiences regarding integration mainly arose while working rather than from the work itself (cf. Fisher 2002). These emotions, although subjective by nature, crossed several organizational levels (cf. Ashkanasy 2003). At the within-person level, employees did view the acquisition from a highly subjective perspective. However, following acquisitions, two distinct group levels seemed to become important. The immediate work group—such as the function—provided a sounding board for individual emotions. In addition, identification with the pre-acquisition organization evolved into a group in the *us* versus *them* sense. Identification with the pre-acquisition organization triggered emotions regarding the future of the in-group. Finally, the organizational level was reflected in the emotions regarding the post-acquisition organization. All in all, emotions reflecting identification with these levels were triggered essentially due to group membership (cf. Menges & Kilduff 2015). These group-based emotions were triggered in the organizational groups that the employees identified with, the pre-acquisition organization they came from, as well as in the post-acquisition organization that was now demanding their attention.

With regard to group-based emotions, it is noteworthy that employees rarely mentioned culture as an emotion trigger. Only a handful of employees explicitly noted that there were cultural differences, and even fewer thought the differences were major or inherently negative. National pride is a clear example of a group-based emotion (cf. Menges & Kilduff 2015), which, for example, at Alpha Group translated into pride at being the buyer (former Alpha) or pride at working for a company that has values (most notable in former Beta). These emotions are not bound by the national culture, nor were any of the others discovered at Alpha Group. However, a lot of frustration was caused both at Alpha Group and at Delta by changes to the organizational structure and work routines. This suggests that in terms of employee emotions, following acquisitions, national culture clashes may indeed be more rare and thus less important than organizational culture change (cf. Sarala 2010; Stahl & Voigt 2008; Schweizer 2005). However, the national cultures encountered in this study were mainly Finnish and German, which may not differ so drastically as to cause actual culture clashes in any case.

As predicted by AET (cf. Weiss & Cropanzano 1996), the work environment and personal dispositions did influence how employees perceived work events and thus which emotional reactions and subsequent behaviors emerged. The findings also highlight the dynamic nature of emotions (Lazarus 1991a) in that different anticipatory thoughts lead to different emotional outcomes in individual employees. Similarly, emotions were dynamic in that although individually they are of short duration, employees experienced different emotions—both positive and negative—recurrently. The affective events at work also triggered group-shared emotions (cf. Menges & Kilduff 2015). Most notably, employees often had similar reactions to change events or converged with the emotions displayed by their colleagues (cf. Barsade 2002; Hatfield et al. 1994). In addition to co-presence (cf. Menges & Kilduff 2015), some form of social interaction, formal or informal, thus seems necessary for group-shared emotions to emerge in the post-acquisition context.

In this study, I found a somewhat complex relationship between communication and emotions. First, communication definitely triggers emotions. As expected (e.g. Sinkovics et al. 2011), communication was a key trigger of emotions both at Alpha Group and at Delta. Employees did indeed value communication that was open, effective (cf. Angwin et al. 2016), and frequent (cf. Weber et al. 2011), as it helped them cope with acquisition-related uncertainty (cf. Appelbaum et al. 2000). Second, a lack of communication can also trigger emotions. A perceived lack of communication increased uncertainty, triggering anxiety. Similarly, the perceived lack of communication gave rise to rumoring, again triggering negative emotions. Thus, based on this study, a lack of communication is an especially potent trigger for negative emotions, which can make it especially problematic in terms of successful change (cf. Angwin et al. 2016). Third, emotions can influence communication, for example, when anxiety and uncertainty increase rumoring. Finally, communication can be used strategically to influence emotions. For example, communication can cut out negativity caused by rumors (cf. Barrett 2002) or increase commitment through creating a positive image of the outcomes of change (cf. Roundy 2010).

Taking a closer look at communication as an emotion trigger reveals new information regarding change experiences. My findings confirm much of what the previous literature has claimed about communication, including the necessity of employee motivation (cf. Barrett 2002), the benefits of varied media (cf. Balle 2008), the desirability of richness in the message (Lee 1994), the significance of constancy (cf. Schweiger & Denisi 1991), the importance of honesty (cf. Lotz & Donald 2006), and the complex role of language (cf. Gao 2014; Piekkari et al. 2005). However, based on my findings, these issues are of greatest importance when considering traditional, top-down communication; that is, information sharing. Such communication is indeed essential for change efforts, as it decreases worries and allows for the smooth functioning of day-to-day operations. Nevertheless, based on my findings, such communication is not optimal for increasing positivity regarding change.

In order to increase positivity regarding change, interaction—or engagement and participation—seems much more fruitful. The prominent example from Alpha Group shows how dialog (cf. Bohm 2003; Isaacs 1999; Senge 1990) can be harnessed to increase employee engagement and motivate the employees to make the desired post-acquisition change a success. Conversely, the lack of interactive engagement at Delta may in fact be a key reason why Delta employees did not feel such positive emotions regarding post-acquisition change. Arguably, any mode of interaction directed at creating positivity toward post-acquisition change can have a similar impact. As it is the general purpose of interaction to influence others in some manner (cf. Buller & Burgoon 1996), it is possible to use interaction as a means to imprint one's own ideas or experiences on others (cf. Kopelman et al. 2006; Buck & VanLear 2002; Burgoon, Stern, et al. 1995). As human beings are hereditarily responsive to social contexts (cf. Fiske & Taylor 2013), the manipulation of such contexts to appear more positive (cf. Andersen & Guerrero 1996) can heighten actual experiences of positivity (cf. Hatfield et al. 1994). The key to the influence of interaction is its ability to create a sense of togetherness and cooperation that can help overcome the hindrance of *us* versus *them* thinking. In addition, interaction can help employees feel engaged in the change process, to share ownership of its success. This is highly motivating, as success with the change then boosts one's own ego-identity (cf. Lazarus 1993).

From the viewpoint of emotions, it seems that information sharing is essential in alleviating employee anxiety over change. However, alleviating negative emotions will not create positive emotions. Thus, interaction is the key for increasing positivity regarding change. From the perspective of emotional contagion (cf. Barsade 2002; Hatfield et al. 1994), it seems likely that information sharing alone cannot elicit contagion, but interaction can. In terms of contagion, however, any social interaction can cause contagion. Thus, informal coffee table discussions can also spread emotions throughout the company (cf. Marmenout 2011). Whereas engagement in planned, organization-led interaction designed to increase positivity can indeed succeed in boosting positive emotions, more informal social interaction can definitely also spread negative emotions.

The evolvement of an emotional climate I found to be tightly connected to the nature of the emotions and communication arising following acquisitions. As the emotional climate of an organization is visible in the predominant collective emotional states that are created through social interaction between organizational members (cf. DeRivera & Páez 2007), the interaction that creates and upholds the emotional climate as well as the emotions that emerge during such interaction have a direct influence on the dynamic evolvement of the surrounding emotional climate.

Based on my findings, a healthy emotional climate (cf. Ashkanasy & Daus 2002) is indeed beneficial for post-acquisition change. Positivity can help organizational transformation through encouraging employees to work toward a mutual goal (cf. Sekerka & Fredrickson 2008), thereby enhancing identification with the new organization (cf. Fischer & Manstead 2008).

In creating a positive emotional climate, it is essential to remember that it does not mean the absence of negative emotions, but an environment where emotional needs are taken into account and positive emotions encouraged (cf. Ozcelik et al. 2008; Bar-Tal et al. 2007). A positive climate, however, does ease the emergence of positive emotions (cf. Bar-Tal et al. 2007), which can be essential for successful post-acquisition integration (e.g. Birkinshaw et al. 2000). However, as an emotional climate can also exist among organizational sub-groups (cf. Härtel & Liu 2012; Ruiz 2007), maintaining positivity throughout the organization can be difficult. Indeed, even before any change efforts are undertaken, the type of deal itself can indicate the potential valence of the emotional climate that will surround post-acquisition change; whereas a friendly acquisition is more likely to result in security, a hostile takeover is very likely to give rise to a climate of fear (cf. Fink & Yolles 2015).

Overall, based on my findings, employee emotions can thus have a major influence on post-acquisition integration. Arguably, this influence depends somewhat on the extent of integration sought, managerial efforts during integration, and the nature of the emotions that arise. First, it is likely that when complete restructuring takes place, employees experience more emotions, simply because more personally relevant changes occur. Thus, when the desired level of integration increases, organizations may also want to increase efforts to maintain positivity. However, bearing in mind that employees are likely to react to any change as predicted in the literature regarding the human side of acquisitions (cf. Teerikangas & Irrmann 2016)—a notion confirmed through the findings from Delta—, even if very little integration is intended, organizations will likely benefit from boosting positivity following an acquisition.

Second, managerial efforts can make or break positivity. The management task following an acquisition highlights the necessity of building commitment and promoting change receptiveness (cf. Caldwell 2003). In order to build positivity regarding change, managers need the ability to show employees how the change itself can be considered as exciting (cf. Karp 2004). If managers are able to emphasize such positive emotion triggers following change (cf. Cameron 2008), they can enable affirmative, positive change (cf. Whetten & Cameron 2011; Avey et al. 2008). However, if managers do not possess the skills such as EI (e.g. Ovans 2015; Gardner & Stough 2002; Goleman 1998) that are necessary to create positivity, negative fight-or-flight reactions can dominate the change period (cf. Fredrickson 2001; Marks & Mirvis 1997).

Third, the nature of employee emotions, as discovered above, can have a major influence on an organization's ability to create positivity regarding change. If the pre-existing emotional climate is very negative, it can be extremely difficult to trigger positivity regarding change. Conversely, even if the pre-existing emotional climate is positive, it does not rule out the emergence of negative emotions, nor the possibility of a deterioration in the climate—as seen at Delta. Next, I contemplate the theoretical contribution these findings generate.

5.2. Theoretical Contribution

Looking back to the identified research gaps, this study makes several contributions to the fields of literature in which it is positioned. For the acquisition literature, my study offers increased theorization and conceptual clarity in offering an in-depth view of what emotions are and how they emerge during—as well as influence—post-acquisition integration. In particular, the framework I build (figure 26) introduces a multifaceted theoretical contribution in the field of acquisition literature. It offers increased analytical, predictive, and planning power. As an analytical tool, it can be used to decipher how change processes unfold in practice and how employee experiences influence them. As a predictive tool, it can be used to anticipate what kind of short-term fluctuations are likely to occur in how employees experience change contexts. As a planning tool, it can be used to strategically influence change processes in order to increase positivity.

Apart from answering the call for more theorization in the field (cf. Zagelmeyer et al. 2016; Reus 2012), my findings increase the relatively limited knowledge of emotions in management and international business research (cf. Sinkovics et al. 2011). More particularly, the findings offer balance for the previous negative bias (cf. Graebner et al. 2017) in the research on emotions following acquisitions, through a focus on positivity. Furthermore, through a focus on individual as well as group and collective experiences, the findings highlight the often neglected role of individual viewpoints in the acquisition literature (cf. Risberg 2001).

For the change management literature, I am able to include the context of change as an explanatory factor (cf. Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017). The change context does not merely depict the walls around the change, but in fact is an active part of change. In my study, I operationalize the change context as the surrounding emotional climate. It is also noteworthy that the context itself as well as its influence on employees does not equal the change event—such as the acquisition—but exists independent of and predates the change. Thus, understanding the context of change does not mean understanding the theoretical concept of a change process such as an acquisition, but the realization of how the context evolves during change (cf. Pettigrew 1990). More particularly, I introduce a link between the surrounding emotional climate and employee experiences following an acquisition, suggesting how the emotional climate can influence the integration process (cf. Fink & Yolles 2015). The emotional climate presents an alternative to studying organizational cultures, as it is more agile and thus can change much more quickly than an organizational culture, which can take years to change. Furthermore, it considers emotions at various organizational levels, deepening the desired insight (cf. Huy 2012) into group emotions and their management following acquisitions. Through this focus, I am able to shed light on the power of positivity in the organizational context and especially during change. Again, I emphasize that positivity does not mean the exclusion of negative emotions, but a general emphasis on creating affirmative experiences. Thus, positivity can help employees feel more comfortable at work despite the nature of their immediate, day-to-day emotions. In addition, offering positive experiences at work is a way to engage employees and thereby increase their intrinsic motivation to work. These findings also shed novel light on how specific communication practices influence post-acquisition integration (cf. Graebner et al. 2017; Angwin et al. 2016).

For the literature on emotion in organizations, I am able to shed light on the multilevel nature of emotion during change periods (cf. Ashkanasy & Dorris 2017). Based on my findings, during change it is important to note that although emotions are born at an individual level, they are also triggered at the group and organizational levels. This reflects the dynamic nature of emotions and heightens the importance of understanding the principles upon which emotions become contagious. Furthermore, I am able to show how different emotional experiences can occur at different organizational levels and how these experiences are related to organizational-level outcomes such as change-congruent behavior. I am also able to show how the elicitation of group-based and group-shared emotions differs in the post-acquisition integration context.

Table 16 summarizes the main elements of the theoretical contribution I make in this study. I evaluate it from the viewpoint of key questions posed by Whetten (1989) on what constitutes a theoretical contribution: What is new, so what, why so, why now, and who cares? I will leave it to the reader to evaluate whether my work also answers the questions of well done and done well, which I will touch on in the evaluation of the study.

Table 16. Theoretical contribution

Why now?	Although the acquisition literature has been increasing for decades, acquisition success rates still leave room for improvement. More recently, the POS lens has been introduced as a novel way to look at old issues in order to find pragmatic solutions. Furthermore, employee emotions and well-being at work have become some of the most widely discussed elements regarding the future of work.
What is new?	This study reflects on emotions from a novel viewpoint in that it 1) introduces a POS lens, 2) considers both individual and collective emotions and their triggers, and 3) offers a dynamic view on emotions in an organizational context.
So what?	These findings are important in the field of acquisition literature, as they help answer the fundamental question of how to make acquisitions more successful. They also increase the level of theorization in the field through offering conceptual clarity.
Why so?	These findings pinpoint the key elements of emotions following acquisitions, suggesting how positivity can enable smoother and swifter change. This occurs because human beings have an innate preference for positivity, which in turn leads to higher performance at both the individual and organizational levels.
Who cares?	Scholars interested in acquisitions, international business, emotions, and change management—as well as practitioners looking for ways to ease post-acquisition change.

In sum, this study reveals how employees' subjective emotion experiences relate to interaction and the overall emotional climate during integration following cross-border acquisitions. In this study, I view emotions from a novel, collective, and dynamic perspective. I discover how emotions emerge at and influence several organizational levels, influencing both individual employees and organizational groups. Going beyond the majority of the existing literature, I pay special attention to supporting positivity rather than suppressing negativity. In the integration context, focusing on alleviating negativity will likely not create positivity, but the generation of positivity can simultaneously help alleviate negativity. Through this slight yet important shift in focus, cross-cultural issues can be overcome more easily, as mutually more beneficial relationships are created (cf. Tjosvold et al. 2014). In addition, through a more informed understanding of which emotions emerge during acquisitions and why, I deepen the level of theorizing in the field. I also refine the understanding of the role of communication—particularly interaction—in managing emotions during integration.

Despite the increasing literature, acquirers often face difficulties during integration. Often managers face multiple points of view and different, even contradictory emotions. The situation becomes even more complex through the uncertainty that characterizes the integration period. Therefore, organizations will benefit from a deeper understanding of the human point of view on integration.

Simultaneously, I offer scholars increased conceptual clarity in the highly subjective field of emotion research. In addition, I enable a deeper insight into employees' collective action during change periods. I also encourage researchers not to be blind-sided by the vast array of potential cross-cultural issues that can hinder cultural change, but instead focus on building unity and harmony through positivity. I illustrate that when employees are offered ways to focus on unifying, positive emotions instead of cross-cultural difficulties, they are more likely to accept and engage in integration. This is likely because positivity leads to higher performance at both the organizational and individual levels (cf. Cameron 2017).

This research is topical not only due to the continued interest in the yet sub-par outcomes of cross-border acquisitions (cf. Graebner et al. 2017), but also in light of the recent interest in POS shown by international business scholars. This has encouraged them to rethink the views on cultural distance and foreignness they have previously taken for granted (cf. Stahl et al. 2016). Through these findings, I increase both the theoretical and practical understanding of how integration processes unfold from the employee perspective and how organizations can learn to manage them better. Thus, I raise the interest of international scholars interested in cross-border acquisitions or emotions in organizations. I also offer insight into how employee emotions can be influenced and thereby benefit management scholars interested in improved HRM during change periods. Thus, I offer value not only to scholars interested in socio-cultural integration but also to practitioners seeking ways to make their acquisitions smoother and more successful—which will be discussed further next.

5.3. Managerial Implications

Emotional skills in the workplace have recently become a hot topic in the mainstream media. For example, in addition to its importance today, the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2018) predicts that in 2022, the key skills for those entering the workforce will include EI. Similarly, Forbes lists five ways to engage emotions at work in order to get more done (Howard 2018), and Harvard Business Review discusses how to embrace change using EI (Wiens & Rowell 2018). This highlights the importance of my research from a managerial perspective. Knowing how employee emotions influence post-acquisition integration allows managers to better understand employee reactions following change such as an acquisition. With the help of the suggested framework (figure 26), practitioners can better plan and analyze their change efforts, paying attention to those aspects that are likely to ease the process. Simultaneously, the framework highlights the importance of understanding the dynamic nature of change—and the possibility that plans may need to be changed during implementation.

Knowing what triggers emotions following acquisitions enables practitioners to understand the mechanisms of how emotions emerge better, and thereby allows them to look at what kinds of emotion triggers are prominent in their own organization. Such knowledge can help practitioners boost positive triggers in order to help employees overcome change-related anxiety. At the same time, knowing what generally triggers negative emotions during change allows practitioners to alleviate the worries of employees more effectively. According to my findings, employees are likely to react to any integration-related change as they would to a change in the organizational culture (cf. Teerikangas & Irrmann 2016). Thus, integration management should be aware that even though they might not plan for a high level of integration, employees will react to the acquisition emotionally, and this will need to be taken into consideration. According to my findings, positivity following acquisitions centers on images of the acquirer and the future of the company. Therefore, to increase positivity, acquirer and acquired company management may find it useful to emphasize what they think is interesting and positive about the companies themselves and beneficial for the employees in the deal. For example, longevity or improved resources can be encouraging to employees. In addition, change itself can be a positive challenge that raises curiosity.

Being able to understand the relationship between communication and emotions is a key component in managing employee emotions. Based on my findings, if practitioners wish to alleviate negative emotions, information sharing is a crucial task. Such communication should be frequent, open, and honest. Honesty in terms of the benefits and plans is especially important, as employees may feel misled if management communicates that no changes will occur. Employees seemed to react most negatively to a perceived loss of direction. When the future strategy of the company becomes unclear to them, they experience confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, and a lack of motivation. To alleviate uncertainty, acquirer and acquired company management can also repeatedly crush potential rumors and speculation regarding job losses—if they are erroneous. Nevertheless, if an increase in positivity is the goal, practitioners also need to introduce interaction, for example, in the form of dialog.

Acquirer and acquired company management should pay close attention to the emotional climate that precedes the integration, as it can have a major influence on how the acquisition is greeted in the beginning. Knowledge of how an emotional climate evolves following acquisitions enables managers to anticipate and influence emotional reactions. It is also important to note that the emotional climate surrounding post-acquisition integration is indeed dynamic. Thus, the acquirer needs to be aware that the emotional climate at the acquired company can change very quickly. Emotional awareness may also be a key concern during due diligence in order to better prepare for what kinds of emotional experiences are likely to emerge during post-acquisition integration. In my study, positivity did seem to predispose employees to positive experiences, but did not rule out negative ones. This suggests that even though the emotional climate may seem positive, acquirers should pay attention to possible underlying negative emotions that could, in the long term, come to overrule the positivity. Major changes always cause fear, so offering employees enough time and information to prepare for the change may help maintain a positive emotional climate. Also explicitly justifying the changes that have been made may help get the employees on board. Acknowledging the mental toll of managing the integration process may be equally important, as those *in the know* often experience keeping secrets from their subordinates as difficult. In addition, sufficient resourcing can help alleviate feelings of exhaustion as workloads during integration may be compounded.

Furthermore, practitioners have additional means to boost positivity that are not directly related to the acquisition. Making sure employees feel that there is a *team spirit* can improve both unity and performance. Such team spirit can be boosted through organizational socialization. Encouraging, positive communication can increase motivation and making sure an established communication chain exists can help avoid communication mismatches between different groups of employees. Finally, investing in the well-being of the employees through making sure the physical surroundings for work are adequate and employees can experience psychological comfort at work may help improve performance. Table 17 gathers the key managerial implications of this study into a themed checklist that practitioners can use in planning and implementing positive change.

Table 17. Managerial implications

Theme	Desirable actions
Integration strategy	• Based on the desired level of integration, anticipate potential emotion triggers and resulting employee emotions • Ensure integration management possesses emotional intelligence and emotional leadership skills • Ensure that integration management is supported in their efforts
Employee emotions	• Detect and understand employee emotions in order to encourage positivity • Consider the individual, group, pre-acquisition, and post-acquisition organizational levels in anticipating emotion triggers • Emphasize positive emotion triggers and alleviate worries • Create positivity toward the post-acquisition organization • Respond to employees' emotions in ways that encourage commitment to the integrated company
Emotional climate	• Ensure awareness of the pre-acquisition emotional climate • Ensure awareness of possible sub-climates • Ensure awareness of fluctuations within detected climates • Emphasize positive elements in the emotional climate • Allow employees to experience and express all kinds of emotions • Strengthen the achieved integration through encouraging employees to identify with the new organization
Communication	• Form a compelling vision of the future of the integrated company • Communicate the positive aspects of integration, creating a sense of excitement and readiness • Use one-sided, top-down communication to ensure day-to-day functionality • Use interaction to ensure engagement • React to employee emotions

Of course, practitioners also need to consider the extent to which they wish to combine the acquisition partners and what implications this may have in determining desirable activity. If full synergy and amalgamation is the objective, the benefits of the combination need to be clearly communicated to the employees in the pre-acquisition organizations. It is likely that when cultural change is greatest, employee emotions will be most aroused. If very little integration beyond the necessity of aligning infrastructures is intended, the personal relevance of such changes to the employees must be considered, as it will likely indicate the emotional experiences that will be triggered. Overall, any change creates a least some uncertainty, meaning that employee emotions should never be completely ignored.

Practitioners can also take note of the suggested steps for managing positive post-acquisition change (table 8). For post-acquisition change to be affirmative, detecting and understanding employee emotions is crucial. A focus on the positive aspects of change creates a sense of excitement and readiness, whereas a compelling vision of a joint future helps engage employees. In addition, responding to employee emotions in commitment-increasing ways helps employees identify with the post-acquisition organization. This implies that practitioners need to be aware that change management is not merely a controlling task but involves a great deal of emotional leadership. Thus, in selecting change leadership, it is beneficial to pay attention not only to managerial but also to emotional leadership skills.

When considering employee emotions, awareness of the levels at which emotions emerge following an acquisition is beneficial. Practitioners wishing to promote positive change may find it useful to highlight the post-acquisition organization as the new *we*, the key arena of organizational identification. At the same time, the individual employee, *me*, will be very concerned over any personal effects of the change for the self and for his or her immediate, group-level colleagues. Employees will likely identify with the pre-acquisition organization, meaning that practitioners pushing for amalgamation may want to downplay the pre-acquisition *us* and *them* in order to promote the *we*. A key way to do this is by creating a positive image of the new, post-acquisition organization. Emphasizing positive emotion triggers in general will help practitioners manage change, but at the same time, awareness and alleviation of worries will give employees a sense of being cared for.

In terms of boosting positivity in the emotional climate, awareness of the pre-acquisition climate may be essential in order to find the positive elements to highlight. Similarly, awareness of possible pre-acquisition sub-climates will help anticipate the formation of sub-climates in the post-acquisition organization. When detected, practitioners may find it useful to stay in tune with the emotional sub-climates as well as with the overall emotional climate in order to detect any fluctuations. Highlighting the positive aspects and solving negative issues will help in maintaining a positive change atmosphere. Nevertheless, practitioners must remember that a positive climate allows room for all emotions—not just the positive ones.

A key way for practitioners to react to and influence employee perceptions and experiences is communication. One-sided, top-down communication can help ease employee concerns and ensure day-to-day functionality. Such information sharing is also useful in cutting down rumors. However, as the level of involvement is minimal, such communication is not likely to fully engage and motivate employees. Thus, in order to truly harness the power of positivity, practitioners may want to consider interaction initiatives. Through interactive engagement and participation, practitioners can increase employee motivation to reach a shared understanding and make the change a success. At the same time, interaction and engagement create a sense of ownership in the employees, which increases long-term motivation.

Overall, the power of positivity following a cross-border acquisition resides in its engaging effect. Based on my research, the key way to increase particularly change-related positivity is interaction. As a side-product of that interaction, employees experience positive emotions regarding the change situation, engagement in the change process, and ownership of the change. This motivates them to make the change successful. At the same time, engagement and ownership decrease employees' anxiety regarding the change. Furthermore, the positivity in the emotional climate surrounding change makes working feel psychologically more pleasant. This increases work-related well-being and thus increases employee productivity. Therefore, boosting positivity during change periods can be extremely beneficial in practice.

5.4. Evaluation of the Study

5.4.1. Trustworthiness of the Study

As I have positioned this study in the third generation of case studies in international business research, it is fitting that I consider pluralist criteriology to evaluate my research. However, the trouble with modern evaluation criteria suitable for this type of study is that they are often rather wide and generic, limiting their practical usefulness. Nevertheless, it is important to evaluate a study based on the research convention it follows. Although in this study I adopt some of the key issues advocated by reflexive evaluation criteria—namely, I explicitly discuss my involvement in the data collection and my choice of philosophical and theoretical starting points—, in this evaluation I follow the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba 1985). (cf. Welch & Piekkari 2017.) This is an appropriate starting point even from the perspective of mixed-method research, as the study is primarily qualitative (cf. Leech, Dellinger, Brannagan & Tanaka 2010). A qualitative stance is common in mixed-method research, where the researcher carefully evaluates the quality of the used methods and collected data throughout the process, examining their relevance from the perspective of the existing theory (cf. Hurmerinta-Peltomäki & Nummela 2004).

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are some of the earliest and most used evaluation criteria in post-positivist case studies. They were created by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to fit the naturalist paradigm, and stem from the need to find alternative standards of evaluation for validity and reliability considered in positivist research (Welch & Piekkari 2017). I have chosen to follow these criteria in full awareness that they have also been contested (e.g. Welch & Piekkari 2017; Seale 1999)—even by the original authors. As they state (Lincoln & Guba 1989, 245), these are "parallel criteria. They have their roots and origins in positivist assumptions, and while adjustments have been made for the different assumptions of the naturalist paradigm, there remains a feeling of constraint, a feeling of continuing to play 'in the friendly confines' of the opposition's home court." Yet the parallel nature of these criteria—I would argue—makes them more understandable to different kinds of audiences following different kinds of paradigms with diverse ontological and epistemological beliefs. Thus, I believe that even if these criteria are not ideal for a (moderate) constructionist study, they are useful to explain the measures taken to ensure the quality of my research in practice (cf. Seale 1999).

Indeed, adopting explicit evaluation criteria helps increase the transparency of my work, including highlighting its strengths and acknowledging its weaknesses (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008). Furthermore, through these criteria I am able to discuss the conception of quality in moderate constructionist research through examining the trustworthiness, authenticity, practicality, and transferability of my study, as suggested by Järvensivu and Törnroos (2010). My key arguments concerning the trustworthiness of this study are presented in table 18.

Table 18. Trustworthiness of the study (adapted from Welch & Piekkari 2017, 719; Lincoln & Guba 1985, 37)

Naturalist paradigm	**This study**
Core axioms ● reality is socially constructed; ● observation is value laden and researchers cannot be independent from the social world they study; ● knowledge is time- and context-bound; ● causes and effects cannot be clearly distinguished as they shape each other.	I have explicitly stated my adherence to a moderate constructionist research philosophy and my wish to understand human behavior as it occurs in its natural context, connected to the surrounding social, cultural, and historical spheres.
Evaluation criteria and procedures *Credibility* ● prolonged engagement ● peer debriefing ● negative case analysis ● archiving of raw data ● member checks *Transferability*: thick description *Dependability*: inquiry audit *Confirmability* ● inquiry audit ● triangulation ● reflexivity	I have purposefully chosen the criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to examine the trustworthiness of my study in full. I have collected data over a prolonged period while actively engaged in dialog with the companies. I have maintained an archive of all of the collected data and ensured my understanding of the data corresponds to the informants' understanding at regular intervals. I have used multiple informants and sources of data and described the research process in fine detail. I have discussed my authority over the study and recognized the involvement of other researchers in phase one of this study.

The first evaluation criterion is *credibility*. This refers to the *truth value* of research. The problem with approaching truth, however, is that if reality is at least in some part socially constructed, there are multiple realities and thus multiple truths. The question then becomes how adequately the construction of truth is represented. (Lincoln & Guba 1985.) In this study, I have sought to ensure credibility through immersing myself in the case context through using several data-collection means at different time points and maintaining dialog with my key contacts at Alpha Group and Delta throughout the research (cf. Shenton 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985). I have revealed my findings and arguments to the informants and asked them to ensure that they recognize their subjective reality in my description (cf. Walle 2015; Lincoln & Guba 1985). I have allowed voice to all perceptions, not just those that have boosted my pre-understanding, and have, to the best of my ability, made sure that the informants were genuinely willing to participate in my study (cf. Shenton 2004). I have also given the involved companies the ability to review this work before its publication and have obtained their approval.

In abductive research, an in-depth description and justification of methodological choices is essential (cf. Dubois & Gadde 2014). To fulfill this requirement, I have used established research methods and justified my choices explicitly (cf. Shenton 2004). During phase one, I have also used the opportunity for researcher triangulation (cf. Denzin 1970). As the data for phase one were gathered during a project, all four project team members (myself included) familiarized themselves with the data, were involved in the analysis, and checked the findings (cf. Shenton 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985). I have discussed my work with peers throughout my doctoral studies (cf. Lincoln & Guba 1985) and have attempted to present my argumentation in an engaging and understandable manner (cf. Rheinhardt, Kreiner, Gioia & Corley 2018). I have also carefully maintained a log of all the data I have gathered for this study to ensure the possibility of being able to go back to check the findings against the original data (cf. Lincoln & Guba 1985). These steps have ensured that my argumentation is supported by data—as is desirable for moderate constructionist case studies (cf. Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010).

In addition, I have maintained anonymity for the companies and individuals involved. On the one hand, this increases the likelihood of honesty, but on the other hand, anonymity complicates the evaluation of transferability (discussed next). Similarly, I have collected self-reported data, which opens the possibility up for self-censorship, resulting in skewed data. Nevertheless, I have aimed at an open and honest description of all the steps of my research. In addition, I have portrayed the abductive nature of my research, increasing transparency (cf. Schwab & Starbuck 2017). Nevertheless, it must be noted that I have drawn a connection between employee responses regarding emotions and my own conclusions as to what has triggered those emotions based on qualitative data, which is often thought of as ill-suited for causal explanations. However, qualitative data can be especially illustrative when the search for causality lies in discovering how events are interrelated. From a processual viewpoint, causality can be observed—not just inferred—and even perceived in single cases. In such research, the context as well as the meanings assigned to it by the participants become an essential part of causal explanations. (Maxwell 2004.) Based on these considerations, I believe that I have succeeded in familiarizing myself with the central phenomenon and context of my study in depth, as well as having collected sufficient data to give merit to my arguments. I believe I have been able to show the logic underlying my choices and have justified my arguments to a degree where others can agree with my assertions. Thus, I believe I have successfully established credibility. (cf. Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.)

The second evaluation criterion is *transferability*. This is largely an empirical issue examining the applicability of the research, centering on the degree of similarity between different contexts. Thus, a sufficient description of the original context is necessary to allow others to determine the applicability of the argumentation in a new context. (Lincoln & Guba 1985.) Due to the heightened link between empiria and theory, abductive research is by nature context-bound. Thus, careful consideration of transferability is necessary. To allow for the possibility of transferability, I have described the underlying reasoning, chosen methodology, as well as the data collection and analysis process of my study in detail (cf. Rheinhardt et al. 2018; Walle 2015; Lincoln & Guba 1985). I have discussed the different case contexts of phase one and phase two at length, and pointed out where they are (dis)similar (cf. Shenton 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985). I have also discussed the circumstances in which this study may be applicable to other contexts (cf. Walle 2015), pointing out the logic of my argumentation while doing so (cf. Rheinhardt et al. 2018). Based on these considerations, I believe I have been successful in linking my research to previous contexts and findings, as well as in showing how my work could be interpreted in new surroundings. Thus, I believe I have successfully established transferability. (cf. Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.)

The third evaluation criterion is *dependability*. This criterion centers on the consistency of the research. Its establishment is supported by careful consideration of the credibility of the work. (Lincoln & Guba 1985.) Abductive research in particular offers the researcher the ability to go back and forth between data and analysis, which could cloud dependability (cf. Sinkovics & Alfoldi 2012). To ensure dependability, I have offered thick descriptions of the research design and the research process, including detailed discussions on data collection and analysis, as well as this evaluation of my work, all of which allow the logic of my study to be understandable and repeatable (cf. Walle 2015; Shenton 2004; Lincoln & Guba 1985). I have attempted to capture and illustrate the particular reality as perceived by my informants, and to show that even within subjective perceptions, consistency can be found (cf. Walle 2015). A mixed-method strategy also benefits dependability, as it helps address possible gaps within the research (cf. Giddings & Grant 2009). As suggested for mixed-method research, I have reported the interconnections between different sections of this work to the best of my ability, seeking to reveal how the elements flow from one to the next (Leech et al. 2010). Through these steps, I have also fulfilled the call for transparent, acceptable linkages between the argumentation and the data, as called for in moderate constructionist research (cf. Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010). Based on these considerations, I believe I have been able to show the logical and analytical trail of evidence behind my arguments, thus establishing dependability (cf. Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008).

The final evaluation criterion is *confirmability*. It highlights the neutrality of research, but instead of the objectivity of the researcher, it centers on the representativeness of the data. (Lincoln & Guba 1985.) Abductive research poses challenges for dependability in that it is somewhat interpretive and subjective by nature (cf. Sinkovics & Alfoldi 2012). Thus, I have attempted to describe the data, findings, and conclusions in a manner that would highlight the chain of evidence. These steps are also important in establishing auditability, a key element in mixed-method research (cf. Giddings & Grant 2009). The researcher triangulation in phase one also adds to the confirmability of my research (cf. Shenton 2004). In addition, I have attempted to point out my beliefs and assumptions insofar as they have had an influence on this study (cf. Rheinhardt et al. 2018; Shenton 2004). Beyond the stated beliefs, I have attempted to present my findings and argumentation in as impartial and neutral manner as possible in order to allow the reader to form their own judgment (cf. Walle 2015). I have used direct quotations and evidence tables to illustrate the path from the raw data to my findings to the reader. I have sought to have my work audited by other scholars through presenting interim findings in conference papers and research seminars (cf. Seale 1999; Lincoln & Guba 1985). At the same time, I have sought intimacy with the informants and the context in order to weaken any prejudice I might have harbored (cf. Walle 2015). Based on these considerations, I believe I have shown that my argumentation is bound to real empirical evidence and is thus meaningful and understandable. Therefore, I believe I have established confirmability. (cf. Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008.)

Based on the discussion of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of my work, I claim that I have done my best to ensure the rigor of my work. However, as with all research, my study also has its shortcomings and limitations. I will discuss these further next, while also pointing out how they indicate possible future research opportunities.

5.4.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

As in many case studies, some limitations in my work are connected to the data. Although I have argued for the sufficiency of the data for this study, I admit that in order to increase the weight of my arguments, future research with more cases is desirable. In terms of revealing the generalizability of my findings, future research could focus on using the suggested framework as an analytical tool in comparative case studies with a higher number of cases. In addition, future research could gain similar benefits through a meta-analysis of existing case studies using the framework as an analytical tool. Furthermore, widespread statistical analysis designed based on discovering how central employees consider the aspects of the suggested framework following change could increase understanding of when and how the framework can be used most beneficially. Statistical analysis can also help discover what differences there are between individuals in what kind of a change atmosphere they prefer and perceive as positive.

Although I have argued for the use of the POS lens, it is possible that this places a positive bias on my work. Thus, future research could benefit from further inclusion of the negative aspects in the framework. For example, looking at hostile acquisitions or otherwise decidedly negative cases through the framework could reveal novel information regarding its analytical power. In addition, a positive change management lens to analyzing post-acquisition integration places a lot of stress on management coping. Including this facet in future research could offer a more balanced view of employee experiences and help in improving understanding of the management aspect in the framework. In addition, my work is likely to have revealed only a fraction of the many emotions that can possibly occur following acquisitions. This leaves room for future research into the wider variety of emotional experiences following acquisitions.

Here, my empirical focus has been on two kinds of friendly acquisitions: one where extensive restructuring was sought, and one where it was not. This is a very narrow viewpoint when considering all the possible combinations of types of acquisition and chosen integration strategies. Thus, future research in different acquisition contexts could reveal where positivity can have the greatest influence. At the same time, such research can point out situations where the framework has the least predictive or analytical power. Similarly, my work does not consider the pre-acquisition phase explicitly. Including the due diligence process in future research could reveal much more information about the dynamic emotional consequences of the pre-acquisition phase in integration. Conversely, including the framework in the due diligence process could enhance our ability to evaluate its planning power in real-life contexts, along with its practical usefulness as a management tool.

Many of the findings I present also leave room for future research avenues. For example, future research could dig deeper into the core relational themes that trigger emotions in different change contexts. This would improve our understanding of why and how emotions emerge at work following change, and whether different types of work environments or different types of organizational changes trigger emotions somehow differently. In addition, my research reveals only limited information of the dynamicity of emotions at work. Thus, future research could take on a more processual research stance to see how emotions evolve within and between days, within and between individuals at work. This would increase our understanding of the different individual appraisal patterns and trait emotionality as well as allow for fine-tuning the suggested framework.

My findings with regard to communication are especially interesting, as very often the acquisition literature discusses communication as an entity, but the findings show that different types of communication do have different roles during change periods. Future research could reveal how employees perceive different communication efforts to differ, what influence they have on employee emotions, and whether employees prefer certain kinds of communication in certain situations. This would allow for better theorization and practical management of communication during change periods. Future research could be especially fruitful in determining the different types of interactive engagement that organizations can use to increase motivation and ease change. Here, the focus was on dialog, but equally beneficial interaction means very likely exist.

My findings reveal new possibilities for studying how the principles of social interaction are at play at work. However, future research is necessary in order to discover the deeper mechanisms of how these principles influence work. For example, the findings hint that emotional contagion takes place, but the exact mechanisms of contagion are beyond the scope of this study. Whether the key is in the type of communication, be it spontaneous or symbolic, or the tendency toward mimicry, or some other facet of social interaction remains to be more fully examined. Similarly, I touch upon the cultural nuances of emotion expression very lightly here, but this may offer future research vast opportunities for contribution. In addition, future research regarding the extent to which emotions are consciously used strategically at work, and the influence of such strategic use, could significantly contribute to management studies. Furthermore, it would be interesting to look further into how conscious or unconscious, accurate or inaccurate emotion perception is in the post-acquisition integration context.

My findings support the notion that emotions can become group phenomena, as many employees reported experiencing similar emotions to those they perceived in their colleagues. Although the possible causalities behind these findings are outside the scope of my research, it would be a fruitful avenue for future research to examine if employees are also likely to perceive their own emotions in their colleagues, or to adapt to the emotions they perceive in others. Similarly, future research could examine the relationship between the emotional climate and individual emotions further in order to see if a distinction can be drawn between the influence of the climate on emotional experiences and the influence of emotional experiences on the climate.

Finally, further research could also greatly contribute to the operationalization of emotional climates. As a dynamic, largely felt, or experienced concept, it can elude observation, and thus future endeavors to discover it more concretely could greatly increase awareness of and enable influencing an organization's emotional climate. How emotions spread within emotional climates and how the climates evolve in the short and long term offer novel research avenues for many fields of study. In addition, the relationship between individual emotions, group emotional climates, and organizational emotional climates is yet to be explored. Although I focus on building positivity in the emotional climate, future research may find it equally important to see how to alleviate negativity in the climate. In addition, although emphasized here, this study leaves room for exploring just how negative emotions also appear in and influence a positive emotional climate.

6. Summary

Based on the previous acquisition literature, emotions are something problematic and negative that must be neutralized or controlled lest they result in sub-optimal performance (e.g. Graebner et al. 2017). However, viewed from a POS lens, emotions can also be the reason why individuals or organizations thrive (Cameron 2017). Recent advances in international business (e.g. Stahl et al. 2016) have indeed called for a more positive tone in cross-cultural research. Thus, this study set out to discover how employee emotions influence post-acquisition integration. In order to find an in-depth answer, it used three sub-questions for guidance:

1. What triggers emotions following acquisitions?
2. What is the relationship between communication and emotions?
3. How does an emotional climate evolve following acquisitions?

Taking a slightly unorthodox stance, this study adopted an abductive research structure guided by a moderate constructionist research philosophy, which bridges ontological realism with epistemological relativism. The abductive process proceeded in two phases: building the framework and reflecting on the outcome. In building the framework, a pre-understanding from theory guided data collection, but systematic combining allowed the empirical evidence to determine the theory with the best explanative power. Thus, in building the framework, abductive and inductive research stances dominated. However, reflecting on the theory deduction allowed for the assessment of the analytical power of the built framework. (cf. Järvensivu & Törnroos 2010.)

The empirical evidence that is crucial to abduction arose from an *in vivo* case study (Andersen & Kragh 2011). Existing theory inspired the frame of the study and allowed for an understanding of the data, but the data guided the refinement of the theoretical pre-understanding through interpolation. For each phase of the study, a single case provided extensive, in-depth data (cf. Yin 2012; Dyer & Wilkins 1991). In the abductive part, the instrumental case was theoretically atypical but particularly informative (Stake 1995). In the reflective part, the case selection was based on more theoretical sampling to shed light on the built framework (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki

2011). In both phases, data collection centered on qualitative interviews and employee satisfaction surveys, augmented in phase two with employee diaries.

In phase one, the acquisition of Beta by Alpha to form Alpha Group guided the building of a framework of positive post-acquisition integration. The deal was friendly in nature, and the chosen integration strategy was a full, collaborative consolidation (cf. Cartwright & Cooper 1993; Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991). Alpha Group chose to center the integration effort on building new organizational values (cf. Sullivan et al. 2001) and invited all employees to familiarize themselves with the values in special value workshops, organized throughout the company. The Alpha Group data raised three questions that guided the abductive process of theory building: (1) Why did the employees report so many positive emotions, in contrast with the acquisition literature which predicted negativity? (2) Why did the value workshops in particular trigger so much positivity? and (3) How did the emotions evolve at Alpha Group throughout integration? The answers to these questions formed the key elements of the theoretical framework.

Emotions are a multifaceted phenomenon (e.g. Scherer 2005) based on cognition and appraisal (e.g. Fredrickson 2013; Solomon 2003). Each emotion arises through a relational theme, an *appraisal pattern*, which links it to how personally relevant, pleasing, or displeasing a triggering event is considered to be (Lazarus 1993). At work, emotions reflect experiences while working rather than reflecting emotions about the work itself (Fisher 2002). They can arise in and influence both individuals and groups (Menges & Kilduff 2015; Ashkanasy 2003), are often triggered by work-related events, and can influence work-related behavior (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). At Alpha Group, the key to overwhelming positivity was the perception that the acquisition ensured continuity of employment and the company. This perception was stronger than the anxiety created by an unknown situation, which has been highlighted in the previous literature (e.g. Sinkovics et al. 2011). A central positivity trigger at Alpha Group were the value workshops; that is, interactive communication.

Previous research has indeed confirmed that communication is a key aspect during integration (e.g. Angwin et al. 2016). Clear, reliable, considerate information delivered through a variety of media can help employees cope with acquisition-related uncertainty and thereby increase productivity (Appelbaum et al. 2000). With regard to integration, it is especially important to acknowledge that social cohesion is achieved primarily through interaction (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson 2006; Morrison 2002). If successful, social interaction and employee involvement can create a feeling of belongingness to the new organization (Rouzies & Colman 2012). Deciphering the Alpha Group findings, the principles of dialog emerged as the reason why positivity was overwhelming regarding the value workshops. Dialog refers to a special form of conversation aimed at building a shared understanding without the burden of debate (e.g. Isaacs 1999). This makes it an especially suitable tool in integration where a shared understanding is a key objective.

However, not all emotions at Alpha Group were positive. Similarly, emotions at Alpha Group varied within and between individuals and groups. In the abductive research process, the answer that arose as to why this was the case was that it reflected the surrounding emotional climate. An emotional climate refers to a socially constructed *working atmosphere*. It is visible in the predominant collective emotional states that arise through social interaction between organizational members. (DeRivera & Páez 2007.) A positive emotional climate refers to an atmosphere where employees' emotional needs and personal growth objectives are acknowledged and where sharing positive emotions is encouraged (Ozcelik et al. 2008). It does not mean the absence of negative emotions, but the greater influence of positive factors like trust and security (Bar-Tal et al. 2007). When positive emotions are harnessed to create a positive emotional climate, organizational identification, performance, and relational strength can be improved—and organizational change facilitated (Vacharkulksemsuk et al. 2010). However, because within the climate emotions are contagious (cf. Maimone & Sinclair 2014; Tran 1998; Hatfield et al. 1994), positivity feeds positivity, but negativity can turn into increased negativity (Bar-Tal et al. 2007).

Based on these findings, this study suggests that in order to create positive post-acquisition integration, organizations need to pay special attention to (1) positive emotion triggers, (2) positivity in the emotional climate surrounding change, and (3) the means of communication and interaction used. With regard to emotions and the emotional climate, the different levels of perspective can influence which emotion triggers emerge. On the individual level, an employee is concerned about *me*, on the group level, about *us*, on the pre-acquisition level, about *us* versus *them*, and on the post-acquisition organizational level, about *we*. In order to create a positive integration experience, it may be beneficial to emphasize the *we* and the *me* but downplay the pre-acquisition organization. More traditional, information-sharing communication is crucial for day-to-day functioning, but through interactive engagement, long-term commitment and motivation increases. In creating positivity and determining suitable communication or interaction means, management skills such as EI may play a key role.

Reflecting on this framework through the second Delta case revealed its functionality as an analytical tool. When Gamma bought Delta, it chose a symbiosis mode of limited integration (Haspeslagh & Jemison 1991). Nevertheless, Delta employees seemed to react to integration similarly to Alpha Group members. At Delta, managers consciously tried to maintain positivity and act as go-betweens. Indeed, employees experienced positive emotions regarding the perceived increase in the longevity of the company. However, a perceived loss of control and increased stress triggered negativity. Similarly, employees felt that communication was lacking, which created confusion. This resulted in the deterioration of the emotional climate that before the deal had been positive and at the beginning of coexistence made acquisition-related changes easier to face. With regard to communication, one-sided information sharing dominated and did ensure day-to-day functioning, but interaction that would ensure engagement and long-term motivation was lacking. At Delta, it seems that the chosen acquisition strategy somewhat influenced the employees' continued perceptions of *us* versus *them*, rather than building a compelling vision of *we*.

The key theoretical contribution of this study is threefold. First, it explicitly discusses positivity. This can help overcome the previous *negative bias* in the previous emotion-centric acquisition literature (e.g. Graebner et al. 2017). Second, it considers emotions in a more balanced manner, not as isolated instances but as both individual and collective emotions, paying special attention to the relevant emotion triggers. This sheds more light on how and why emotions emerge during change periods, increasing the level of theorization in the field (cf. Zagelmeyer et al. 2016). Third, this study offers a more dynamic view of emotions in an organizational context, also shedding light on how to manage collective emotions following acquisitions (cf. Huy 2012). Together, these findings help answer the fundamental question of how to make acquisitions more successful. These findings pinpoint the key elements of emotions following acquisitions, suggesting how positivity can enable smoother and swifter change. This occurs because human beings have an innate preference for positivity, which in turn leads to higher performance at both the individual and organizational levels (Cameron 2017).

For practitioners, the key contribution is in the analytical and predictive power of the suggested framework. Based on the framework, this study offers themes and desirable actions that practitioners can use to plan for and analyze their integration endeavors. Managerially, the key elements are the chosen integration strategy, the ability to increase positivity in the change process, and the skills necessary to create the desired positivity. With regard to employee emotions, acknowledging the different levels of emotions and their triggers can help emphasize positivity and alleviate negativity. Simultaneously, an emphasis on the post-acquisition organization can help overcome *us* versus *them* thinking. With regard to communication, information sharing is essential to ensure day-to-day functions, but interaction is crucial for long-term engagement and motivation. With regard to the emotional climate surrounding change, awareness of the pre-acquisition climate and possible sub-climates can help predict fluctuations. Positivity emerges through acknowledging employees' emotional needs and emphasizing the positive elements.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Alpha Group Interview Guide

EmoMA
Emotions in mergers and acquisitions:
Managing emotions in a global, virtual world

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Section 1—Presenting the researchers and research project briefly

- Research aim and focus
- Research team
- Affiliation
- When is the project finished and what will be the outcome?
- Why has this interviewee been chosen?
- Confidentiality issues

Section 2—Background information

1. How long have you worked for Alpha/Beta?
2. What is your current position in the organization and which positions have you had in the past?
3. What role did you have in the M&A?/do you have in Alpha/Beta M&As?
4. How would you describe your M&A experience (how many and what types of M&As have you been involved in in the past)?

Section 3—M&A

5. How did you first hear about the Alpha–Beta acquisition?

6. How did you feel when you first heard about the M&A?
7. If you go back to Day 1 when the acquisition was announced to the media and the staff, what do you remember from that day? What emotions did the staff meeting evoke in you?
8. What changes did the acquisition bring to your (daily) work?
9. What organizational changes have followed the M&A?
10. In your opinion, how has the integration process proceeded?
11. What were the main milestones in the integration process in your opinion?
12. In your opinion, how successful has this M&A/integration process been?
13. What are/were the main challenges in the integration process?
14. Alpha has been introducing new values as the basis of the new Alpha Group culture. What are your thoughts regarding this process? How do you find the new values?
15. What are the cultural differences at the organizational level (managerial) and national level?
16. What did your acquisition partner (Alpha/Beta) represent to you? What emotions did it evoke in you before the acquisition?
17. How would you say the acquisition affected your identification with Alpha/Beta?
18. Would you describe yourself as an Alpha Group member? What emotions does Alpha Group evoke in you now?
19. What emotions have you experienced since the acquisition during the integration process?
20. What has evoked positive emotions (during the integration process)?
21. What has evoked negative emotions (during the integration process)?

Section 4—Emotional dialog and conflicts in international M&As/divestitures

22. What emotions has the acquisition created in Beta in Germany/at Alpha in Finland?
23. Have you been aware of conflicts during the M&A process? If yes, please elaborate on what the causes of the conflicts were and how they were managed.
24. In which ways has the management (Alpha or Beta) addressed positive or negative emotions?

25. What informal ways do employees/managers have to express their emotions?
26. In your opinion, do you have the ability to disclose your true emotions at work? (emotional labor)
a. why?
b. in what situations?
c. how does it make you feel?
d. what could be done differently?
27. What cultural differences have you encountered in terms of emotions? What emotional, cultural differences have you encountered?
28. How do you find expressing emotions in another language to your colleague/supervisor abroad?
29. How do you perceive management across borders in Alpha Group in terms of managing emotions?

Section 5— Emotions in a global virtual world

30. How would you describe the emotional climate in former Alpha/Beta or in current Alpha Group?
31. Has the M&A affected the emotional climate of the company? If yes, how?
32. How are emotions managed in Alpha Group? (e.g. conflict situations or how are positive emotions enhanced)
33. How, according to you, have emotions been managed during the Alpha–Beta acquisition and integration phase? How would you want emotions to be managed during an M&A?
34. In your opinion, what emotions has the Alpha–Beta acquisition raised locally in the media or with the general public?
35. How much are different virtual communication tools utilized in Alpha Group?
36. What are your thoughts on virtual teams and computer-aided communication?
37. In your experience, how can emotions be expressed using virtual communication tools?
38. In your experience, how can emotions be managed using virtual communication tools?
39. How can positive emotions be created through virtual communication tools?
40. How can negative emotions be managed *virtually*?

Section 6—Emotional competence in international M&As/divestitures

41. What is the most important quality of managers and leaders in (international) M&As?
42. In your opinion, what qualities are needed from a) integration managers and b) other middle and top managers to deal with emotions in M&As in Alpha Group?
43. In your opinion and based on your experience, what are the most important actions and tools to deal with emotions in Alpha Group following an M&A?
44. From an emotion perspective, what are the critical issues in Alpha Group now?

Finally, is there anything you would like to add related to this topic, something I might have forgotten to ask, or something you wish to comment on … anything?

Appendix 2. Full Coding Scheme for Emotions at Alpha Group in 2015

Valence	Emotion[15]	Triggers
Positive	Happiness	Good value workshops create positive perceptions about the value process and the company as a whole.
		Value workshops are a step toward increased cooperation and unity.
		Value workshop discussions encourage practical application of the values.
		Good, common values that coincide with personal values are the building blocks of good work.
		Common values that give the company direction enhance employee motivation to make the company a success together.
		Integrating with a similar company was a positive development.
		The acquisition was a sign of combined strength and growth.
		The acquisition created development opportunities for both the company and its employees.
		Growth creates new and more international markets.
		The integrated company is strong and has a good future.
		The integration in general has created positive affect.
		The positive atmosphere in the integrated company supports work.
		The integration was handled in an appropriate way.
		The integrated company is a stronger player in international markets.
		A sense of direction and personal development opportunities have given the integration period security.
	Relief	Employees feel more secure when the company shows that it cares about and appreciates its employees.
		The acquisition created confidence in the future.
		Being employed in the acquiring company was perceived as good.
		The acquirer has kept promises.
		Fears about the future have diminished.
		The integration has restored perceived job security.
		The integration has restored faith in future progress.
	Pride	Employees are proud to work for a company that has values.
		The ability to acquire another company shows that the company is strong and successful.
		Employees perceive the integrated company and belonging in the company as valuable.
		Integration can be seen as an accomplishment toward building a stronger company.

15 The emotions reflect Lazarus' (1993) categorization.

Negative	Anxiety	Integrating with an unknown partner creates uncertainty about the integrated company's future.
		Potential reallocation of resources causes insecurity.
		How the process has been handled still creates uncertainty.
		Employees do not feel secure that work will continue.
		Hoped-for progress has not been achieved.
		Some decisions during the integration period are perceived as poor.
		The integration has somewhat clouded the current and future standing of the company and its employees.
		The integration has failed to unite the two companies completely.
		Employee ideas and concerns have not been adequately heard during the integration.
	Anger	The value workshop did not offer practical benefit.
		The value workshop was not organized successfully.
		That the integrated company and its managers do not clearly live up to the common values causes a negative atmosphere.
		Lack of progress, openness, honesty, and cross-departmental appreciation of colleagues causes friction.
		Acquirer employees fear that the acquired company will gain all control.
		The integration has not succeeded in resolving past and present problems.
	Sadness	Perceived losses create a negative feeling.
	Jealousy	Decision-making structures that are difficult to understand cause a feeling of inequality.
Mixed	Hope	The process must be continued, and the values lived up to in order to achieve a better future.
		If everyone in the integrated company lives up to the values, they have the potential to make the company better.
		The acquisition created the possibility of continuity and improvement.
		The acquisition makes a brighter future possible for the company and its employees.
		If integration is successfully carried out, the future looks brighter.

Appendix 3. Full Coding Scheme for Emotions at Alpha Group in 2016

Valence	Emotion[16]	Triggers
Positive	Happiness	The merger has created positive affect in general.
Positive	Happiness	The merger established trust and expectations regarding the future; it was the right way forward.
Positive	Happiness	The two companies have gained mutual benefits due to the merger; it is good to be a strong international player.
Positive	Happiness	The merger has created new opportunities.
Positive	Happiness	The merger has created feelings of togetherness and good cooperation.
Positive	Happiness	The fact that the company is developing creates happiness and contentment.
Positive	Happiness	The merger has created a feeling of stability and security.
Positive	Happiness	The merger has created satisfaction about the new way of management (open and warm) and family atmosphere, of feeling welcome.
Positive	Happiness	Increased amount of work is a positive thing; learning and possibilities for self-development create happiness.
Positive	Happiness	The integration process has been well managed and forward-looking.
Positive	Relief	The future is more secure than before the merger.
Positive	Relief	The situation is starting to look better, as things are happening.
Positive	Relief	Things are now under better control than a year ago; it is possible to concentrate on work and the development of the Alpha brand again.
Positive	Relief	The merger meant the survival of Beta.
Positive	Pride	The merger of two great brands with high quality gives power.
Positive	Pride	Pride to work in a group that is advancing and has a prestigious brand.
Negative	Anxiety	Anxiousness concerning what will happen next and whether there will be job losses.
Negative	Anxiety	The merger creates uncertainty and confusion in general.
Negative	Anxiety	There are concerns related to retaining good quality and levels of expertise.
Negative	Anxiety	Integration is not completed for some processes; there are concerns because not everyone is ready to undergo changes.
Negative	Anxiety	There are problems in cooperation between units.
Negative	Anxiety	There is confusion because mutually agreed processes and guidelines are missing or not realized.
Negative	Anxiety	There is a high level of stress due to overload of work and scarce resources.
Negative	Anxiety	There are concerns related to global decision-making, stalling sales, and clarity of target markets.
Negative	Anxiety	The extent and pace of the changes is worrisome.

16 The emotions reflect Lazarus' (1993) categorization.

Negative	Anger	There is a great feeling of inequality regarding decision-making structures.
		The new organization does not work efficiently, there is a lack of communication, and working is more complicated.
		The development and changes are not as positive as expected.
		Disappointment because the values are not respected or realized.
		The deal created a negative feeling in general.
		The merger was ill-prepared for, with no consideration of the peculiarities of the German market.
		Lack of self-authority and no opportunities for career advancement are demotivating.
	Sadness	Loss of identity and colleagues.
	Jealousy	It feels that sometimes Alpha is left in second place.
		I wonder how much more money the Beta people make.
Mixed	Hope	Feelings of anticipation and optimism concerning future because the merger of two great brands opens new opportunities, but there are also dangers and challenges.
		The merger has created a hope for a safe, secure workplace and continuity for the company.
		Improvements in quality, IT systems, technology, machinery, and customer service are called for.
		The flow of information and openness of communication and cooperation need to be improved.
		A big step has already been taken but there is still a lot of integration work to do.
		The merger creates mixed feelings in general.
		Shared rules and working methods should be achieved.
		The values have to be worked out and the embodiment of them improved. If they were better followed, we would probably be a successful group.
		There is fear of redundancies and resistance toward the German hierarchy, which good HRM and employee policy could diminish.
		Former flexibility with prices, product decisions, and warranty issues are longed for.

Appendix 4. Delta Interview Guide

Part 1—Background

- Objective of the research; Findings and conclusions; Choosing the interviewees; Confidentiality

1. How long have you worked for Delta?
2. What is your current position? Have you had other positions?
3. What was your role in the acquisition?
4. What kind of acquisition experience do you have?

Part 2—Acquisition

5. How did you hear about the deal for the first time? How did it feel?
6. What do you remember of the day the deal was officially announced? How did the first personnel info feel?
7. What changes has the deal brought to your work?
8. What kinds of organizational changes has the deal evoked?
9. How has the integration proceeded?
10. What have been the greatest accomplishments during integration?
11. How well has the deal succeeded?
12. What have been the main challenges?
13. Do you find cultural differences between Gamma and Delta? What about differences in management styles?
14. What emotions or perceptions did you have of Gamma before the deal?
15. Have they changed?
16. How would you describe Delta as a company before the deal?
17. How has Delta changed since the deal?

Part 3—Emotions and working atmosphere

18. How are emotions expressed at Delta?
19. Do you feel like you need to regulate your emotions at work? Why? In what situations? How does it feel? What could be changed?
20. What emotions have you experienced regarding the acquisition?
21. Has the acquisition evoked any conflicts?

22. What kinds of cultural differences have you encountered with regard to emotions?
23. How does it feel to handle these issues in a non-native language?
24. How has management responded to the emotions evoked by the acquisition?
25. How does management deal with emotions in general? Are there differences between Delta and Gamma?
26. What do you think are the most important qualities in managers during acquisitions?
27. How should a good integration manager deal with emotions? What about other managers?
28. What do you think are the best or most important ways for dealing with emotions during an acquisition?
29. What is focal at Delta now with regard to emotions?
30. How is the working atmosphere at Delta now?
31. How has the working atmosphere changed since the acquisition?
32. How could the working atmosphere be improved?

Part 4—Communication

33. How have acquisition-related issues been communicated to the employees?
34. What kind of communication do you think is best during acquisitions?
35. What kind of communication would you wish for?
36. What is the role of communication in making the deal a success?
37. What is the role of communication in terms of what kinds of emotions are evoked?

Conclusion

Is there something I forgot to ask, or you would otherwise like to tell me?

Appendix 5. Diary Outline

MEMO

This memo reflects on your opinions and experiences regarding the working atmosphere. Please answer these questions on five consecutive working days. Your name will not be revealed to anyone else but the researcher at any point of the study. All answers will be confidential, and no single respondent will be recognizable from the results.

If you find it difficult to recognize your emotions, look back on today. When did you arrive at work? What did you do first? Did something make you, for example, happy, worried, glad, or angry today? Was today tiring or energizing? Please use any words you think reflect today's emotions. If necessary, you may use the back of the page for further reflection.

Personal information:

Name: ______________________

Gender: ______________________

Age: ______________________

Education: ______________________

Current position: ______________________

Current main location: ______________________

Time (in years) you have worked for the company: ______________________

When and from whom did you first hear about the deal? ______________________

What was your first reaction to the news? ______________________

How do you feel about the deal now? ______________________

Please describe how you normally deal with emotions at work. Why?

For example, do you show or hide your emotions? If a colleague is experiencing emotions, do you bring it up?

____

____

____

____

____

Today's feelings:

	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
How was your day?	Horrible									Amazing

Why?

____

____

How do you feel today? Why?

____

____

What feelings have your colleagues shown today? From what signals did you notice this?

____

____

Please describe how the working atmosphere felt today.

____

____

Please describe what you could do to improve the working atmosphere.

____

____

Please describe what the company could do to improve the working atmosphere.

____

____

Anything else on your mind today?

Please use this space to give further information or feedback.

____

____

Thank you for your answers!

Appendix 6. Emotions at Alpha Group Locations in 2015[17]

	Alpha Group	**Finland**	**Germany**	**Poland**	**Czech Republic**
Emotions when first heard about the deal, %					
Positive	47	51	47	48	28
Negative	24	16	25	14	49
Mixed	9	10	12	6	5
Neutral	4	7	3	5	4
N/A	16	17	13	27	15
Emotions regarding value workshops, %					
Positive	48	43	43	68	45
Negative	5	10	4	3	7
Mixed	22	17	38	3	12
Neutral	13	14	10	15	15
N/A	12	16	6	11	21
Emotions regarding integration, %					
Positive	30	9	45	25	37
Negative	16	23	14	7	11
Mixed	20	22	23	5	20
Neutral	11	12	6	23	5
N/A	23	34	12	39	28
Emotions total, %					
Positive	42	34	45	47	37
Negative	15	19	14	8	22
Mixed	17	16	24	5	12
Neutral	9	11	6	14	8
N/A	17	22	10	26	21

17 Percentages have been rounded to the nearest integer.

Appendix 7. Examples of Other Emotion Categorizations (adapted from Harikkala-Laihinen 2018, 22)

Author	**Original purpose**	**Emotion categories**	**Emotions**	**Emotion descriptors/Relational themes**
Laros and Steenkamp (2005)	To create a categorization of emotions for consumer research	Negative affect	Anger	angry, frustrated, irritated, unfulfilled, discontented, envious, jealous
			Fear	scared, afraid, panicky, nervous, worried, tense
			Sadness	depressed, sad, miserable, helpless, nostalgic, guilty
			Shame	embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated
		Positive affect	Contentment	contented, fulfilled, peaceful
			Happiness	optimistic, encouraged, hopeful, happy, pleased, joyful, relieved, thrilled, enthusiastic
			Love	sexy, romantic, passionate, loving, sentimental, warm-hearted
			Pride	pride
Warr and Inceoglu (2012); Warr (1990)	To create structure for the measurement of job-related affective well-being	High activation, low pleasure	Anxiety	aroused, alarmed, afraid, tense, anxious, uneasy, upset, dissatisfied, discouraged
		High activation, high pleasure	Enthusiasm	alert, surprised, excited, energetic, enthusiastic, delighted, cheerful, elated, happy, glad, pleased
		Low activation, high pleasure	Comfort	serene, contended, comfortable, satisfied, calm, relaxed, tranquil, drowsy, sluggish
		Low activation, low pleasure	Depression	fatigued, bored, lethargic, gloomy, sad, depressed, miserable, dejected

Watson and Clark (1999)	To arrive at trustworthy self-rated affect scales	General Dimension Scales	Negative Affect	afraid, scared, nervous, jittery, irritable, hostile, guilty, ashamed, upset, distressed
			Positive Affect	active, alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, proud, strong
		Basic Negative Emotion Scales	Fear	afraid, scared, frightened, nervous, jittery, shaky
			Hostility	angry, hostile, irritable, scornful, disgusted, loathing
			Guilt	guilty, ashamed, blameworthy, angry at self, disgusted with self, dissatisfied with self
			Sadness	sad, blue, downhearted, alone, lonely
		Basic Positive Emotion Scales	Joviality	happy, joyful, delighted, cheerful, excited, enthusiastic, lively, energetic
			Self-Assurance	proud, strong, confident, bold, daring, fearless
			Attentiveness	alert, attentive, concentrating, determined
		Other Affective States	Shyness	shy, bashful, sheepish, timid
			Fatigue	sleepy, tired, sluggish, drowsy
			Serenity	calm, relaxed, at ease
			Surprise	amazed, surprised, astonished

Appendix 8. Data Supporting the Alpha Group Findings

Theme	Representative quotations
	Employee views on happiness
Happiness triggered by the deal	"I was very happy that we have once more become a family enterprise, and that a long-term direction is recognizable." "I thought it is good to have a partner that belongs to the same sector, has knowledge of our environment and nearly the same structure and historical base." "My first thought: Finally a company from our industrial sector that knows what growth means. This was really very positive for me." "When I heard the news, the feeling was that good, we are moving forward and creating a stronger foundation for business." "The takeover made it possible to combine our strengths, which strengthens the company for the future." "Absolutely positive, since the merger of 2 major brands and the combining of competencies offers good opportunities for tackling the challenges of the future."
Happiness triggered by the value workshops	"The establishments of joint objectives and values is positive as a matter of principle, and especially good for team building." "I find the values workshop an excellent platform for exchanging information with one another, and for airing one's opinion on the current position of the company, individual processes or problem cases, which disturb one personally." "Good feelings from the effort to get the ordinary employees closer to the vision of the whole company, which motivates them to collaborate." "The launch and the message that has come with the values were so good that I wanted to see and develop the company and its values with an open mind." "The company's (group's) values feel like a strong foundation to stand on and the company's mission/vision are clear." "They gives us all a good direction and we understand what is expected from all of us to achieve growth and success for the company." "Especially the fair interaction, the joint cooperation and the openness, are increasing motivation and the results of work."

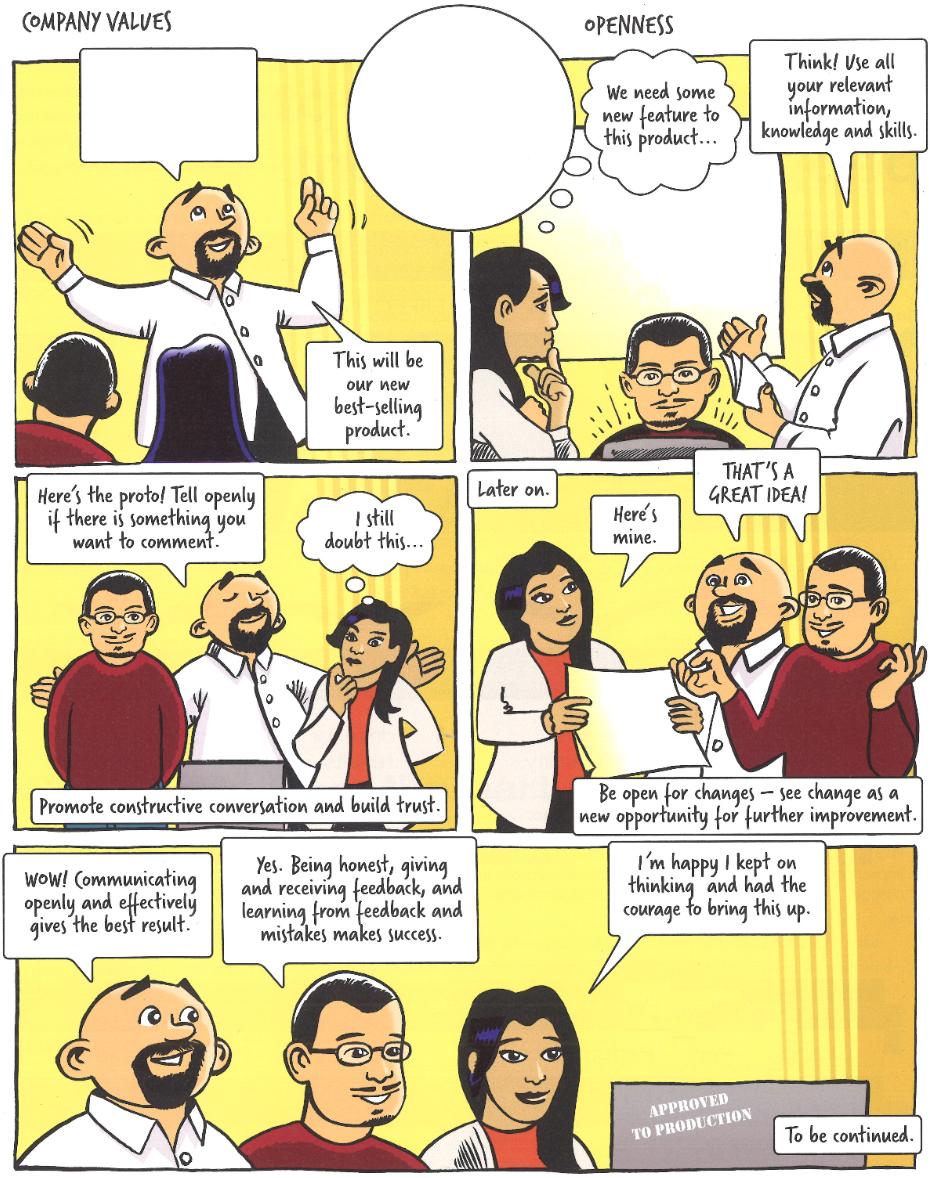
Happiness triggered by integration	“Happiness. Integration has gone well.” “I am happy to work in an owner-managed, medium-sized company, which has excellent development possibilities. When 2 companies have to be integrated, then there are always "points of friction". There are very few of these with us, because everyone acknowledges and accepts the possibilities of the other person.” “I think Beta's entrance will have a positive effect in the long term - not just financial, but also enriching in the sense that we will have to consider new ways of doing things, to shake things up a bit with respect to our traditional way of thinking and doing things.” “Personally I feel very good. For the first time there is a strategy (2015-2017) that I can experience, and it is one that I can actively help to shape. These goals have been jointly defined and are lived up to by the entire Alpha Group, leading to the visible progress.” “Sometimes I wonder if it really is possible to bring together two different cultures and different approaches this painlessly. So far everything has been communicated well and I have had a chance to meet my German colleagues and see their practices on site.” “With this survey, for instance, one can see that the concerns and ideas of the workers will perhaps also be taken seriously.” “More than ever before, I feel that I'm part of a fantastic company. An open and good cooperation exists between the departments that I know.” “I feel myself integrated and at home in this organisation. I notice that we work towards the same goals and that we act as a group; it's no longer two separate companies.” “The launch and the message that has come with the values were so good that I wanted to see and develop the company and its values with an open mind.”
	Employee views on relief
Relief triggered by the deal	“I was worried when Alpha was just getting smaller and smaller. The deal restored my faith in the future and was a real boost.” “It will secure the company's future in the increasingly tougher market as well as ensure work.” “After 12 years of existential fear, due to rationalisation measures, I was happy that I finally found some peace, and I'm proud and thankful to be able to work for this company!” “My first reaction was relief that we have not been bought again by an investment company, but that instead it was a company that is active in the same industrial sector, though in different markets.” “From the present vantage point I can only say, it was the best thing that could have happened to us!!!!!” “The first thing that came to mind: Yes! Alpha bought Beta and not the other way around.”
Relief triggered by the value workshops	“It is a good point of departure for Beta, to see its employees as its most important capital.” “The process itself evoked a feeling of trust.”
Relief triggered by integration	“At last we have a chance to reforge the huge potential that can make my environment into a real success.” “I feel more secure, namely I am slowly developing confidence. A feeling is slowly developing, something like "having arrived".” “Much was implemented as announced. This had not been so in the past.” “There was a certain tension, which is a logical consequence of major changes. There was good internal guidance, so that it quickly became clear how it would continue, which created a positive feeling.”

	Employee views on pride
Pride triggered by the deal	"I'm proud to be part of this group!" "I'm proud and thankful to be able to work for this company!" "Pride, a feeling of success. We thought that the Alpha trademark would now spread better in Central Europe as well." "I felt proud my company acquired another company and the other way round." "I am proud of our company."
Pride triggered by the value workshops	"I am also proud of the fact that I now work for a company, which orients its actions on values." "Makes me proud to work at a company, which values honesty and fairness! It´s good that we have out spoken values in the company."
Pride triggered by integration	"My feelings are only positive. We are now really an international company and it's something to be proud of." "I feel that I am in good hands at Alpha. They even let little workers know that they belong to the family, and that is something of which I am proud." "Proud of two strong and fine trademarks." "Pride of being in a strong group that has an important market position."
	Employee views on anxiety
Anxiety triggered by the deal	"Acquisitions always make you nervous because you don't know what kind of changes will occur." "When one is taken over, the first reaction is always a critical attitude towards what it means - what is happening and especially, what is happening to oneself." "A lack of trust at first." "Anxiety and sense of insecurity in the future." "Great insecurity and uncertainty at the first moment, with regard to what the intentions of the new company are." "Doubts whether work will continue. Whether operations will move entirely abroad." "The first ideas with regard to the takeover were negative, since this usually leads to dismissals." "The sudden dismissals clearly showed that everyone is replaceable or dispensable, which is why it is rather daunting to say what one honestly thinks." "I am afraid that due to control and the fear of failure we will go years back in time, as responsibilities and decision-making, which was supposed be brought closer to the field, have been taken further away." "Now I am really frightened, since nothing is changing in the really important positions here at Beta. The darkroom continues to survive."

Anxiety triggered by integration	"The daily feeling is anxiety. Workloads have increased so much that it affects the quality of work. Rewards have been talked about, but nothing has happened." "Uncertainty about the future. Some decisions and changes have caused concern." "It seems that our management cannot handle the situation and does not know what to do next. I am sick with apprehension that our company is collapsing. My subordinates and I do not understand what is happening. There is no clear structure and understanding of distribution of duties." "Controversial feelings close to frustration. I started feeling unsteady. There is a feeling that we do not have clear goals, we "go with the flow", a sense of insecurity of the future. There is no clear guidance and understanding of objectives and goals. The goal is clear but the way to reach it is obscure." "Nothing positive about the matrix organization. The organization and approaches are still a mess. Responsibilities have shifted to managers and individuals can no longer make a difference."
	Employee views on anger
Anger triggered by the value workshops	"It is an insult to the employees, since it is subliminally being suggested that no "values" exist with the employees at Beta. The communicated values are self-evident "virtues" in daily working life and have therefore always been in existence!" "No sense could be detected in the scheduling of the workshops. Colleagues that have just as long a journey to the destination are arriving on different days. Not efficient, and it leads to higher costs." "If we were instructed by someone who is expert in it, there would not be a problem. But when the training is led by someone who is totally unaware of what is being talked about and just reads booklets, then there is probably an error somewhere." "The values workshop had a bad image for quite some time, due to the dismissals that were carried out shortly beforehand." "Management must live up to these values as an example, otherwise they are senseless." "Anger. People don't appreciate each other between different departments."
Anger triggered by integration	"At first it was said that power of decision and management will be in Finland. Now it feels that all orders come from Germany." "Will the wolf eat Little Red Riding Hood?" "It looks like we've been doing everything the wrong way for 70 years and only now is Beta showing us how to do things." "I have slight irritation with the fact that better quality is required from Beta products than Alpha products. Even though we are all part of the same company, why is there two levels of quality?!"
	Employee views on sadness
Sadness triggered by the deal and integration	"The company can no longer be called a family company." "Regret as it was clear that everything would change." "Today I'm thinking that it actually was clear from the beginning that this could not proceed without losses. Beta has lost a part of its identity." "Nowadays I am somewhat sad that personnel has been dismissed, and that there are continuous discussions about the supposedly too high salaries of Beta employees."

	Employee views on jealousy
Jealousy triggered by the deal and integration	“Was Beta bought with the employees' operating profit bonus money?” “A feeling of inequality, Germany has a better position.” “Now it feels that too much "power" has been given to outsiders and people who have different cultures. So who bought who???” “Sometimes it feels that Germany is leading us, i.e. they are in control.”
	Employee views on hope
Hope triggered by the deal	“I had mixed feelings (fear and hope) when I heard of the Beta takeover. What will the future bring? Are our jobs safe?” “Nevertheless, a small something called "hope" took hold of me. Slowly I am gaining confidence in the Alpha Group and I am praying that this will stay that way for a long time.” “I am happy and hope that I and my descendants will still be working for Alpha for many years.” “Hopefully the matrix and the values will take hold in the near future, and that the old boy network will hopefully be broken up.” “I am hoping that we will emerge as a team from two strong companies, and that we become a still stronger company.”
Hope triggered by the value workshops	“I hope, and I will cooperate in that regard, that the expressed values will continue to be lived up to over a longer period.” “I find it very sensible, if the defined values are really lived up to. When even the appointed trainers do not do what they communicate/have to communicate in the workshops, then the whole thing becomes rather questionable.” “If the very top of the executive level gives an example of living up to these values, then the values and their claims become valid. In the interests of the Alpha Group and for the future of the company, I hope that these workshops will be carried out regularly in the future.” “We have had something similar about 18 years ago, and nothing developed from that back then. It is to be hoped that it will be different this time.”
Hope triggered by integration	“I am hoping for a much more networked cooperation, including development possibilities and integration in various areas.” “And I do hope that full commitment and loyalty will also find somewhat more recognition, and that this will not always be simply seen as self-evident.”

Appendix 9. Value Comic Strip[18]



Trust and openness create constructive interaction between people.

18 Minor alterations have been made in order to ensure anonymity. The company name has been erased, along with the illustrations of the product and the signature of the artist.

Appendix 10. Examples of Communication Types at Alpha Group

Examples of information sharing		
Purpose	**Source**	**Direct quotes**
To explain the value process	Internal PowerPoint presentation	Values and value statements of Alpha Group are quite abstract so that most of the employees in different countries and cultures could adopt them as their own. Therefore values have been stated very broadly, which, however, hinders their applications to the everyday work life. The level of value abstractness must be the higher, the more multinational and multicultural Alpha Group is.
To promote the new strategy	Internal strategy publication	We at Alpha Group have proactively taken care of our competitiveness and future opportunities even in difficult market conditions and continue to do so also in the future.
To promote the deal	Annual report	Alpha Group has renewed itself last year due to the acquisition of Beta. The key figures include Beta's Q4 financial results. The Group's revenue totaled 156.7 million euro in comparison with the previous year's 131.1 million euro. The EBIT margin declined to 5.6% (13.1%), due to one-time costs and asset amortizations related to the Beta acquisition. Gearing rose to 53.4% (15.2%) due to acquisition loans. Coordinated and decisive steps are being taken towards full integration of the new Alpha Group, with the goal of creating one unified company with two strong and highly recognized brands: Alpha and Beta. The Alpha Group is on its way to becoming a major European player in the industry.
Examples of interaction		
Purpose	**Source**	**Direct quotes**
To enable sharing thoughts	Value workshop facilitator guide	Discuss in pairs or in smaller groups: What should we as a team continue/start/stop to be more brave in renewing our ways of working, our products or our own thinking? Document your ideas on post-it notes, one idea per note. Share with others.
To discover employee perceptions about courage	Employee group work from value workshops	COURAGE -renewal -changing working routines -working conditions -to work independently and make decisions -to have and present own opinions -to intervene in grievances -to educate oneself -to intervene in bullying -to give and receive feedback -the acquisition -product development

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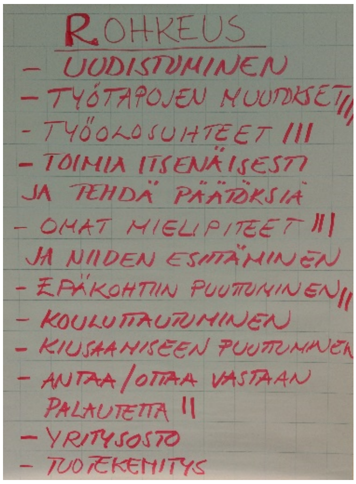
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>
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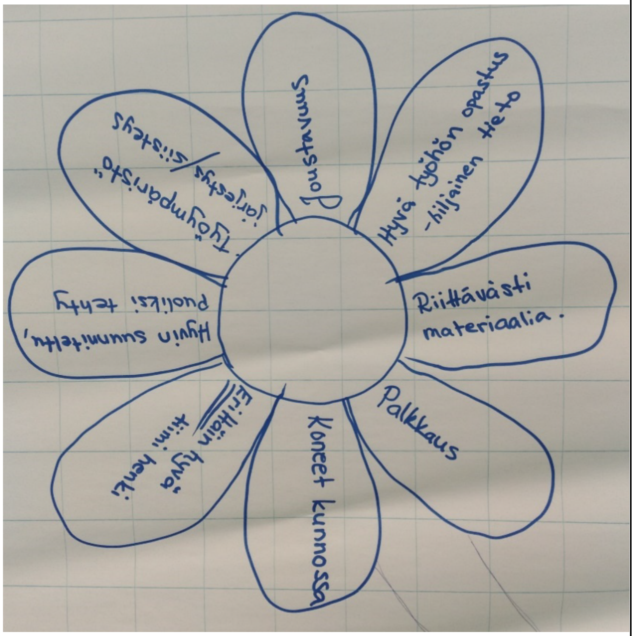
<tr><td>To discover employee perceptions about effectiveness</td><td>Employee group work from value workshops</td><td>-Flexibility
-Good orientation, tacit knowledge
-Sufficient materials
-Wages
-Functional machinery
-<u>Extremely</u> good team spirit
-Well planned, half done
-Organization/cleanliness of the working environment

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Appendix 11. Data Supporting the Delta Findings

Theme	**Representative quotations**
Happiness over development	"Investments are positive for the whole company, and the new recruitment. They build faith in continuity." "There have been positive things like investments and that gives faith in the future." "I really feel like I'm part of this. And they make me feel very welcome." "Peace and a happy feeling—they hopefully will carry us for a long time." "It is always positive when things come to a conclusion." "They are nice people and it is easy to get along with them." "We do have good group spirit; we can all laugh at the same things."
Relief over continuity	"The times before the deal were … I often felt like something must happen." "I was relieved. I saw it as positive for Delta and Delta's employees." "I am now a bit relieved that the beginning of the year is over, but for the whole of the beginning of the year I have felt annoyed, really, because there was too much work." "To get some new kick into this—for that reason I thought it was positive. I've been thinking that this can't get much worse." "They don't have our main products; that makes me feel easier."
Pride over Delta practices	"In the end Delta is an old company, so being Finnish and where this all begun, somehow you want to hold onto that." "They want to learn more about our products and we can help them." "Our way of doing things is definitely better." "In a way change triggers anger, because I think common sense should be allowed. They are making my work more difficult." "Speaking straight, the change was ridiculous."
Anxiety over the future	"If you don't know what is going on, you feel a little insecure about everything." "People are quite irritated and tired; you can tell that the positivity that has always been a great resource for us has diminished significantly." "There are things that aren't under our control and that seems difficult." "Compared to our resources, too much is demanded from us. We have too many projects." "There is frustration going around, there has been a lot of bungling things up, start this, stop this, change this, repair this, repair that, the bungling up is disconcerting." "With the people that I'm working with it's, I think there is quite a lot of tension."

Anger over perceived offense	"It is stupid. It feels bad, not being able to do the work like you are supposed to." "We try to think of all possible solutions but feel a bit powerless." "We can't always get straight answers from Gamma or we don't know whom to contact and get inconsistent information." "There's a spirit that OK, this is how things are, we can't help it. Let's do it although it makes no sense." "Anger and frustration, and it leads to a bit of irony, it becomes a joke, when you are just trying to survive somehow." "The worst cases make me furious, when someone is breathing down your neck even if you cannot do practically anything about the matter but wait for something to happen."
Sadness over losses	"Our voice is not heard about quality and there is no interest in quality in-house." "I find that when before you had an independent responsibility area that was meaningful, and I want to have responsibility and make decisions and push things forward, when that is taken away, commitment is no longer at the same level." "When there are many changes going on simultaneously, at some point you just stop caring." "I do expect our company name will change."
Hope for the future	"It is clear that Gamma needs the product development, manufacturing, deliveries, everything we are doing now. And somehow it will turn out all right in the end, but I don't know how we could make the financials look good in the frame they expect." "It seems we have fallen so much behind even though all the signs were good, and we have all the elements for a better bottom line. So logically, it should turn out OK in the end." "Of course, there is a lot of change in the air and things going on, so no one knows where this will end, but it is an interesting experience." "Very hopeful. I am hoping that we will have improved operational preconditions." "Sometimes it feels heavy, but another time better. You just have to think that it won't continue like this forever."

UNIVERSITY
OF TURKU

Painosalama Oy, Turku , Finland 2019

ISBN 978-951-29-7760-4 (PRINT)
ISBN 978-951-29-7761-1 (PDF)
ISSN 2343-3159 (PRINT) ISSN 2343-3167 (ONLINE)