PASI HIRVONEN

This study lies at the nexus of two social psychological research paradigms: interaction and small-group studies. By analyzing institutional meeting interactions, this study examines how positioning theory can be utilized in the study of small-group dynamics and how discursive positioning connects with processes such as decision-making and conflicts. This study highlights how positioning in small groups is intertwined with the surrounding cultural, legal, institutional, conversational, and intrapersonal moral orders.
POSITIONING DYNAMICS IN SMALL GROUPS

A MICRO-CULTURAL SMALL GROUP STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF MEETING INTERACTION
Pasi Hirvonen

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the adaptation of positioning theory to the study of small groups by examining the discursive positioning dynamics within small groups. Therefore, this study’s aims are twofold: First, it aims for a methodological contribution by delineating the methodological possibilities of positioning-theory-oriented micro-cultural group studies. Second, this study aims to shed light on small-group phenomena – such as decision-making, collective identity, and conflicts – from the perspective of discursive positioning. In this study, positioning refers to the ways that small-group members assign and interpret interpersonal rights, duties, and responsibilities in relation to local moral orders.

The data used in this study comprise two video-recorded and transcribed data sets: The first comprises one interprofessional team meeting in the context of elderly care, and the second comprises seven management-team meetings from two Finnish public research institutes. The data analysis was conducted by utilizing inductive thematic analysis, abductive positioning analysis based on positioning theory, and abductive analysis of dialogue and multivoicedness.

The findings demonstrate positioning theory’s usefulness in the micro-cultural analysis of small-group dynamics. By utilizing the theory’s key analytical concepts (i.e., positions, storylines, and social acts), small-group dynamics can be understood and approached as interpersonal processes in relation to surrounding moral orders. Positioning is always relational and takes place through different narrative conventions (storylines). In this study, positioning dynamics were connected with the groups’ decision-making and conflict processes, and how these processes commenced through fluctuating storylines. The often-subtle and inconspicuous positioning was intertwined with the meetings’ progression, establishing the chair’s role, as well as how shared themes and concepts were negotiated. The findings also highlight how different positioning forms resulted in conflicts and how these conflicts were managed through positioning. This resulted in the construction of either generative or degenerative dialogue. Finally, the findings demonstrate how collective identity was constructed in one of the organizations. Three different kinds of we-positions in strategy discussions were identified in relation to cultural and institutional discourses and moral orders.

This study offers theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic implications. Theoretically, analysis of small-group interactions introduces the concept of task-positioning, i.e., the way that members of small groups position either the task at hand
or in the future. Methodologically, this study presents an example of how positioning theory’s basic concepts can be adapted to the micro-cultural study of small groups. From a pragmatic perspective, this study offers practical implications as to how, for example, team leaders can solve team conflicts and help create generative dialogue.

**Keywords:** positioning theory; small groups; group dynamics; interaction; micro-cultural; meetings; decision-making; conflict; collective positioning
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TIIVISTELMÄ


Tämä tutkimus tuottaa uutta tietoa liittyen teoreettisiin, metodologisiin ja käytännöllisiin pienryhmätutkimuksen ja -toiminnan teemoihin. Pienryhmien vuorovaikutuksen analyysi nostaa esiin tehtäväposiitioinnin (task \textit{positioning}) käsitteemme positiointiteorian kehykseen. Tällä tarkoitetaan sitä pienryhmätoiminnan näkökulmasta erityistä positiioinnin muotoa, jonka kautta ryhmän jäsenet rakentavat yhteistä ymmärrystä joko käsitellä olevista tai tulevaisuudessa suoritettavista tehtävistä. Lisäksi, tämä tutkimus osoittaa esimerkinomaisesti, kuinka positiointiteorian lähtökohtia voidaan hyödyntää metodologisesti mikrokulttuurisen pienryhmätutkimuksen yhteydessä. Lopuksi, tutkimuksen löydökset ovat sovellettavissa esimerkiksi tiimijohdon käytänteisiin, kuten konfliktien ratkaisuun ja rakentavan dialogin luomiseen pienryhmissä.

\textbf{Avainsanat:} positiointiteoria; pienryhmät; ryhmädynamiikka; vuorovaikutus; mikrokulttuuri; kokoukset; päätöksenteko; konfliktit; kollektiivinen positiointi
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I have come to refer to this PhD project as an adventure story following the plot of *Mission: Impossible* movies. As the protagonist, I was faced with a nearly impossible task, and after struggling with both tragic and comedic elements, I came up with a strategy and an action plan that, for an outsider, occasionally might have come across as bonkers. Finally, after trials and tribulations, I reached the goal and completed the mission. It is now time to thank all the supporters and sidekicks who made this story possible.

First, I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Professors Vilma Hänninen, Luk Van Langenhove, and Ilkka Arminen. Professor Hänninen, an unwavering supporter of my mission, provided me with both academic and emotional support during this process in addition to the space and independence that I needed. Throughout this project, she helped me develop not only as a scientific scholar, but also as a human being. I also am exceedingly thankful to Professor Van Langenhove, this protagonist’s surprising supporter, for providing his help and insights regarding positioning theory in the later stages of my dissertation project. He gave me tons of advice chock full of his wisdom and helped me challenge my own thinking while pushing myself even further. I also am grateful to Professor Arminen, this protagonist’s supporter at the beginning of the story, as he provided me with the data that I used in this study. Furthermore, discussions with him and his other postgraduate students motivated me to investigate generative and degenerative dialogue forms further.

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In Kuopio on December 31, 2019
Pasi Hirvonen
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1 INTRODUCTION

“...if we understand how we construct social reality, we can construct more consciously to sustain norms that promote the ends we profess to desire”—Nikki Slocum-Bradley (2010, p. 81)

The everyday lives of organizations and institutions entail a variety of different kinds of group activities varying from formal settings of decision making, strategic planning, or innovation to the mundane settings of coffee breaks and relaxation. However, none of these groups would exist without interpersonal interaction, whether verbal, or textual. It is therefore reasonable to assume that how individuals interact in a group context has a fundamental role in how groups function. Irrespective of the context, people engaging in groups constantly negotiate their interpersonal relations and identities through interaction. These group interactions often entail individuals positioning one another into different kinds of positions such as advisors, supporters, antagonists, or negotiators. As such, positioning can be understood as “the assignment of fluid ‘parts’ or ‘roles’ to speakers in the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person’s actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts” (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 17). In addition to constructing personal stories, interpersonal relations, and identities, could the interpersonal positioning have an impact on the groups themselves and how they work? This study sets out to investigate this question from a social constructionist perspective.

Everyday interactions with other people are a central element in building up our social realities. Imagine participating in a mundane lunchtime conversation between colleagues. With regard to what is being discussed and based on our previous experiences with each other, we will soon come to share an understanding about what is appropriate to say and by whom. If the conversation leads to work-related issues, such as schedules, the person responsible for schedule preparation is generally considered to be obliged to answer questions related to the issue. Occasionally, though, we may even question these rights and obligations and re-position ourselves in such a way that the integrity of someone else might be at risk. Rom Harré, one of the father figures of discursive psychology, approached this issue with his colleagues and developed an approach known as positioning theory. One can only imagine the conversations that this group of scholars have had over lunch.

This study aims to examine how discursive positioning is intertwined with the daily lives of small groups in an institutional context. That is, how positioning affects, and leads to various group processes such as decision making and conflicts. Approaching small group interaction in an organizational setting through the basic concepts and starting points of positioning theory, this study provides new perspectives to group dynamics and to the methodology of group studies. Simultaneously, it seeks to lead to the practical use of positioning theory.

1.1 A NEED FOR NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SMALL GROUPS

One the core areas of applied social psychology is the study human behavior and social relations in different organizational and institutional contexts (e.g., Schneider, Gruman & Coutts, 2005; Semin & Fiedler, 1996; Steg, Buunk & Rothengatter, 2008).
During the first half of the 20th century, the works of Kurt Lewin and his colleagues focused on issues related to organizational behavior and small group dynamics, which laid the foundations for subsequent field research (Cartwright & Zander, 1968). In addition, the influence of George Herbert Mead, one of the social psychological classics, and the development of symbolic interactionism have had a far-reaching effect on studies focusing on, for example, occupational and professional issues (Shaffir & Pawluch, 2003) as well as different kinds of institutions (Charmaz & Olesen, 2003; Kinney, Brown Rosier & Harger, 2003).

Themes related to team dynamics and interpersonal relationships in organizational context have been an ongoing topic for discussion in both educational and professional discourse over the past few decades as well. A number of surveys paint a picture, in which social skills and abilities to operate well in a team context are of great importance for individuals in working life, especially in terms of skills required from recent college graduates (e.g., the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2017; 2018). How can this be explained? Although the response may not be simple, knowing some of the core elements underlining the changes in organizational settings over the past five decades is fundamentally important. Although a vast amount of investigations in organizational research has focused on the changes in the organizational lives and structures in the 20th century, constructing an all-inclusive model of these changes is somewhat of a challenge. However, in most of these models (see Reed, 2006; Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013), there is a clear distinction between modern and postmodern models of organizations and institutions (see also Clegg, 1990). The modern approaches to organizations date back to 1950 and 1970s and the postmodern models from the 1980s onward. These models attempt to depict the change from bureaucratic organizations to post-bureaucratic organizations where the rigid organizational structures, hierarchy, and clarity of roles and power, for example, have been replaced by fluid network structures, non-hierarchical relations based on dialogue, and constant negotiations of identities and power (Hodgson, 2004; Webb, 2004; Kira, 2003). Although some scholars have questioned the true nature of this change and there is evidence that bureaucratic structures still play a crucial role in organizational life (e.g., Clegg & Courpasson, 2004), it is safe to say that there has been a significant change in the ways of coordinating organizational lives and work. To some extent, literature covering organizational structures and processes often emphasize prescriptive models and doctrines instead of descriptive analyses regarding the everyday lives of organizations. Concepts such as agile decision making, entrepreneurialism, network organizations, and teamwork are a central part of the current post-bureaucratic discourse of organizations (Webb, 2004). It can also be said that there is an ever-growing need to develop methods and models to understand these changes and how they come into play in everyday life of organizations.

Since one of the solutions for the aims and challenges of post-bureaucratic organization structures has been the idea of network and teamwork-based organizations, there is a demand for developing new approaches to the study of teams and groups. Alongside with the historical construction of organizational life, it is at least as difficult to construct an articulate description of the history of small groups and small group research. In short, social psychologists have been interested in small group phenomena since the early days of modern social psychology. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Norman Triplett performed one of the first social psychological experiments by studying how a group can increase individual performance. At that time and later in the 1930s, the focus of small group research was on how groups
influence individuals. It was not until the middle of the 20th century that groups became a valid object of research. This was due to, among many other things, Kurt Lewin’s early conceptualizations of group dynamics as well as the need for a better understanding the different ways of working in a group context. The economic growth after the second world war especially in the United States accelerated the idea of how to get the most out of group work and how to measure group performance. This was followed by the golden era of small research lasting until the late 1970s, which was characterized by both experimental and naturalistic methodologies. These studies investigated particularly themes of conformity, social norms, and group dynamics from the perspective of Lewin’s field theory (Collier, Minton & Reynolds, 1991, pp. 124–142; Levine & Moreland, 2006, pp. 2–4).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the conventional viewpoint of small group study has given way to new methods that focus more on cultural and interactional dimensions of joint action. Simultaneously, the concept of team itself was overlooked by social psychologists, and groups were more frequently referred to as context of social interaction and interpersonal behavior. (Harrington & Fine, 2006). Hence, the concept of group became more implicit in the studies of interpersonal behavior.

Considering the changes in organizational structures, a change of this nature in the field of small group research is somewhat surprising. In the context of post-bureaucratic organization structures, there is a progressive need for knowledge in understanding how people behave and function with each other in all different kinds of group contexts from virtual groups to inter-professional teams and multinational management groups. The traditional small group research perspectives face a challenge created by the questions related to the post-bureaucratic organizations. Do we need new methodologies of small group research to investigate the themes of post-bureaucratic organizations and ranging from dialogical relationships to identity negotiations and networks? Although these themes have already been studied quite extensively with both qualitative and quantitative methods, approaches focusing on these issues from an explicit group research perspective has been relatively minor. Moreover, even though the research paradigms of the golden age of small group research still deserve their place in organizational research, there is still a need to develop methods that focus on, for example, issues related to identity, interpersonal relations, and group dynamics. In accordance with Gary Allan Fine’s (2012a) call for more explicit small group research, “a focus on the group—the meso-level of analysis—enriches both structural and interactional approaches, stressing shared and ongoing meaning” (2012a, p. 159), this study aims to discover the possibilities of positioning theory as a discursive framework in explicit small group research. In this study, explicit small group research refers to investigations where the primary interest focuses on analysing group phenomena and group processes.

1.2 THE CONTEXT AND AIMS OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine positioning in small groups in an institutional context. Instead, of investigating only the interpersonal level of positioning, this study aims at highlighting the role of interpersonal positioning in the everyday lives of small groups. Findings presented in this summary article and the attached articles originate from the context of institutional interaction. In the past 30 years or so, institutional interaction and the study of talk at work has been of interest among
discourse scholars (e.g., Firth, 1995; Drew & Heritage, 1998; Arminen, 2005). Previous investigations on institutional interaction in social psychology has mainly been conducted by ethnomethodologists using conversation analysis (CA) among other discursive approaches as methodological tools. From a group interaction perspective, studies of this nature have focused on interprofessional decision making, meeting interaction and therapy interaction (Halvorsen, 2010). More effort is usually directed at understanding how people construct their reality with each other by adopting different kinds of discursive practices or how the interaction between individuals is constructed. As a social psychologist, I am particularly interested in combining both the traditional aspects of explicit small group research and the discourse dynamics of interaction. In this sense, this study represents a more micro-sociological approach to social psychology in contrast with psychologically oriented social psychological approaches (see, e.g., Stainton Rogers, 2011).

Within the past 20 years, positioning theory has become an influential framework in research areas related to communications, education, intercultural relations, and personal identity (e.g., Moghaddam, Harré & Lee, 2008). Positioning theory can be defined as “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” (Harré & Van langenhove 1999a, p. 1). In this context, moral orders are understood as the everyday rules of contextually bound appropriate behavior. In other words, in a very dynamic, and ever-changing way, positioning theory strives to explain how people put themselves and each other in different positions in conversations. Previously, the starting points of the theory have been applied to the study of individual identity construction, intergroup relations and organizational communication (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Rothbart & Rabat, 2009). However, investigations on positioning in small groups has been somewhat left aside.

The findings of the sub-studies presented in this summary article aim to shed light to how members in a group position each other during group interaction and how these positioning acts are connected to the functioning of the group. Adopting a meso-level approach to the study of group dynamics, this study seeks to identify both the structural as well as social and interpersonal elements of group behavior. On a larger scale, this study aims to contribute to the methodological discussion related to micro-cultural investigations of small groups. In this summary, I bring together the findings of my sub-studies through three aims:

1) Outlining a scheme for positioning theory driven small group research methodology
2) Scoping the interrelatedness of positioning dynamics and key factors of successful groups
3) Investigating small groups as fields of moral orders

1.3 STRUCTURE OF THE SUMMARY ARTICLE

Following the introduction, in chapter two, I briefly introduce two key concepts of the study, small groups, and interaction, by defining these concepts, and looking at how they relate to one another. Since the main objective of this study is to investigate positioning and interaction in small groups, it is important to examine these concepts more closely. After this, in chapter three, I present the theoretical foundations for this study starting from a broader framework and concluding with the core theoretical
background utilized in this study. This is followed by a closer look at the methodology, methods, data, and ethical considerations of the study in chapter four. In chapter five, I present the findings of my sub-studies in accordance with both the chronological order of the publications. In chapter six, I present the key findings of this study emphasizing the methodological and practical implications of my study. Finally, in chapter seven, I discuss the overall insights of my study, its possible limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Overall, this summary article aims at achieving two tasks or contributions. First, this summary article aims to fulfill a methodologically driven task of contributing to the methodological discussion related to both micro-cultural small group research and positioning theory-oriented research. Second, this summary article aims to fulfill a pragmatically driven task dealing with concrete issues that the studied small groups face and trying to find out possible solutions, and understandings to these issues. These tasks have a key position in explaining this study’s overall purpose and presenting the study’s theoretical background and main concepts.
2 SMALL GROUPS AND INTERACTION

“Whether we examine Little League baseball teams, street gangs, art world collectives, corporate boards, or social movements, by seeing what it is that groups value and repeat, group life as a cultural forum is made real” (Joann Keyton, 2016, p. 145)

2.1 SMALL GROUPS—CONCEPTUAL THEMES AND DEBATES

This study focuses on small groups and small group interaction, one of the key forums where interpersonal action takes place. As Harrington and Fine (2006, p. 4) put it, small groups are the arenas “where the action is.” Especially in an organizational and work life context, small groups are of utmost importance when it comes to interpersonal relations, task co-ordination, interaction, and communication. It is, then, appropriate to start with the definition of small groups. However, when it comes to defining what small groups are, an overlap in theoretical concepts within social sciences is inevitable, and the theoretical classification of small groups is no exception to this. Although different theoretical approaches underline and emphasize certain aspects over others in the conceptualizations of small groups, there are a few common characteristics that can be drawn together when making these definitions. In this sense small groups are just one form of social groups, usually contextually bound, and inhabits a certain number of members. The concept of social groups varies from dyadic interaction to reference groups, crowds, and even social categories and cultures (e.g., Stangor, 2004, pp. 3–7). Here the focus of analysis is on work groups. Defining the concept of a working group, Stangor (2004, pp. 4–5) emphasized both the number of members in the group as well as the goal specific aims that the group is working toward in achieving. The ideal number of members of a working group varies from 3 to 12 participants. Defining a small group with a reference to a specific number of members has been a topic for a debate for both sociologists and social psychologists. Starting with dyadic interaction, it is important to distinguish the difference of a dyad and triad. In accordance with Simmel (1902), it is stated here that a dyad is not a group as in that case there is no room for concepts like “group dynamics” or “group processes.” When a third member joins the picture, changing the dyad into a triad, processes such as forming coalitions, keeping secrets, or negotiating between different perspectives in conflicts or decision making can take place, which would not be present in a similar fashion in dyadic interactions.

However, defining small groups based on number of members is not enough. A group might exist in terms of number of members, yet it might be that none of the group members identify themselves as belonging to a specific small group. However, according to Tajfel (1970), even the mere knowledge of belonging to a group is enough to generate group behavior such as ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination. On the other hand, according to Bales (1951), small groups can be examined in terms of interactions taking place among the group members. From this interactional point of view, small groups are understood as collectives that strive toward a dynamic equilibrium between task and social–emotional elements of joint action. From a more individualistic perspective, small groups can be defined in terms of what individual needs they fulfill. According to Levine and Moreland (2006), small groups satisfy
survival, psychological, informational, and identity needs, all of which can be regarded as the fundamental elements of small groups as well. All in all, small groups entail an element of individual needs and belonging but, above all, a sense of similarity among the group members and from the perspective of outsiders, interaction, and interdependence, and a group structure including norms, roles, and status (Stangor, 2004, pp. 17–21). From the viewpoint of this study, particularly, the elements of interaction, and interdependence are of interest.

Perhaps contrary to the previous descriptions and conceptualization, especially work group, and teamwork literature emphasize prescriptive viewpoints of well-functioning groups and teams as a conceptual starting point. Often, four key elements of small groups are presented. These definitions share the idea that small groups function based on shared identity and sense of belongingness, clear, and focused aims and tasks, distinct role division, and shared history (Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2015; Levi, 2017). In addition, elements related to trust, such as competence, benevolence, and integrity, as well as collective efficacy, the shared understanding of the group’s possibilities, are often outlined as key features when defining small groups (e.g., Griffith & Dunham, 2015). For the purposes of this study, and considering the previous viewpoints, small groups can be defined in accordance with Kozlowski and Bell (2003, p. 334) as

“groups of people who exist to perform organizationally relevant tasks, share one or more common goals, interact socially, exhibit task interdependencies, maintain and manage boundaries, and are embedded in an organizational context that sets boundaries, constrains the team and influences exchanges with other units in the broader entity”

The definitions and outlines of this quote suit the definition of the particular type of small groups that are investigated in this study: working groups. By emphasizing the task and goal-oriented nature of small groups, Kozlowski and Bell (2003) outlined above an apt definition of a working group. In working life studies, small groups are often referred to as teams instead of groups highlighting the task and goal-oriented nature of teamwork. However, organizations include various kinds of groups out of which teams represent only one. Starting with a micro-cultural small group perspective, it is not important to go through the varieties of different kinds of teams for the purposes of this study. It is, however, important to notice the interrelatedness of small group behavior and surrounding culture. Small groups such as management boards do not exist in a vacuum but are rather the result of the surrounding historical, cultural, and institutional contexts. As such, a work group can be regarded as “an arena through which individuals collaborate and use their shared identities to link to larger communities, just as larger communities constrain group action” (Fine, 2012a, p. 161). After all, small groups form the arenas for interpersonal activities and relationships in organizations.

Throughout the history of small group research, experimental research methods have held a predominant position among different small group research methodologies. Focus has been put mainly on how different group contexts, such as the opinions of other group members, influence individual decision making, and information processing. Approaches of this nature have usually been labeled under the social cognition tradition (e.g., Hamilton, 2005; Pryor & Ostrom, 1987). Rooting to the studies conducted by Norman Triplett (1898), the social cognitive small group approach is interested in how individuals effect each other’s behavior in small groups.
for example in the context of individual decision making. Although the emphasis is on social processes, from a small group research and social psychological perspective, this tradition is rather individualistic. On a more social and interpersonal level, the works of Kurt Lewin and his colleagues in 1930s–1940s have had a profound impact on how we view small groups and small group dynamics even today. For Lewin (1975), small groups were an arena of personal and social forces, where individuals navigate their behavior in relation to internal and external effects. Resonating ideas and concepts of physics, Lewin adapted his theoretical starting points of so-called field theory to the study and understanding of small groups. This resulted in development of a tradition that has been referred to as the study of small group dynamics. By adapting these starting points, Lewin and his colleagues investigated the ways, in which small groups can function as means for social change and individual motivation (Lewin, 1973; 1975).

Although Lewin did not explicitly focus on small group interaction processes, it is self-evident that interaction plays a crucial role in such small group dynamics. In comparison with Lewin’s, traditional small group interaction research has taken a different kind of approach. Traditional analysis of small group interaction has focused either on the different structures or patterns of interaction, different interaction processes, or on theoretical underpinnings of small group communication (see Bales, 1951; Hirokawa et al., 2003). Some of these approaches, however, include the idea, similar to Lewin’s starting points, of finding a balance between the different elements of group dynamics in order to achieve optimal group performance. These traditions, labeled here as explicit, and implicit small group interaction research, will be discussed next.

2.2 SMALL GROUPS AND THE STUDY OF INTERACTION

Within the domain of small group research, especially small group communication scholars have emphasized the centrality of communication and interaction as the primary level of analysis (Frey, 2002; Hirokawa & Scott Poole, 1996). However, just as it can be somewhat difficult to define the concept of groups unambiguously, defining a distinction between communication and interaction can also be rather challenging. Although these terms are used frequently, and often synonymously, in social psychological, and small group research literature, they are seldom explicitly defined. Instead of defining these concepts or making a distinction between them, the reasons why it is necessary to study different kinds of language use is often highlighted. It is often argued that symbolically mediated language use in social interaction and communication is something that is characteristic to human beings as a species and for that reason alone it is worth studying (e.g., Deacon, 1997; Mercer, 2000). Language use is regarded not only as means of communication but also as a tool for constructing the social realm and a shared understanding about individuals, social events, relationships, and even societies. Communication can thus be regarded as transmitting information between individuals and as a process of interpreting others’ messages. In this regard, communication is a process that can either proceed smoothly or it might encounter challenges such as disturbance in the mediation of the message or difficulties in understanding the message. In addition to group communication scholars, studies of communication in general have focused on intergroup and interinstitutional communication (Gudykunst, 2004; Gudykunst, Stewart, & Tin-
Toomey, 1985) by examining, for example, public relations-related issues as well as client and organizational communications.

Analogously, *interaction* can be understood as a subtype of communication where the purpose is not only to communicate information, emotions, or ideas to others but also to construct a shared understanding and meaning regarding interpersonal relations, institutions, and even cultures. Understanding interaction as “the actions and responses of people to each other’s activities” (Dennis, Philburn & Smith 2013, p. 1) refers to the active nature of language use when language both describes and constitutes the social reality. For example, talk in conversations and discussions has the element of communicating but also the element of action when the consequential elements of communication acts, such as turns in conversations, are also of interest. That is, the relational aspects of communication are considered to be of utmost importance. In this regard, analysis of interaction is not only about identifying different kinds of speech acts but rather focusing on how specific speech acts are understood by others and how these reactions eventually play a specific part in the meaning making process of the original utterance or speech act. This opens the possibility of different versions of reality and even competition between these perspectives and versions. Within the past two decades, interaction studies of this nature have also paid special attention to the multimodalities in interaction, meaning how people use not only words but also bodily gestures, gaze, tone of voice, artifacts, and physical space in the construction of shared understanding. Particularly, conversation analysts have placed more and more emphasis on these issues (e.g., Sindell & Stivers, 2013; Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron, 2011).

With reference to small group research, the communication and interaction perspectives can be regarded as two different kinds of approaches to the understanding of small groups. Small group communication scholars approach small groups explicitly as their primary aim is to investigate small groups and small group processes from the perspective of communication. Scholars focusing first and foremost on the study of interaction often leave explicit small group investigations aside. Here, approaches of this nature are referred to as implicit approaches since their interest on small groups is secondary. These approaches are presented next in more detail.

**Explicit approaches to small group interaction**

Those small group research approaches that strive to find mostly generalizations about how small groups function are here referred to as explicit approaches. One of the most predominant approaches within this context has been the analysis of communication and interaction in small groups. The focus of analysis has varied from understanding the structural patterns of small group communication to the theoretical and statistical models of group communication as well as the analysis and quantification of speech acts in small group interaction (e.g., Pennington, 2002). Concerning the distinction between communication and interaction, the explicit approach to small group interaction represents the communication perspective.

Alex Bavelas (1950) carried out one of the earliest attempts to understand the mechanisms of small group communication out as he outlined the different structural possibilities of effective communication in task-oriented small groups. Bavelas presents theoretical models as to how small group communication can be structured considering different possibilities of interpersonal communication connections. These
connections are presented as communication networks that vary in shape based on how group members can communicate with one another. For example, these structures can take the form of a circle, line, or an x-shape.

Although Balvelas was interested in communication in small groups, his investigations did not consider the contents of communication. This is something that was addressed also in the 1950s by Robert F. Bales as he developed his analytic schemes of small group interaction process analysis. Starting from systems theory and Lewin’s field theory, Bales’s interaction process analysis (IPA) aims to investigate the essential features of social action that make coordinated behavior within small groups possible. Bales set out to discover the elements of successful group work and how that can be analyzed in terms of small group interaction. According to Bales, for a group to function and to reach its goals, it has to achieve a state of dynamic equilibrium in which the task-related and social–emotional elements of interpersonal dynamics are in balance with each other (Bales, 1951; Pennington, 2002, pp. 33–40). In terms of analysis, the state of the dynamic equilibrium can be analyzed by coding individual speech acts within the group in relation to the task and social–emotional dimensions of interpersonal behavior. Based on the coding, the behavioral patterns of the group can then be categorized both as supportive or negative toward the social–emotional elements of the group work and in relation to the task elements of the group work (e.g., asking questions, and providing answers). Although the IPA model has been adapted to the study of natural groups, quite often, analysis of this nature is based on experimental and non-naturalistic data. However, the method has provided insights especially to the analysis of work group interaction, and it still holds a significant role in the study of small group communication. For example, Bell (2001) has adapted the IPA model when studying multidisciplinary teams in child protection context. Using the IPA model as an analytical tool, Bell discovered how the institutional position influenced the ways how the group members took part in the interaction and how representatives of different disciplines had more power over other representatives. Although these findings are based on using predefined categories of interaction, the results show how different institutional positions affect the ways in which group members take part in interaction and how different kind of institutional positioning effects the group work.

In addition to IPA, an approach that is commonly referred to as small group communication orientation also constitutes as one of the explicit approaches to small group interaction. Continuing with the interest of communication processes and patterns as well as the theoretical foundations of small group communication, this approach emphasizes the statistical, theoretical, and experimental analysis of small group behavior based on various versions of data. Small group communication approach can hence be regarded as an umbrella concept for a variety of different kinds of studies focusing on the communicative and theoretical aspects of communication types, aims, and requirements. (Myers & Anderson, 2008.) A common feature for these research orientations is the testing of different theoretical models, the use of quantitative research methods, and investigations related to the role of communication processes to small group behavior. Often, themes related to efficient group work, leadership, and member satisfaction are of interest (see Hirokawa & Scott Poole, 1996).

The analysis of these processes and themes within the small group communication approach have their theoretical starting points in functional theory (e.g., Gouran & Hirokawa, 1996) and structuration processes theory (Scott Poole, Seibold & McPhee, 1996). By emphasizing the specific processes that help a group to achieve the best possible
result, say, in a decision making process, the functional approaches emphasize the analysis of different communication patterns that assist the group members to express their understanding about the decisions and to identify the relevant and realistic alternatives concerning the decision. Constructing a rather normative account of small group communication and behavior, the functional approach disregards the actual interactional features and episodes at the expense of investigating and scrutinizing the dos and don’ts of effective small group communication. Stemming from the structuration theory originally outlined by Anthony Giddens, the structuration process theory aims to investigate how interpersonal, institutional, and societal practices are constructed based on varieties of practices of social action. Here, focus of analysis is on the investigations of the interplay between small group communications and different structures. (Scott Poole, Seibold & McPhee, 1996).

By highlighting and differentiating the details and different variables of small group communication and group behavior, the explicit approaches offer important cumulative and detailed information about small groups. However, these approaches quite often regard small groups as container-like entities disregarding the cultural and surrounding structural elements of small groups. Also, as a result of using pre-established codes in the analysis of small group communication, the interactional, and socially constructed nature of interpersonal relations within groups are often neglected. These issues have traditionally been approached by research that I refer here to as implicit small group approaches.

**Implicit approaches to small group interaction**

The above-mentioned orientations of small group interaction analysis and group dynamics constitute the main theoretical and empirical perspectives in small group research. However, within the past four or so decades, approaches focusing on language use and the empirical analysis of naturally occurring data have also set their analytical lenses on small group level phenomena. Nonetheless, these discursively oriented approaches focus on small groups implicitly, scrutinizing interpersonal behavior as discursive phenomena leaving small-group-level investigations to a lesser extent. Within this context, CA (e.g., Heritage, 2008) and discourse analysis (e.g., Tannen, Hamilton, Scriffen, & Adger, 2015) hold a predominant position. Both methodological approaches focus on in-situ interaction in small group contexts although discourse analysis can be regarded as a broader framework utilizing a variety of discourse data as the focus of analysis.

Where IPA and group communication research set theory and theoretical categorizations as the starting point for analysis, CA strives to do the opposite. Focusing on the micro-structures of mundane or institutional interaction, CA scholars aim at identifying the interactional building blocks of conversations and interpersonal behavior. Using an inductive approach, CA scholars pay special attention to conversations from a talk-as-action perspective where interaction is a joint accomplishment among the participants with regard on how the interlocutors orient toward each other’s talk. Hence, interaction is not merely talk but also social action (ten Have 2007; Heritage, 2008). For example, a simple greeting in a conversation can function as a starting point for the conversation, as a question, or as a sign of enthusiasm depending on how the greeting is said and in which social context. In this regard, labeling interactional speech acts into specific categories beforehand
is not appropriate. Originating from ethnomethodology and micro-sociology, CA combines the systematic analysis of interaction orders (Goffman, 1983) and everyday conversations. Conversation analysis can be regarded as one of the approaches that gave way for the linguistic and interactional turn in social sciences in the early 1970s criticizing the hegemony of positivistic and experimental methodologies in social sciences (see, e.g., Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007, pp. 2–9). In accordance with other interactionist approaches, emphasis is put on the analysis of naturally occurring interaction avoiding simulated and experimental settings. This is also true in the context of small groups. However, avoiding theoretical assumptions and focusing on interaction in-situ, CA scholars leave aside questions related to small group dynamics, communication processes, and social structures as they are understood within the traditional small group research paradigms. Groups are regarded as contexts for interaction rather than the focus of analysis representing an implicit approach to small groups.

Discourse analysis (DA) is a method for investigating all the different ways in which people use language, whether it is texts, or spoken language, to construct understanding, and meaning concerning their social lives. In other words, DA “seeks to understand the role of discourse in the construction of our social world” (Wiggins, 2017, 32). DA comes in many forms. Some discourse analysts focus on how people use different kinds of vocabularies in everyday interactions, whereas some analysts might be interested how broader cultural and ideological realities are presented and constructed not only in interpersonal interactions but also in texts, documents, and different kinds of declarations. In the context of small group research, the former version of DA is typical.

As a result of the so-called crisis in social sciences, particularly in social psychology in the early 1970s, the epistemological and methodological starting points of experimental social psychological research were questioned as a sufficient method in understanding the dynamics of social worlds. The need for more cultural and relativistic approaches gave way for the development of new theories in social psychology, such as social constructionism and DA (Stainton Rogers, 2011, pp. 22–23). Both CA and social constructionism can be regarded as the prime influences for the development of DA and other discursive approaches in modern social psychology (see Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007, 6–14).

Both CA and DA have proved out to be adequate methodologies also in the investigations of small group interaction. Particularly, institutional interaction has gained special attention from both CA and DA. For example, discourse analytical investigations of classroom and study group interactions have highlighted the subtle micropolitics of identity construction (Davies, 2003), participation (Quebec Fuentes, 2013), and collaboration (Sawyer & Berson, 2004). DA has also been applied to investigations in therapy and counseling interaction in a variety of group settings. Studies on discourse management in aphasia related group therapy (Simmons-Mackie, Elman, Holland & Domico, 2007), construction of victim status in men’s group therapy (Zverina, Stam, & Babins-Wagner, 2011), and involvements in sex offender therapy (MacMartin & LeBaron, 2009) are just few examples.

Moreover, from an organizational research perspective, the study of workplace interaction and discourse has gained special attention (Koester, 2006). Looking at this area of research from the perspective of small groups, the study of meeting interaction is of interest. Using mainly conversation analytical methodologies, but also discourse analytical approaches (e.g., Kwon, Clarke & Wodak, 2009), studies on institutional
meeting interaction aim at highlighting how different institutional practices come in to being through interaction and how individuals orient toward the institutional context. Thematically, the studies have focused on, for example, shared decision making in design development teams (Alby & Zucchermaglio, 2006) and interprofessional teams in healthcare (Nikander, 2007; 2011), leadership identities in meeting interaction (Svennevig, 2011), and alignment into teams in multiparty conversations (Kangasharju, 2002). In addition, conversation analysts have investigated the overall nature of meeting interaction, identifying the idiosyncrasies of such interactions. Meeting interaction can be regarded as a form of work group interaction consisting of sequential construction of interaction through openings and closings, dynamics of turn taking, and leadership as well as special situational features such as physical surroundings and elaborate meeting procedures. (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009).

Although all the above-mentioned discursive investigations highlight important features of interactional dynamics in the context of work groups, both conversation, and discursive analytical traditions represent an implicit approach to small groups. This means looking at small groups rather as context of interaction than focusing explicitly on group level phenomena in a similar fashion as the traditional small group research paradigms. However, some small group research scholars have drawn attention to the importance of applying different kinds of methodologies emphasizing the symbolically mediated interactions from the perspective of explicit small group investigations. Next, I present briefly these micro-cultural investigations of small groups simultaneously outlining some of the epistemological and methodological starting points of this study.

2.3 SMALL GROUPS, MICRO-CULTURES, AND INTERACTION ORDERS

Taking a more cultural stand on small groups, some scholars have combined the features of studying everyday interactions in groups and the explicit research approach of small groups. Investigations of this nature do not form a unified research approach but nevertheless stem from somewhat similar starting points, mainly symbolic interactionism, and micro-sociology as well as social constructivist psychology. Broadly, these cultural perspectives consider individual behavior inextricably intertwined with interactions, interpersonal relations, and group memberships. All these approaches look at small groups as micro-cultures consisting of individuals who share a sense of belonging and study how interpersonal interactions are guided by the group structures and how, on the other hand, groups are structured through interaction. In this study, these approaches are referred to as micro-cultural group studies with their focus on local group cultures, interaction orders, and structures. For example, Norman Denzin (1999) has applied a social interactionist approach to small groups by combining the study of orderliness of interaction and the open-ended nature of small group processes and interaction. Denzin considered small groups as arenas of interaction that are guided and controlled by a shared interaction order. Constructed through previous histories and experiences, individual interaction repertoires, and social relations with their analogical identities, interaction orders can break, and continue in a stream-like fashion. Similarly, Peter Hartley (1997) has outlined a micro-cultural model of small groups that suggests bringing together individual and collective viewpoints. In his integrative model, Hartley (1997, pp.
29–31) outlined three distinct features of small groups and group life: the often-undetected level of interpersonal underworld, the level of tasks and procedures, and the level of social and cultural background. The first level refers to hidden agendas of individuals, the second to the observable surface behavior in groups and the third to the cultural and ideological surroundings of groups. This model suggests that groups should always be investigated both on the interpersonal and contextual levels. Analogously, Denzin (1999, p. 308) has criticized the container model of small groups, commonly represented by the experimental approaches, that often study newly formed groups that have been assembled by the researchers with mere research purpose. Accordingly, instead of studying groups in controlled settings through experimental methodologies, research should focus on natural, already existing groups with their specific histories, interaction orders, norms, and identities.

Within small group research paradigms, micro-cultural approaches are usually located under the symbolic–interpretive perspective (Frey and Sunwolf 2004; 2005). According to the key figures of the field, Lawrence Frey and Sunwolf (2004; 2005) characterized the symbolic–interpretive perspective on small group dynamics as the study of how groups and group members use symbols such as discourse and objects in communicating and what individual and collective outcomes the use of these symbols has. Additionally, the aims of this approach are on the group level of action investigating “how groups and group dynamics themselves are products of such symbolic activity” (Frey & Sunwolf, 2004, p. 278). Drawing its starting points from hermeneutics, social phenomenology, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and social constructionism, this approach brings the themes discussed as the result of the interpretive turn to the context of small group dynamics. However, as Frey and Sunwolf (2004) stated, this perspective “has not been formally articulated with respect to groups per se” (Frey & Sunwolf, 2004, p. 277), which to a certain extent can be understood due to its multifaceted background as well as methodological plurality.

Gary Alan Fine has outlined perhaps the most articulated conceptualization of micro-cultural small group studies. He took the symbolic interactionist, and to a large extent, the starting points of the symbolic–interpretive perspective, as a point of departure for small group investigations. For Fine, the concept of culture is essential. According to Fine (e.g., Fine 2012a; 2012b), micro-cultures hold a predominant role in constituting the civil society. For Fine (2012a), small groups create local cultures and form arenas of action with their own sets of social norms and collective histories. In this context, small groups function as the nexus between the society and interpersonal interaction and interaction orders. It is the local group culture that provides the link between interaction and structure (Fine, 2012a, p. 3). As a micro-cultural perspective to small groups, Fine (2012a, p. 159) referred to this approach as a “local sociology on the meso-level.” By referring to the meso-level as the middle ground between societal macro-level and interpersonal micro-level, Fine (2012a; see also Harrington & Fine, 2006) highlighted the importance of explicit small group research that considers the cultural, interactional, and structural elements of group life. It is the meso-level of analysis, the explicit focus on the small group level that “enriches both the structural and interactional approaches, stressing shared and ongoing meaning” (Fine, 2012a, p. 159). From this micro-cultural perspective, small groups establish different kinds of standards for appropriate behavior that becomes apparent in the form of local interaction orders that form specific arenas of social action.

Starting from the conceptualizations of Erving Goffman, Fine (2012a) regarded the analysis of interaction orders as the key in understanding small groups, their cultures,
and development. Interaction orders establish the cultural foundation for action as the “local context, or the set of shared understandings arising from continuing interaction” (Fine, 2012a, p. 160). According to Goffman (1983), interaction order refers to the organized patterns of body-to-body interactions that rely on the previous experiences of the interaction participants. In other words, interaction order defines the context-specific ways for appropriate interpersonal behavior based on previous experiences. Consequently, in the small group context, interaction orders can be considered as the historical by-products of previous experiences that set the limits for appropriate and expected behavior in a small group.

For micro-cultural small group perspective, the cornerstone of analysis is the detailed analysis of interaction orders through, for example, small group conversations. The focus of analysis, then, is on the everyday lives of small groups. As for the unit of analysis, both Norman Denzin (1999) and Rom Harré (1993), two of the key advocates for micro-cultural investigations in social psychological research, suggested the analysis of everyday episodes and situations of social life. From the perspective of the analysis of interaction orders, social situations entail objective, subjective, and interactive frames all of which play a significant role in the creation and re-creation of an interaction order. The objective frame refers to the physical surroundings of the situation, that is, where the social situation takes place. Individuals taking part in the situation with their own thoughts and feelings constitute the subjective frame, whereas the interactions and roles of participants constitute the interactive frame (Denzin, 1999, pp. 300–301).

This micro-cultural, meso-level of analysis has been applied to a variety of different issues, such as investigations in group memberships and social identity, collective action in small groups, and the “idiocultures,” the local group cultures (Fine, 2012b). One particularly interesting emerging field of investigation is the application of the micro-cultural perspective to the study of organizational life that emphasizes the explicit investigation of small groups in the formation of organizational culture (Fine & Hallett, 2014). Drawing on vast ethnographic studies, Fine, and his colleagues have addressed a variety of issues and themes in this context. These include how idiocultures of small groups can create differentiation with in relation to the broader organizational culture, how small group cultures come into being through different kinds of performances, and how the culture of a small group can assist the group to manage organizational threats (Fine & Hallett, 2014; Fine, 2007). Although these meso-level organizational analyzes emphasize the importance of investigating local interaction orders of small groups, they often lack the close and detailed analysis of everyday interactions of the groups. In addition, albeit the focus of analysis is explicitly on the groups, local group cultures are often investigated through their contribution in creating larger organizational cultures.

In this study, I emphasize the meso-level perspective on small groups and utilize a discursive method for the examination of the everyday lives of institutional working groups. The meso-level perspective brings together the basic starting points of both explicit and implicit small group interaction studies but emphasizes the role of language and discourse in the construction of small groups and small group dynamics. I have outlined these conceptual starting points of this study in Figure 1 in which the central part of the figure can represent the core interest of this study.
Implicit approaches (e.g. Discourse analysis, Conversation analysis)
- naturalistic data
- focus on interaction: talk-as-action
- small groups as contexts of interaction

Explicit approaches (e.g. IPA, Small group communication research)
- non-naturalistic data
- study of communication
- focus on communication and theoretical concepts
- quantification

Figure 1. Conceptual starting points of the study.
3 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

“Conversation is to be thought of as creating the social world just as causality generates a physical one” (Rom Harré, 1983, p. 65)

Applying positioning theory to the analysis of small group interaction and dynamics is the main purpose of this study. Positioning theory has been developed to meet the demands arising from the so-called second cognitive revolution or the dynamic paradigm in social sciences and psychology outlined originally in the 1970s. Rom Harré, one of the initiators of this paradigm, can be considered as one of the key figures of modern social psychology due to his extensive work concerning the philosophical underpinnings of social scientific research, theoretical developments, and dynamics of micro-, and macro-processes of individual psychology. In his above-mentioned provocative quote, Rom Harré crystallized the fundamentals of his social psychological thinking arguing that most of the social and psychological phenomena originate and get their meaning in everyday social relationships. Paying special attention to the everyday episodes and conversations of individuals and collectives, Harré and his colleagues have sought a more interpersonal understanding on issues such as emotions (Harré, 1988), health and illness (Sabat, 2001), and the self (Harré, 2015a).

Within the past 30 years or so, Harré’s ideas have been developed further within a framework called positioning theory. As this theory forms the core of this study, I will introduce in this chapter the theory in more detail starting firstly with the broader theoretical frameworks of social constructionism and discursive psychology, within which positioning theory can also be situated.

3.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Social constructionism can be regarded as an umbrella-like epistemological orientation that brings together a variety of different disciplines, approaches, and theories mainly within fields investigating the human world. As an epistemological approach, social constructionism is anti-essentialist. In this context, anti-essentialism refers to the idea that “there are no ‘essences’ inside people that make them what they are” (Burr, 2015, p. 6). For social constructionists, social interaction, and the use of language are the prime elements in the construction of social reality. In this sense, language is considered from both descriptive and constructive perspectives: We use language in our everyday lives both to describe our reality as we perceive it and simultaneously to construct the reality we live in to specific kind of version of that reality (e.g., Gergen, 1985; Burr, 2015; Hjelm, 2017). As Harré and Van Langenhove (1999a, p. 2) put it, “social constructionism stresses that social phenomena are to be considered to be generated in and through conversation and conversation like activities.” With this, the writes highlight in particular the discursive construction of both psychological and social phenomena, such as identity, emotions, and memory, adhering to the criticism of reductionism in mainstream psychology and social psychology alongside many other scholars (e.g., Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1973, 1985; Harré & Gillet, 1994).
Within psychology and social psychology, this critical starting point has been adopted in several approaches, such as critical social psychology, discursive psychology, Foucauldian DA, and constructivism. All these approaches underline, albeit to different degrees, the anti-essentialist approach to psychology, the historical, and cultural contexts of knowledge, the centrality of language as a pre-condition for thought and a form of social action, and interaction and social processes as the focus of investigation (Burr, 2015). The anti-essentialist starting point rejects the common, either implicit, or explicit, dichotomy of individual versus social in psychology. In this sense, social constructionists avoid rendering concepts like identity or self as merely individual or social entities. Burr (2015, 6) pointed out aptly that “if the social world, including ourselves as people, is the product of social processes, it follows that there cannot be any given, determined nature to the world or people.” In these social processes, language has a primary role. Language is something that pre-exists individual thought and gives content to it. It is argued that, through the process of learning a specific language, we also adopt categories, ideologies, and ultimately, our sense of self in relation to our social world. It is thus why the focus of research should lay in the investigations of our social relations, interactions, and processes. From this point of view, human world with all the meanings attached to it is in a constant flux, invariably re-constructed and challenged by the actors within it (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2015).

From a philosophical viewpoint, post-structuralism has had an important role in the development of social constructionism. Post-structuralists underline the importance of language although language is not considered as a fixed system of meanings but rather a fluid and ever-changing set of meanings associated with the use of language. (Burr 2015, pp. 12–14, 61–64.) Thus, concepts like individual identity or self are in a constant flux depending on the context and people taking part in the interactions. As a social process, then, the construction of identity is intertextual, consisting of a constant negotiation between different discourses (Brinkmann 2018, p. 118).

Within social psychology theorizing and research, social constructionism has had a significant role. For example, studies on identity (Jackson & Hogg, 2010), memory (Edwards, 1997), and emotions (Harré & Gillett, 1994) have emphasized the social constructionist starting points. Regarding the development of positioning theory, social psychological developments of social constructionism are of great importance. Rom Harré, alongside social psychologists like Kenneth Gergen and Henri Tajfel, can be considered as one of the key figures of critical social psychology. It was the writings and critiques of the above-mentioned scholars who led to the critical turn in social psychology in the 1970. The criticism against reductionist and experimental approaches in social psychology was paced by the need for a more cultural and relativistic approaches in understanding social behavior. Together with Paul Secord, Rom Harré (1972; see also Harré, 1977) formulated their criticism and suggestions for future research in the book *Explanation of Social Behavior* and drafted the starting points for so-called ethogenic research program. Harré and Secord outlined an anthropomorphic approach on how to study social phenomena criticizing the inability of experimental methodologies in the explanation of complex social events. Harré and Secord underlined that human beings should be considered as active and intentional agents collectively constructing the social reality as a result of the cognitive recourses of the individuals (Harré & Secord, 1972; see also Harré, 1977). Albeit Harré’s ethogenic ideas emphasize the idea of individuals as cognitive beings, an idea that is largely rejected among social constructinists, his ideas on the joint social
construction of meanings and reality is something that has had a significant role in the
development of social constructionism. In addition, Harré’s emphasis of interpersonal
discourse as the primary reality and focus of research is something that is shared by
all social constructionist research.

Despite the similar starting points of social constructionist research, there are some
differences as to what the focus of research should be. One of these differences stems
from on how the role of language in the process of social construction is ultimately
understood. Is language merely a practice in everyday interactions enabling a variety of
different and sometimes contradictory constructions, or is it something that adheres to
broader cultural and ideological origins functioning as a resource for even oppressive
functions? According to Burr (2015), social constructionist theory, and inquiry has
tackled these issues in the forms of micro- and macro-social constructionism. Micro-
social constructionism focuses attention to the everyday use of language analyzing the
different practices of language use. In this sense, there are always a variety of versions
available for the construction of reality and the use of different kinds of language
ultimately defines how the social reality is constructed. It is therefore important to
pay attention to these processes of language practices that come to determine the
social reality in a given context. Macro-social constructionism takes a different stand
as to how much individuals can in fact influence the construction of meanings.
Focusing on the broader ideological and cultural origins of language, macro-social
constructionists consider the everyday use of language as “derived from, or at
least bound up with, material, or social structures, social relations and institutional
practices” (Burr 2015, p. 25). Language is considered as subordinate to culture and
ideology and therefore always entails elements of power. Everyday language use is
therefore considered as an arena of social construction that one way or another either
substantiates or reconstructs broader cultural and ideological meanings (Burr, 2015).
Within micro-social constructionism especially studies on discursive psychology that
apply conversation analytical methodologies (e.g., Edwards, 2007; Speer & Potter,
2000) have had a predominant role. On the other hand, studies applying the starting
points of critical DA (e.g., Fairclough, 2013; Wodak & Angouri, 2014) have gained
attention among macro-social constructionism. Although attempts to bridge the gap
between the micro- and macro-perspectives have been relatively scarce, it is argued
here, according to Burr (2015, p. 26), that the works of Rom Harré and his colleagues
on positioning theory can be regarded as one possibility to combine these approaches.

3.2 DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND THE HARRÉAN DYNAMIC
PARADIGM

Discursive psychology represents a branch of social constructionist research that
focuses particularly on analysis of discourse in interaction. Although several attempts
have been made to map out the somewhat diverse field of discursive psychology and
its relations to other discursive approaches (e.g., Hepburn & Wiggins, 2007; Wiggins,
2017; Wooffitt, 2005), it can still be challenging to single out discursive psychology as an
independent field of studies. Here, I will outline the basic starting points of discursive
psychology followed by a specification of Rom Harré’s viewpoints on discursive
psychology that represent a somewhat distinct form of discursive psychology.

Largely, discursive psychology shares the starting points of social constructionism
focusing its attention to language and to the discursive construction of both
psychological phenomena and institutional practices. According to Sally Wiggins (2017, p. 4), discursive psychology can be understood as “a theoretical and analytical approach to discourse which treats talk and text as an object of study in itself, and psychological concepts as socially managed and consequential in interaction.”

In accordance with the social constructionist starting points, discursive psychology is also an anti-cognitivist approach focusing on the social and interactional elements of psychological concepts like attitudes, emotions, gender, identities, memory, and prejudice (see, e.g., Wiggins, 2017). As a specific form of DA, Wiggins (2017) outlined three principles of discursive psychology: the dual nature of discourse as both constructed and constructive, the situated nature of discourse, and the emphasis on discussion and accountability as action-oriented activity. In line with social constructionism, discursive psychology emphasizes the notion of language use as relativist practice. As such, discourse is understood as “constructed through a range of cultural resources: words, intonation, gesture, and culturally available phrases and expressions” (Wiggins, 2017, p. 10 [italics in original]). The constructive perspective of discourse emphasizes the variety of different versions of the world, including people, institutions, and groups, which can be generated through different discursive resources. This starting point adheres to the discussion concerning the realistic and relativistic understanding of language. Although realistic views of language and research of that nature (e.g., content analysis, phenomenography) suggest the role of language primarily as a neutral tool for communication describing and reflecting reality as it is, relativistic approaches (e.g., discursive psychology, narrative psychology, conversation analysis) focus on the diverse ways language is used to describe events and what kinds of meanings are attached to these descriptions. From the relativistic perspective, discourse is always situated within distinct place and time. The situated nature of discourse draws attention to the occasioned, sequential elements of discourse. That is, talk and text should be understood as part of a specific interaction and how each discursive act relates to the previous and forthcoming sequences of that interaction. Furthermore, discourse is situated rhetorically so that discursive action is considered to be constructed to somehow counter or challenge other versions of discursive construction. Finally, discourse is always situated in a way that it is a part of ongoing interactional context varying from everyday conversations to institutional practices and should thus be investigated in-situ (Wiggins, 2017, pp. 8–15; see also Potter & Edwards, 2001, pp. 104–106).

Rom Harré has had a predominant role within the field of discursive psychology in addition to the early developments in social constructionist thinking. Together with his colleagues, he has outlined the starting points for discursive psychology as a critique and alternative to traditional reductionist approaches in psychology (Harré & Secord, 1972; Harré & Gillett, 1994; Harré, 1995). For Harré, the starting points of discursive psychology take the form of historical development in psychology. Discursive psychology originated as the result of the second cognitive revolution, the turn to discursive investigations of psychological phenomena instead of understanding them as merely mental states or structures. Following the first cognitive revolution, the development, and generalization of cognitive psychology during the mid-20th century, the second cognitive revolution led to the development of so-called dynamic paradigm (e.g., Harré & Moghaddam, 2003a). This dynamic paradigm juxtaposed the traditional reductionist and experimental psychology with a new, discursive, and social constructionist paradigm.
In this context, discursive psychology should be understood as “the study of intentional use of symbolic systems of various kinds by active and skilled human beings in public and private contexts, for the accomplishment of various tasks and projects, jointly with others” (Harré, 1995, p. 146). For Harré, the aim of discursive psychology is to examine not only the construction of social reality (public context) but also the role of the social reality in the construction of the person or the self (private context) (see Harré 1983; 1993). Accordingly, individual personalities consist of an intertwined duality of personal and social being, both of which originate from social, interpersonal level. Personal being refers to the adoption of socially originating self-concept, whereas social being refers to the social presentation of the self in everyday interactions. Originating from the ideas of Vygotsky (e.g., 1986) and Goffman (e.g., 1973), Harré highlighted both the preceding nature of language and social relations in the construction of personal being and the social expressive orders where individuals present themselves in various and multiple ways. To particulate the primary role of the social and conversational reality in the investigations of individual and social selves, Harré (1983, p. 20) stated that “all that is personal in our mental and emotional lives is individually appropriated from the conversation going on around us and perhaps idiosyncratically transformed.” In this sense, “there are no mental entities other than the public and private actions people engage in” (Harré, 1998, 3). Harré referred to conversations as the primary structure in which both the social and psychological reality is constructed. In order to access the beliefs, rules, and logics of reasoning, we must investigate the discursive construction of accounts regarding agency and personality (Burkitt, 1993, p. 65).

Later, Harré (1998) has further developed the dynamics of personal and social being by differentiating three dimensions of agency: self 1, self 2, and self 3. Self 1 refers to the embodied singular perspective and the sense of self; self 2, to the personal attributes, beliefs, and characteristics about oneself developed in relation to one’s history; and self 3, to the social person one is from the perspective of others. All of these dimensions can be articulated discursively either by using the first person indexical, through self-concept in narratives of oneself or in accountive practices in conversation with others (Harré 1998, pp. 8–9, 177–178). Taking into account both the personal and social elements of human behavior and their connectedness to discursive practices, Harré and Gillet (1994, p. 27) summarized the starting points of discursive psychology, or the dynamic paradigm, as follows:

1. Many psychological phenomena are to be interpreted as properties or features of discourse, and that discourse might be public or private. As public, it is behavior; as private, it is thought.
2. Individual and private uses of symbolic systems, which in this view constitute thinking, are derived from interpersonal discursive processes that are the main feature of the human environment.
3. The production of physiological phenomena, such as emotions, decisions, attitudes, personality displays, and so on, in discourse depends on the skill of the actors, their relative moral standing in the community, and the story lines that unfold. (Harré & Gillet, 1994, 27.)

A common feature for all the aspects in the discursive psychology of Rom Harré and his colleagues is the notion of human beings as fundamentally moral beings. All social action, then, is based on shared and rule-governed patterns of collective activity that
underlie the conventional and unconventional norms and conventions of behavior (Harré, 1997). These rule-governed patterns are based on local moral orders that assign different kinds of rights and duties for individuals and collectives. The local moral orders are fundamentally social and a result of discursive practices. However, the moral orders are not only cultural and situated guidelines that individuals adopt or apply in their everyday lives but also defeasible and subjectable to appraisal and remediation. According to Harré (1993), the competence of the social being, the presentation of the social self, is determined in how individuals succeed in accommodating their self-presentation to the surrounding moral orders. Therefore, the analysis of moral orders and social behavior should focus on the discursive processes taking place in social episodes.

Harré’s and his colleagues’ views and ideas on discursive psychology differ to some extent from the mainstream discursive psychology. Although Harré emphasizes the primary role of conversations and discourse over individual attributes, his discursive psychology entails the idea of individual cognition. In addition, Harré’s DP entails the idea of structures that precede the individuals and social interaction, mainly regarding the state of moral orders. Although moral orders are understood as products of discursive actions, they simultaneously create expectations, and structures, as to how individuals should act in a given social episode. In this study, the focus is not on evaluation of individual intentions, objectives, or self-concept. However, the idea of human beings as moral agents is taken as a starting point in the investigations of local moral orders. This sets the focus of analysis on interpersonal relations and positioning, and on the construction, and articulation of local moral orders. Within the past 30 years, Harré and his colleagues have paid special attention to the processes between local moral orders and individual and interpersonal action. In the attempts to further the understanding of social action in relation to rights and duties, theoretical framework called positioning theory has been developed (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999b; 2010; Harré, 2012).

### 3.3 POSITIONING THEORY

#### Roots, origins, and developments

Ever since the dawn of discursive psychology, special attention has been paid to the public construction of identity. In accordance with post-structuralist and social constructionist theories, identities are not considered as static, inner features of individuals but rather as publicly constructed and contextual versions of oneself and interpersonal relations (e.g., Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, pp. 3–5). As Benwell and Stokoe (2006, 4) stated, analogously with Harré’s view on the social self, “there is no such thing as an absolute self, lurking behind discourse.” To investigate the dynamics of public identity construction, many discursive and narrative psychologists have turned their analytical focus on the analysis of subject positions (e.g., Bamberg et al. 2011; Davies & Harré, 1990; Hollway, 1984; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). By emphasizing the cultural and historical construction of identities, it is argued that identity is not an essentialist and uniform concept but rather “a strategic and positional one” (Hall, 2011, p. 3). In accordance with the starting points of this study, this suggests that identity and interpersonal relations are considered as “never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting, and antagonistic, discourses, practices.
and positions” (Hall, 2011, p. 3). This sets a challenge as to how subject positions should be defined and how they should be investigated.

According to Törrönen (2013), research focusing on subject positions can be divided into three clusters based on the scope of their analysis. A situational perspective on identities focuses on the immanent nature of subject positions and on the positionings among interlocutors in conversations. Conversation analysis can be regarded as an example of such analysis with its focus on in situ interaction and inductive analysis. A broader approach comes in the form of cultural analysis, which focuses on the ways in which larger cultural categories are produced through subject positions. This kind of analysis also considers the situational aspects of positioning but extends the analysis to a broader cultural framework. Lastly, subject positions can be investigated and defined through critical DA, which sets its focus on a societal perspective. In this case, subject positions are understood as an expression of larger macro-contexts connecting to the political and economic structures and processes. As Törrönen (2013) stated, all these approaches can take a different stand on subject positions focusing on classifications between groups, participant roles, viewpoint structures, or positions in interactions. The conceptual and theoretical core of this study, positioning theory, represents both the interactionist, and cultural perspective.

The roots of positioning theory can be traced to feminist post-structuralism in the 1980s, especially to the works of Hollway (1984) on gender differences in the construction of subjectivity. Hollway was one of the first scholars who introduced the concept of subject positions in relation to discursive practices and the construction of subjectivity. In addition, positioning theory stems from philosophy of language, particularly the works of Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin, Vygotskian psychology, and micro-sociology of Harold Garfinkel and Erving Goffman. In the context of positioning theory, the ideas of Wittgenstein’s later philosophy (e.g., Wittgenstein, 1953) can be seen in the central role of language in the creation of social reality. Originating from Austin’s (1961) conceptualizations on speech acts, positioning theory regards language use as a practice of speech acts that have both a declarative and a social consequential aspect. Both Wittgenstein and Austin represented a philosophy of language that prioritizes the role of language over individual cognition in a similar fashion with social constructionism. The starting points of adopting the cultural norms and skills required for social action from the surrounding social and cultural contexts aligns positioning theory with Vygotsky’s (1986) views on symbiotic relationship in development. Furthermore, adopting the norms for appropriate social behavior are understood among positioning theory in a similar fashion with Garfinkel (e.g., 1967) and Goffman (e.g., 1983) and their investigations on the everyday rules of social episodes. In addition, Goffman’s (1959) views on the presentation of self can be regarded as a baseline for the investigations on discursive presentation of social selves or personas in the context of positioning theory. Put to a broader frame, positioning theory represents a specific version of discursive psychology in the terrain of social constructionism and draws on multiple theoretical and conceptual sources.

The starting points and key concepts of the positioning theory were first outlined and published by Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990). In their article, Davies and Harré presented positioning theory as an immanentist approach to the investigation of conversations as rule-governed joint action. Continuing to some extent with the ethogenic agenda, the writers emphasized the contextual and indexical investigation of conversations and speech acts as a way of constructing individual subjectivity. Here, Davies and Harré presented the concept of position as a more dynamic
alternative to the concept of role that does not depict the multifaceted dynamics of social episodes and conversations in enough rigorous manner. Later, more elaborated conceptualizations regarding different varieties of positioning have been presented (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991) alongside with systematic overviews of the theory itself and research applying the theory (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999a; Harré & Moghaddam, 2003b; Harré, Moghaddam, Pilkerton Cairnie, Sabat, 2009). Theretofore, scholars had focused either on individual, intergroup, or inter-institutional levels of positioning utilizing a variety of different kinds of data. Surprisingly, relatively minor body of work dealt with naturalistic interaction data and none of the research tackled interpersonal themes in a small group context. Within the past 10 years, some delineating articulations regarding the theory itself have been made, mostly tackling positioning-related themes to identity and selfhood (Slocum-Bradley, 2008, 2010; Harré, 2015a) as well as the role of positioning theory in narrative and therapy research (Harré & Dedaić, 2012) and other discursive and positioning theory-oriented approaches (Harré, 2012; Harré, 2015b). In recent years, positioning theory has also been introduced as a complementary framework for the analysis of social representations (Harré & Moghaddam, 2015).

Key concepts and starting points

Looking at both personhood and interpersonal relations as a result of contextual, diverse, local, and temporal language use, and cognition forms the starting point for positioning theory-oriented inquiry. In this context, conversations hold a predominant role as the primary source of public and private processes, such as memory, decision making, conflicts, and problem solving. Concerning interpersonal relations and processes, interpretations and perceptions concerning the distributions of rights and duties among interlocutors have a defining effect (e.g., Harré, 2008). Positioning theory sets to investigate the relationship between what people perceive they can do and what they end up doing. For Harré (2015b), individual’s conceptions about the rights and duties to do things is the key in understanding this relation. Indeed, “what we do is just a sliver of what we may do, which is itself only a sliver of what we can do—are capable of, powerful enough for, or sufficiently endowed in one way or another to do” (Harré, 2015b, p. 265). The rights and duties to act in a certain way unfolds in different ways in different social contexts and episodes depending on their local moral orders. These orders take both explicit and implicit forms. While outlining the varieties of these moral orders, Van Langenhove (2017) divides them on a macro- and micro-scale to cultural, legal, institutional, conversational, and intrapersonal moral orders each of which originate in social interactions and through symbolically mediated language. Each of these moral orders set rights and duties for individuals, groups, and even societies. For example, legislation assigns rights, and duties regarding action to individuals, societies, and even globally across nations. Despite of the dispositional nature of these classifications and due to their embeddedness in cultural and discursive practices, the moral orders are disputable and negotiable. Depending on the social episode, different moral orders might become active, whereas others, not relevant to the social episode, might be more latent. Nonetheless, as Van Langenhove (2017) stated, the moral orders often overlap and might be difficult, or unnecessary, to separate with one another.
Harré and Van Langenhove (1999a, p. 1) defined positioning theory as “the study of local moral orders as ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting” emphasizing how these rights and duties are distributed among the interlocutors, groups, and institutions. In this context, the concept of position is often defined as the more dynamic counterpart of the traditional concept of role. Roles are regarded entailing relatively fixed demands, whereas instructions, and restrictions, positions are contextual, defeasible, and ephemeral. In comparison to roles, the rights and duties assigned with positions are regarded more temporal and dynamic (e.g., Harré & Slocum, 2003, pp. 126–127). Positioning in this context refers to the speech acts and social action through which positions are constructed, assumed, and assigned. Position refers to the context-specific rights and duties to speak and act in a certain way. In more detail, the concept of position should be understood as “a metaphorical concept through reference to which a person’s ‘moral’ and personal attributes as a speaker are compendiously collected” (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 17).

Positioning occurs as a part of a lived storyline, in which each participant holds a specific set of rights and duties, that is, positions. For example, a conversation between a student and a professor is very likely to unfold in a manner of a counseling or tutorial storyline in which both participants hold different kinds of positions with regard to rights and duties. However, the storyline might change if, for example, the student disagrees with the professor and challenges one’s authoritative position. This might lead to a storyline of conflict or negotiation with a different position structure.

As an interactional phenomenon, positioning is always relational as each position hold a counterpart with a different set of rights and duties. Harré and Van Langenhove (1999b) made use of Austin’s (1961) concepts of illocutionary and perlocutionary force when delineating the role of speech acts in discursive positioning. The former refers to the social meaning of the speech act, whereas the latter refers to the social consequence that the speech act eventually has. For example, in the case of a request to take out the trash (illocutionary force), the request might have the effect of either taking the trash out or not (perlocutionary force). To sum up and to illustrate the mutually determining nature of the speech acts, positions, and storylines, a triad-like construction is often presented (e.g., Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999; Harré 2008; 2015b). These “three relevant background conditions for the meaningfulness of a flow of symbolic interactions” (Harré, 2008, p. 30) are presented in Figure 2.

Within this framework, social action is understood as the result of the dynamics between the three vertices of the triad. In this context, positioning can take several different forms. Perhaps the simplest way to describe positioning dynamics is to make a distinction between self and other positioning. Self-positioning refers to the
ways people position themselves, either explicitly, or tacitly, to a certain position. Other positioning refers to how others are positioned, for example, in conversations. In interaction self and other positioning occurs simultaneously and in immanent fashion, whereas self-positioning is reflexive, and can take place textually in many forms. Positioning can be divided into different modes according to its social scope. First-order positioning refers to a positioning act that is not challenged by others and as the interaction continues uninterruptedly. Second-order positioning refers to a situation when a previous positioning act is challenged by someone else. First-order positioning can also be referred to as performative positioning and second-order positioning as accountive positioning. When accountive positioning takes place outside the original social episode but concerns the events of the original episode, this positioning is referred to as third-order positioning. Other ways of characterizing positioning are to pay attention to the moral orders of the social action or to the personal characteristics regarding the action. Moral positioning refers to a situation when someone else’s actions are scrutinized with reference to the moral expectations (e.g., doing someone’s job) of the episode. If for some reason a person has not been able to fulfill the expectations of this order, one might justify one’s positions by referring to personal attributes (e.g., being sick). This kind of positioning is referred to as personal positioning. In addition, positioning can be understood as either tacit or intentional positioning depending on how someone’s position is constructed. Tacit positioning occurs frequently in everyday interactions as people do not explicitly name themselves as a holder of a certain position but rather just act according to one. In this context, intentional positioning refers to a situation when someone explicitly brings forth their position, for example, as a chair of a meeting. This could also be referred to as deliberate positioning, although the intentionality, or deliberateness on one’s behavior cannot be determined by the mere investigation of social interactions. (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1991; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999.)

In the context of the positioning triad, social episodes, and conversations unfold according to specific storyline structures. Storylines can be regarded as “established patterns of development” (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003a, 6) that guide the social interaction in a specific manner. For example, a visit to the doctor’s office follows a storyline of an institutional encounter that is quite different from a storyline of a family dinner. It is evident that the previous experiences of, say, a group have a great impact on the ways episodes and storylines unfold. As a part of a social episode, then, storylines function as a script-like construct that assists individuals to navigate and take part in the episode in a meaningful way. As a part of individual identity construction, a storyline can be articulated as a part of individual narration of personal experiences and understandings (see, e.g., Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999b). Overall, storylines also make positioning comprehensible as each storyline comes with its sets of appropriate rights and duties and ultimately positions. In social episodes, multiple different storylines can take place each of which with their own set of positioning dynamics. Resonating the starting points of the ethogenic paradigm, social episodes can be defined as sequences of events and actions that people take part in and share its meaning. An episode has a distinct beginning and ending and can vary by duration from a few seconds to longer ceremonies and events. (Harré & Secord, 1972, p. 10). However, episodes are relational events to the extent how individuals taking part in the episode are both shaped to act in a certain way by the episode and how the participants shape the episode themselves (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999a, pp. 4–5).
Understanding the dynamics of social episodes from the positioning triad perspective is commonly regarded as the starting point of positioning theory-oriented analysis. Recently, the starting points of the triad have been developed further by focusing specifically on construction of identity and the self. Slocum-Bradley (2010) has suggested a theoretical and analytical framework referred to as the positioning diamond by adding the concept of identity as fourth vortex to the previous triad. In addition, Harré (2015a) has also specified the basis of positioning replacing the triad with a quadrangle and adding the concept of “self” as the fourth vertex. According to Harré (2015a, p. 271), “the emergence of selves has been implicit in positioning studies from the beginning.” In this context, the self is viewed as “the beliefs a person has about him- or herself and the beliefs that others have of the attributes and history of someone” (Harré, 2015a, p. 273) suggesting that the positioning dynamics has always an impact on the personal level, that is, how one views oneself with respect to others. In this study, the focus is not on the individual aspects and experiences but rather on the social interactions between individuals in a group context. It would be rather challenging, albeit interesting, to investigate the concept of the self in this sense using interaction data.

The basic concepts of positioning theory come close to the traditional small group research investigations on roles, norms, and status (e.g., Pennington, 2002). According to Harré and Van Langenhove (1999b), positioning should be regarded as a more dynamic perspective to roles as concepts of positions and positioning describe and explain the dynamics of social episodes in more detail that the traditional conceptualization of roles. However, as Henriksen (2008) has stated, frequent use of specific positions can lead to the crystallization of those positions resulting in a role-like behavior. Henriksen also points out that roles can be liquified into different positions highlighting the dynamic and complex nature of interpersonal behavior.

In the context of small groups, roles are typically regarded as a set of expectations that others assign to or associate with a specific role. Similarly, group norms are connected to these role-based expectations of correct behavior. Overall, group roles, and norms can function as an integral part of group structure and processes. Particularly norms are often implicit and function as the basis for taking part in group activities. Status, on the other hand, refers to the hierarchies between individuals within a group. Nonetheless, status is also connected to the rights and duties attached to a specific position. Both status and roles can be formal and informal in a group setting when formal status and role structures are often explicitly presented, whereas informal status and roles are constructed implicitly in everyday interactions (Pennington, 2002, pp. 88–91).

From the viewpoint of positioning, roles, norms, and status are significant as certain roles, and status positions can create rights and duties that become manifest through positioning. However, the starting points and basic concepts of positioning theory offer a more dynamic perspective to these processes. A role can consist of several different kinds of positions, and norms can be constructed in relation to a variety of moral orders associated with preferred behavior. The status of a group member can be challenged through positioning, and a member with a specific status can position others exclusively.

Based on these conceptualizations, it can be stated that when group members interact in a small group context, they position one another to different kinds of positions. These positions are constructed through different kinds of positioning acts varying from first- to third-order positioning resulting in both self-positioning and positioning of others. These positioning acts can be explicit or implicit, and they may entail elements of personal characteristics or demands for accounts regarding
previous behavior. The group members act according to different storylines and create new storylines. The purpose of this study is to investigate group level storylines and the positioning that they entail instead of individual narration or storylines concerning the individuals themselves.

Applications and contributions

Previous studies that have adopted positioning theory as a theoretical and methodological starting point have mainly focused on individual identity construction, intergroup relations, and both inter-institutional and intercultural investigations (see Harré & Moghaddam, 2003b; Harré et al., 2009). From a disciplinary perspective, investigations in education (Anderson, 2009; Glazier, 2009), intercultural and regional studies (Slocum & Van Langenhove, 2004; Slocum-Bradley, 2008a), conflict management (Moghaddam et al., 2008), and public relations and organizational studies (Boxer, 2003; Ghosten, 2012; James, 2015) in particular have utilized positioning theory as a cornerstone for investigations. Studies on individual identity construction have focused on, for example, the construction of masculine identity through emotion discourse (Walton et al., 2003), malignant positioning of others (Sabat, 2008) and positioning of self and others in classroom interaction (Anderson, 2009). By analyzing how teachers position students in classroom interactions, Anderson (2009) demonstrated how positioning constructs both macro-level cultural categories of identity and agency and micro-level relationships and positions in a classroom setting. Although this analysis represents an implicit approach to the analysis of small groups, it demonstrates the dynamics of both micro- and macro-elements of interpersonal positioning. Investigations on intergroup positioning have focused especially on intergroup conflicts by scrutinizing power relations (Louis, 2008), in-group and outgroup divisions (Tan & Moghaddam, 1999), the social dynamics of disputes (Harré & Slocum, 2003), and political conflicts (Montiel & de Guzman, 2010). Finally, the inter-institutional and intercultural investigations utilizing positioning theory have highlighted the role of positioning dynamics in intercultural politics (Slocum-Bradley, 2008b) and construction and demonstrations of cultural identity (Carbaugh, 1999).

Among these approaches, positioning theory has also inspired quite a few investigations on organizational and business-related issues some of which have even focused on group and team level themes. Positioning theory has been utilized in the investigations of quality systems assessments in an organizational context (Boxer, 2003) and how positioning dynamics intertwine with organizational change communication and identity construction (Bisel & Barge, 2011). None of the above-mentioned studies, however, used naturalistic interaction data or focused their analysis on group-level investigations. Nonetheless, few investigations, in addition to the present study, have utilized positioning theory in the analysis of group level interaction. In the context of business interaction, Clifton (2014) analyzed a private school’s management meeting and elaborated how positioning through narrative practices resulted in the construction of leader identity and doing leadership. The focus of analysis is on multiparty interaction and how certain members of the board can make use of certain discursive resources in meaning making. In addition, Clifton combines features of multimodal analysis looking mainly at nodding and gaze as a part of the meaning making process. This is something that has been previously neglected by positioning theory scholars. Although Clifton does not explicitly examine
group level themes in his analysis, he highlights the social dynamics of positioning and leadership in a group setting. Focusing on team level interaction and behavior, Alaina Zanin and Ryan Bisel (2018) investigated how managers of a sports team can unintentionally assist in creating collective resistance. This ethnographic study draws attention to how the team managers discursively positioned the team members in a way that the members were held guilty in violating team norms. Bisel and Barke concluded that these positioning acts created room for team resistance and highlighted the reciprocal nature of managerial communication and positioning. Although Bisel and Barke highlighted the positioning dynamics of team management in their study, it lacks the detailed analysis of naturally occurring interaction and the investigations on the ongoing and relational positioning dynamics of interpersonal communication.

What most of the previous studies on organizational positioning dynamics have in common is their lack of focus on the local moral orders in relation to which positions and positioning are constructed. Overall, the study of morality, and moral orders is not at all a novel idea. In current research, sociologists have paid special attention to moral themes in various contexts (e.g., Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). Many sociologists have also paid attention to the moral nature of interaction and interpersonal relations. For example, Erving Goffman (1967) has theorized the morality of individual behavior through the concepts of “face” and “facework” by highlighting the context-specific ways individuals present themselves to other people and how individuals adjust when others fail in their facework. Together with Goffman, Rom Harré shared the assumption of human beings as fundamentally moral beings in explaining social behavior as an outcome of human morality. Scholars focusing on the discursive side of morality and moral orders, such as conversation analysts, take a different stance. Starting with the emphasis on discourse and interaction, morality and moral themes are considered as a product of interaction and worth investigating if they are somehow made explicit in interaction or when moral activities take place in interaction (see Bergmann, 1998). However, what becomes evident in both perspectives is that “morality and interaction are deeply intertwined with each other” (Bergman, 1998, p. 286) and as such interpersonal interaction always entails a moral element. Whether implicit or explicit, tacit, or declarative, different kinds of moral orders play a significant role in everyday interactions.

Although positioning theory starts with the overall assumption of individuals as fundamentally moral beings and understanding interpersonal dynamics with reference to local moral orders, explicit investigations on the local moral orders and positioning have gained very little attention. Previous discursive research on moral aspects of everyday interactions have focused on, for example, mundane conversations in family settings (Sterponi, 2003) and institutional interaction in the context of couples therapy (Kurri & Wahlström, 2003) highlighting the discursive construction of moral agency. In a similar fashion, positioning theory starts with conversations and discourse as the arenas of constructing moral agency. However, positioning theory suggests that conversations and other discursive practices rely on, but also construct, local moral orders that function as a structure for interpersonal interaction (Van Langenhove, 2017). It can therefore be argued that these local moral orders play a significant role in the everyday lives of small groups such as organizational management groups or sports groups. However, investigations related to these issues have previously been somewhat neglected in positioning theory-oriented studies.
4 METHODOLOGY, METHOD, AND DATA

In this chapter, I present the methodological aspects of the study alongside the used methods, the data, and ethical considerations. This requires not only the presentation of these issues but also the personal accounts concerning the choices I have made regarding the practicalities of this study. The study and analysis of small group interaction and small group dynamics can be conducted in many ways ranging from experimental and laboratory studies to naturalistic and qualitative methods (Scott Poole & Hollingshead, 2005). Considering the starting points of the Rom Harré’s dynamic paradigm that emphasizes the analysis of everyday social episodes and conversation, I have chosen a methodology for this research that follows the logic of studying natural groups through qualitative methodology. In accordance with Harré and his colleagues, representatives of the symbolic–interpretive perspective and so-called bona fide small group research paradigm have also plead for the use of naturalistic data sets instead of the analysis of controlled laboratory settings (Frey, 2003; Frey & Sunwolf, 2005). Methodology, methods, and data utilized in this study deal with the everyday language use of small group members. This locates the empirical context of this study to the field of DA and discursive methodologies.

It has become evident to me throughout this research process that working within the social constructionist and discursive frameworks requires constant dialogue between the theoretical background and the methodology of the study. In accordance with the social constructionist starting points of positioning theory, my study represents a relativist and discursive ontology (Harré & Gillet, 1994, pp. 29–36) and an intersubjective epistemology suggesting the possibility of multiple and varying realities and the interpersonal construction of meanings, knowledge, and understandings (Toren, 2009; Pascale, 2011, pp. 50–53). Methodologically, this study represents a positioning theory-oriented discursive analysis that I utilized in sub-studies one, two, and four, and a dialogical positioning analysis, which I utilized in sub-study three. In turn, this directed me toward a method of collecting naturalistic small group interaction data. I have summarized the overall empirical starting points of this study in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Summary of the research approach of this study.
4.1 NATURALISTIC MEETING INTERACTION AS DATA

Collecting and analyzing naturally occurring interaction data are at the heart of discourse and CA and discursive psychology. Instead of collecting “researcher-provoked data” (Silverman, 2014, p. 316), particularly conversation analysts have focused their attention to the interactions of everyday lives in different kinds of settings. As Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2013, p. 287) have argued, “the heart of our social and personal being lies in the immediate contact with other humans.” Hence, different kinds of audio, and visual methods of data collection have been adopted to investigate these immediate contacts. Especially in the case of studying small groups or the meso-level life of organizations, using video recorded materials is useful. This method makes visible the everyday lives of the groups and makes the identification of individual speakers in multiparty conversations easier, which helps in identifying non-verbal activities and in describing and investigating the physical and artifactual organization of the groups (LeBaron et al., 2018).

Analyzing natural interaction data also requires making detailed transcriptions of the interactions. Depending on the focus of analysis, the transcriptions can follow a variety of precisions varying from a word-to-word transcription to highly detailed transcription depicting all the facets of interaction (e.g., intonation, overlapping speech, and pauses). The former level of transcription accuracy is more common for DA, whereas the latter is necessary when conducting conversation analysis. The data that I have used in this study has been transcribed by using conversation analytical transcription conventions (see Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Transcriptions can also include specifics about the non-verbal activities, such as gaze, and gestures, taking the level of detail even further. Transcripts of this nature are particularly used in analyzing multimodalities of interaction (e.g., Streeck, Goodwin & LeBaron, 2011). However, because of the vast amount of transcribed data, I chose not to include the multimodal details in the transcriptions. To capture some of the non-verbal viewpoints of interaction in my data, I used the original video-recorded materials as a supplementary data source.

For the purposes of this study, I have utilized two different data sets of naturally occurring meeting interaction data from an institutional context. Previous studies on meeting interaction (Asmuß & Svennevig, 2009; Svennevig, 20012) have highlighted the particularities of meetings as a specific form of institutional interaction. For example, meetings are characterized by the central role of the chair, sequenced topic progression, and proceeding through openings, and closings of themes and issues. Conversation analytical studies on institutional interaction have highlighted the importance of the interaction context by emphasizing the analysis of how individuals orient toward a given context in interaction (Arminen, 2006). For Harré (1993, pp. 50–51), institutional meetings represent certain types of rule-governed social episodes that consist of both social practices (e.g., decision making, planning, and argumentation) and people taking part in the meetings. A positioning theory-oriented perspective of meetings suggests drawing attention to the moral orders of meeting interaction, which form the rule-like foundations for the interpersonal activities in the meetings. In this regard, different structural elements of institutional interaction, such rules, and moral orders, become meaningful only if they are somehow made meaningful in interaction.

For the purposes of data presentation in my sub-studies, I translated the data extract that I chose for the articles from Finnish to English. Translating discourse data can present several challenges for the researcher starting with the correct translation
and retaining the original conversational structure of the discourse data. In the case of
detailed discourse data, such as mine, this can occasionally be challenging. Nikander
(2008) suggested that, while presenting translated data, one should always include a
version of the extract in the original language. However, this is not always the case
as publication policies of scientific journals might have an impact on the nature of
the transcriptions that one should use and how to present them. In my sub-articles, I
was able to include the original Finnish data extract in sub-study one. As for the other
articles, the limited word number in the given publication did not allow me to add
the original data Finnish data extracts. Nevertheless, I translated the data extract in a
way so that the original meaning changed as little as possible.

Data Set 1

First data set (data set 1, DS1) consists of data that I originally used in my master’s thesis
analysis while scrutinizing the possibilities of applying positioning theory-oriented
analysis to the field of micro-cultural group studies. These findings are presented
in sub-study one. At the time of conducting my master’s thesis, I was lucky enough
to get access to data that had already been collected for a different research project
at the University of Tampere. Therefore, these data represent a convenience sample
(see, e.g., Patton, 2002). The data that I analyzed for the sub-study one were originally
collected in 2000 and 2001 as a part of an Academy of Finland-funded research project
dealing with interprofessional team’s decision making in the context of elderly care.
My analysis was based on an analysis of 1 h-long sequence of an almost 3 h-long
interprofessional team meeting. Overall, the data corpus for the project consisted of
42 h of video-recorded meetings consisting of 15 meetings (see Nikander, 2007). This
sequence of the meeting was already transcribed according to conversation analytical
transcription conventions. Since the aim of this analysis was to scrutinize and evaluate
the usefulness of positioning theory for explicit micro-cultural small group research,
a smaller sequence of data was enough to meet these aims. This data set consists
of altogether some 13000 words (105 pages) including speaker symbols, minimal
responses, and pauses.

In more detail, the inter-professional team meeting in DS1 dealt with decision
making concerning long-term elderly care and nursing home placements. The team
discussed cases of support for informal care and made decisions regarding the financial
support for the cases. Altogether 11 cases were discussed in the 1 h-long sequence that
I analyzed. The participants consisted of 11 people: a doctor, a secretary of support
for informal care, three home help service directors, and six public health nurses. All
the participants of the meetings represented their specific expertise regarding the
discussed issues. Both the home help service directors and the public health nurses
held the first-hand information regarding the cases, as they were the ones who had
been in personal contact with the clients.

The meeting took place in a meeting room where the participants sat around a large
table so that everyone could see one another. After starting the meeting and getting
organized, the meeting proceeded by going through the cases in a case-by-case order.
Before a case specific decision was made, the discussed case was presented through
a case description, which was followed by argumentation and discussion. Overall,
the meeting was somewhat unofficial as no official turn allocation took place and the
discussion proceeded rather fluently. This demonstrated the fact that the team had an extensive history of working together.

Data Set 2

The data set 2 (DS2) could be labeled as the primary data for my dissertation study since it represents a larger data corpus and has been utilized in three sub-studies. After finishing my master’s thesis in 2008, I started to plan my doctoral dissertation as a continuum to my master’s thesis. During 2009, I outlined a research proposal for my doctoral dissertation and started to consider different options of data collection and sampling. Continuing with the same theoretical and methodological framework, it was apparent that I would continue working with naturalistic group data. At that point, the aim for my doctoral research was merely to apply positioning theoretical methodology to a larger group interaction data set. In 2010, an opportunity came about to utilize data that were collected as a part of different research project at a different university. Since that project dealt with institutional meeting interaction in the context of organizational change, the available data suited my research purposes very well. In addition, as my aim for the dissertation was not to focus on a specific kind of groups or group phenomena but rather to further the adaptation of positioning theory to the small group research context, a convenience sample suited well my research purposes. This saved me a lot of time since I did not have to collect the data myself and did not have to apply separate permissions for data collection.

This data set was originally collected as a part of a larger research project on structural development in universities and public research institutions consisting of both interview data and video-recorded management meeting data. This project was directed and monitored by professor Ilkka Arminen from the University of Helsinki (from the University of Tampere at the time of data collection). For the purposes of my research, I was able to include the meeting interaction data from the public research organizations. The meeting interaction data were collected in 2009 and 2010 from two Finnish public research institutions (PRIs). Altogether, this consisted of seven management board meetings, four from PRI1 and three from PRI2 forming a corpus of over 16 h (16 h 20 min) of video-recorded data. Two of the meetings in PRI1 were recorded in 2009 and two in 2010. All the meetings in PRI2 took place in 2010. One of the researchers working in the original research project collected the data. Altogether, this data set consisted of some 140–700 words (870 pages) including speaker symbols, minimal responses, and pauses.

Both institutions in DS2 had undergone large mergers right before the time of data collection. In these mergers, two PRIs had been fused together, which influenced both the structural elements and work distribution of the institutions. The management board meetings in both institutions consisted of the CEO of the institution (former CEO of one of the merged institutions) and sector directors of different branches of the institutions (e.g., research branches, communications, and finance). In PRI1, a representative of one of the branches functioned as a secretary in the meetings. In PRI2, also a representative of the staff was part of the management board and functioned as a secretary in the meetings. In addition, a variety of outside members attended the meetings usually functioning as presenters of specific themes and reports. These participants took part in the meetings only momentarily and departed the meetings
either immediately after their presentations and reports or once the discussion related to the theme was over.

In both institutions, the meetings took place in a meeting room at the institution’s headquarters. The participants sat around a long square table facing each other. Both institutions made use of a data projector in which the meeting agenda as well as all other relevant information was presented. Especially in PRI2, most of the participants had their own laptop computers, whereas in PRI1, most of the meeting materials were distributed in paper format. Both institutions followed the meeting agendas rather explicitly and the participants took part in the discussion through official turn allocation. Typically, the meetings proceeded through the chair’s initiative of openings and closings. Unofficial turns and free discussion also took place and therefore the meetings in both institutions could be labeled as semi-official. The details of both DS1 and DS2 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of the data used in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA SET 1</th>
<th>CONTEXT</th>
<th>COLLECTION OF DATA</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data SET 1</td>
<td>Inter-professional team meeting of social and health-care professionals in Finland</td>
<td>Collected in 2000 and 2001</td>
<td>1 hr of an almost three-hour-long meeting</td>
<td>11 (Doctor, secretary of care giving, home help service directors, nurses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI 1 2009: meetings 1 &amp; 2 2010: meetings 3 &amp; 4 PRI 2 2010: 3 meetings</td>
<td>PRI 1 Meeting 1: 59 mins Meeting 2: 75 mins Meeting 3: 1 hr 54 mins Meeting 4: 2 hr 46 mins Total: 6 hrs 54 mins</td>
<td>PRI 1 Meeting 1: 59 mins Meeting 2: 75 mins Meeting 3: 1 hr 54 mins Meeting 4: 2 hr 46 mins Total: 6 hrs 54 mins</td>
<td>PRI 1 Meeting 1: 2 hrs 59 mins Meeting 2: 3 hrs 8 mins Meeting 3: 3 hrs 19 mins Total: 9 hrs 26 mins</td>
<td>PRI 2 16-18 (CEO, administrative director, service director, sector director, staff representative + outside members)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS

As it is often mentioned in texts concerning discursive research methods, transcribing the discursive research data can be regarded as the first step of the analysis (e.g., Nikander, 2008). This was also the case in my study as both data sets consist of transcribed interaction data. The original video-recorded data were transcribed into text format by using conversation analytical transcription conventions. To investigate the sequential nature and orderliness of everyday interactions, conversation analysts have developed a forensically detailed method of transcribing interaction data (Jefferson, 2004). The purpose of these detailed transcriptions is to capture all the original interactional features of the collected data including overlapping speech, intonation, pauses, minimal responses, pace, and tone of the talk. I chose the CA transcription method for two reasons. First, the data had to suit the needs of other researchers who worked mainly with conversation analytical methodologies. Second, and perhaps more importantly, to investigate the positioning dynamics in small group
interaction, it is important to pay attention to the sequential nature of the interactions as well as to investigate the minimal responses of the interlocutors in addition to the prosodic features of talk. Previous studies have demonstrated, for example, that in a group context, even such small features of interaction as minimal responses or non-verbal activities can function as means of creating alignment among the group members (Kangasharju, 2002). In addition, concerning the micro-cultural investigations of small groups, I found it necessary to capture the original group situation in as much detail as possible in the data transcripts to grasp and communicate the natural settings of the groups as clearly as possible.

In the case of DS1, the data that I used for my analysis had already been transcribed for previous research purposes. Therefore, in this case, I missed this first step of analysis as I did not transcribe the data myself. In order to overcome this missing step, I watched the original videotaped material alongside the transcription two times in order to get a tentative impression of the data. I used this method also with the first two meetings of DS2 that were transcribed by another researcher (two first meetings in PRI1).

In the cases of both data sets, to gain access to the data, it was agreed that I would transcribe some or most of the data. In the case of DS1, I finished the transcription of the inter-professional team meeting that I analyzed of which only the first hour had been previously transcribed. Regarding DS2, another researcher working in the original research project in which the data were collected had already transcribed the first two meetings from PRI1. I transcribed the rest and most of the data were in 2010 during an 11 month-long working period. Transcribing the data really helped me to get an overall understanding of the data, its content, themes, and phases. Regarding the transcriptions made by the other researcher, I watched the videotaped recordings following simultaneously the transcripts to get a first look of the data. I did this before I started to transcribe the rest of the data in order to accommodate my own transcribing style (e.g., lining and spacing) to the already existing data.

In the next two sub-sections, I will introduce and go through the first two steps of analysis regarding DS2 consisting of a precursory analysis and discursive positioning analysis utilizing either positioning theory or dialogical analysis. DS1 was also analyzed using discursive positioning analysis according to positioning theory.

Precursory analysis

Constructing an overall picture and understanding of the content of my data were the main purpose of the precursory analysis. I did this by conducting a descriptive analysis, which was followed by a thematic analysis. As a part of the original research project in which also DS2 was collected, a descriptive analysis was conducted to offer an overview of the meeting practices to the institutions involved. This part of the analysis was conducted periodically in 2011. Together with another researcher from the University of Tampere, I conducted the descriptive analysis of the meeting data of PRI1. During that time, I started doing a similar analysis of the meeting data from PRI2, which was finished at the end of 2011. The purpose of these analyses was to pay attention to the overall progression of the meetings, the role of the chair, clarity and transparency of decision making, and participation. In this part of the analysis, we went through the data transcripts from PRI1 reading them through focusing on the above-mentioned themes and thereafter describing the general characteristics of
these themes with the help of data extracts. I used a similar method for the analysis of the data from PRI2, which I conducted by myself.

In the analysis concerning the meeting progression, the focus was on the transitional parts of the meetings in which themes of discussion changed and the meeting progressed topically. We also paid attention to how turns were taken during the meeting (formal/informal turns) and how external factors, such as time limits, effected the progression in the meetings. The role of the chair was analyzed through the participation of the chair with reference to what kinds of turns did the chair take (e.g., asks questions, makes suggestions, and offers information) and how the chair spoke out in the meetings. In the case of decision making, we paid special attention to how well decisions were elaborated and what was decided in the meetings. In this part of the analysis, we focused on those sequences of the meetings that were outlined beforehand in the meeting agendas as decision making topics. While analyzing the participation in the meetings, we conducted a quantitative analysis of different turns used in the meetings. In the case of PRI1, we analyzed turns in decision making sequences, whereas in the case of PRI2, I analyzed turns taking place in strategy discussions. Since the data in PRI1 were collected during a 2 year period, we also compared the findings from the meeting data from 2009 and 2010 to present an evaluation whether participation in the meetings changed during that period. These turns were labeled beforehand as favors, opposes, asks a question, suggests, offers information, answers, and others (unlabeled). Although the turns were categorized prior to the analysis, we considered contextual elements of each turn. That is, the turns were coded into the categories based on what their social response was.

This part of the precursory analysis gave me a comprehensive understanding of the data altogether. For example, I got a sense of how the group members took part in the meetings and how the meetings proceeded. In addition to the descriptive analysis, I found it important, and useful to conduct a somewhat simplified thematic analysis of the data as well. In this inductive part of the analysis, I focused particularly on the topic progression and contents of the meetings in addition to some other details. This part of the analysis was loosely based on the basic principles of inductive thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) starting with generating the initial codes followed by searching the themes and then assigning them into larger categories. In this minimal form of thematic analysis, the purpose of the analysis is merely to organize and delineate the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The codes were generated based on discovering what is going on in the meetings. I used the same codes as we used in the descriptive analysis as a system for coding, only going through the whole data now. By doing this, it was rather simple and straightforward to categorize the codes into larger themes based on what function they served as a part of the meeting. On the basis of this analysis, I identified four thematic phases in the meetings: starting the meeting (getting organized, orienting toward the meeting, and going through the agenda), presenting a case (presenting all the necessary information), discussing a case (asking questions and further details), and ending the meeting (orienting toward the future and going through unofficial issues and themes outside the meeting agenda). After this, I went through all the thematic phases paying more attention to what goes on in each of these themes. This led me to identify four further themes. These themes were management, decision making, argumentation, and disagreements. The theme of management consisted of phases in the meeting in which the groups were explicitly managed (e.g., giving instructions to others, and keeping up with the agenda and timetable). The theme of decision makings consisted of phases in which decisions
were made and articulated and often followed the theme of argumentation, in which different perspectives, and opinions were presented. In the theme of disagreement, the phase of the meeting was characterized by turns in which disagreement with others was explicitly presented.

Both parts and findings of the precursory analysis have not been published anywhere as they were conducted only to get a conceptual hold of the rather large amount of discourse data. However, both parts of the analysis assisted me with the next step of the analysis. Although these analytical phases presented here are clearly separated from each other, it was somewhat difficult to make a clear distinction between them from the viewpoint of the overall research process.

**Positioning analysis according to positioning theory**

Within the context of positioning theory literature, discussion related to methodological procedures as how to proceed with positioning theory-oriented analysis has not been given much attention. Usually, positioning theoretical analyses apply one form of discursive analysis, perhaps most commonly following either the basic principles of thematic DA or thematic decomposition analysis. Both approaches “identifies patterns (themes, stories) within data, and theorizes language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). In this sense, positioning theory-oriented analysis can be regarded as a similar kind of analytical approach focusing on the discursive construction of different storyline patterns and how different interpersonal positions are constructed in these storylines.

According to Harré and Van Langenhove (1999b), the aim of positioning theory-oriented discursive analysis is the analysis of social episodes and the dynamics constructing and steering them. In my analysis, the use of the theory aimed at unfolding the positioning dynamics of institutional meetings as one specific form of work group behavior. From the perspective of analytical procedures, Harré and Van Langenhove have suggested that positioning theory-oriented analysis can start with any one of the three vertexes presented in the positioning triad. Similarly, Jones (2012) has demonstrated the use of positioning theory as an analytical tool for discursive and interaction analysis highlighting the triad-like approach in empirical positioning analysis. In addition, Jones emphasized the analysis of the social force of positioning acts. That is, what is the social consequence of each positioning act in relation to, for example, to the storyline structure of a given social episode. It is this notion of the social force of positioning that was also the core of my positioning theory-oriented analysis. Keeping in mind the starting points of micro-cultural and meso-level group investigations, I was not only interested in the interpersonal positioning dynamics but also on how these dynamics influence the lived storylines of the groups and how different group level phenomena could be understood in terms of positioning, storylines, and local moral orders.

On a more general level, positioning theory-oriented discursive analysis represents a deductive and abductive approach to qualitative research, which sets it aside from other discursive methodologies that generally embrace an inductive approach. My analysis represents a deductive approach to the extent that I have applied the starting points and theoretical concepts of positioning theory as methodological tools in my analysis. However, my aim has not been to set hypotheses or test the theoretical foundations of the theory but rather to develop an understanding of discursive positioning dynamics.
in group interaction through positioning theory. This naturally requires an ongoing dialogue between analysis of the data and the theoretical starting points. In this sense, my study represents an abductive qualitative analysis (Tavory, 2014).

In the case of both data sets, I decided to approach the analysis from the perspective of storylines. Hence, the baseline for sub-studies one, two, and four was storyline analysis, which aimed at identifying the episodic structure of each meeting and paying special attention to the dynamic shifts in storylines in each social episode. Each storyline was analyzed in a turn-by-turn fashion focusing on the different orders of positioning (first-, second-, or third-order positioning) as well as the performative and accountive aspects of each positioning act.

The overall aim of the positioning analysis was to look at the social aspects of the positioning. This meant looking at both the illocutionary and perlocutionary forces of each speech act. That is, how different speech acts position both the speaker as well as the others in specific positions and what takes place after this in the conversation. This means that the focus was not on the individual intentions or meanings of action but rather on the social aspects and consequences of discursive positioning acts.

In sub-study one, my primary aim was to investigate how well the basic starting points and concepts of positioning theory could be adapted to group interaction analysis. First, I identified the storyline structure of the meeting with relation to the thematic progression of the meeting and what was being discussed and addressed in the meeting. I focused particularly on what happens in each storyline in terms of positioning theory by analyzing each utterance and labeling the different forms of positioning based on their relatedness to other turns. This labeling of positioning acts was always done with reference to other turns in accordance with the idea of the relational nature of positioning.

Going through and analyzing the DS2, it became apparent to me that it would be beneficial to pay attention to specific group level phenomena within the data instead of scrutinizing the rather extensive amount of data as a whole. In sub-study two, I focused my analysis of decision making episodes on PRII, which had been labeled as matter “to-be-decided” in the meeting agendas. This allowed me to pay detailed attention to a limited amount of data that nevertheless was an integral part of the management board’s functions. This part of the analysis also followed the logic of storyline analysis starting with the identification of the decision making storylines followed by a detailed investigation of the unfolding of sub-level storylines taking place within the decision making episodes. In this part of the analysis, I analyzed in more detail each decision making episode according to their storyline structure looking at how a change between two storylines takes place and identifying sub-storylines in which micro-scale positioning takes place. In addition, I analyzed in more detail how each positioning act and the lived storyline was connected to the positioning of the team’s tasks and the task related moral orders (e.g., who needs to do what, when, and how?). After the analysis of decision making episodes, I focused my analysis on interpersonal conflicts. I operationalized the concept of conflict as second-order positioning in which a previous positioning act is challenged or confronted. This was followed by the analysis of the perlocutionary effects of the second-order positioning acts. Thus, I investigated what happened after the second-order positioning act paying special attention to whether the conflicts were resolved or not and if they were, how this was achieved. In this part of the analysis, I incorporated conceptualizations of different kinds of dialogical scenarios (Gergen, 2015; Gergen, Gergen & Barrett, 2004) and labeled them as either generative or degenerative dialogical scenarios.
Positioning analysis according to dialogical analysis

One of the sub-findings of the precursory analysis was an observation on how in both institutions a great part of the meetings consisted of talk about the institutions of themselves. This form of talk especially took place in strategy discussions. Already at this stage of the analysis, I decided that I would come back to this theme in my later analyses. In both institutions, some of the meetings focused particularly on strategy issues. I decided to focus my analysis for this part of the study to these strategy discussion episodes.

For the purposes of this analysis, that is presented in sub-study three, I adapted, together with Dr. Pekka Kuusela (first writer of the sub-study), a qualitative method developed for the analysis of multivoicedness and dialogicality originally outlined by Aveling, Cornish, and Gillespie (2014). The purpose of this method is to systematically analyze qualitative text data, namely, interviews, and identify the different voices used in identity talk. In previous studies, this method had not been adapted to the analysis of collective positioning in a meeting interaction context.

According to Aveling et al. (2014), the dialogical analysis of multivoicedness should be conducted in three phases: identifying and labeling the I-positions of each speaker in each turn, identifying other voices (“inner-Others”) that each of the speakers use, and finally analyzing the relations between each different voice (both I-positions and inner-Others). All these phases are conducted using the logic of inductive content analysis as a starting point.

For the purposes of our analysis, we conducted an adapted form of this method starting with the identification of I-positions but continuing from there to the identification and analysis of we-positions. We also conducted a quantification of both I-positions and different forms of we-positions as a part of this phase of the analysis. In the next part of the analysis, we focused on identifying to what the speakers refer to when they are talking about “we.” Through this, we were able to classify the forms of we-positioning that dealt with the overall discussion of “we” as an institution. This was followed by a further analysis of the different voices used in these we-positions.

In the last part of this analysis, we analyzed the different voices through which the we-positions were constructed to identify the multivoicedness of the we-positions and their relation to the socially constructed ways of understanding institutional strategies.

I have summarized the methodological starting points, data sets, and research questions of each sub-study in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of sub-studies according to research questions, methodology, and data set.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-study</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Data Set</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How does the starting points of positioning theory suit the investigations of microcultural small group research?</td>
<td>Positioning theory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What are the positioning dynamics of group decision-making?</td>
<td>Positioning theory</td>
<td>2 (PRI 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>How is collective identity constructed in management team meetings through we-positioning?</td>
<td>Dialogical analysis</td>
<td>2 (PRI 1 &amp; 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What is the role of positioning dynamics in creating and resolving small group conflicts?</td>
<td>Positioning theory</td>
<td>2 (PRI 1 &amp; 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Studying naturalistic group interaction data is no exception to the basic guidelines and standards of ethical qualitative research. Regarding the ethical considerations of my study, I considered both procedural, and practiced ethical issues. From the procedural perspective (Silverman, 2013; Tracy, 2010), the key ethical issues of my study dealt with informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and avoiding harm.

In all of the institutions investigated in this study, participants had given their permission for the data collection at the beginning of the research projects. In addition, in the case of DS2, all outside members visiting the management board meetings were informed about the recording of the meetings. However, regarding the informed consent and voluntary participation, the institutional setting of the data collection might pose some ethical concerns as some of the participants might have felt reluctant to participate in the recordings but might have felt compelled to do so. Thoughts of this nature were not outspoken, but nevertheless, this does not mean that feelings and thoughts of this nature did not occur. In the case of DS2, the institutions received a report and evaluation concerning their meeting practices in return for their participation. In this regard, all the participants knew that taking part in the recordings holds a potential in developing their meeting practices.

In both data sets, the meetings dealt with delicate issues concerning either client information (DS1) or institutional matters (DS2). To ensure the anonymity of all the participants, institutions, and their stakeholders, I, and all the other researchers dealing with the data made sure that the confidentiality was not breached. Alongside the other researchers, I did not report the origins of the data (names of the institutions) in any public domains or to anyone outside the original research projects besides my supervisors who were not part of the original research projects. I used pseudonyms in all data extracts that were used in the sub-studies to ensure the anonymity of the participants and institutions. Whenever a name of a project, sector of an institution, or a name of a stakeholder was mentioned in the extracts, I either used pseudonyms, or deleted the information altogether from the extract.

DS1 had already been anonymized at the time of transcribing the data, whereas DS2 was not transcribed to an anonymous format. I kept the original data video-recorded data in an external hard drive, which was always under my surveillance or kept in a locked cupboard in a locked room. During the research project, I printed out altogether one print of the transcribed material of DS1 and six prints of DS2 that were all handled and stored in a similar fashion with the video recordings.

Regarding the practiced ethics during my research process, one theme became relevant. Particularly in sub-study three, in which I, together with another researcher, investigated the strategy discussions of the institutions, some of the discussion dealt in considerable amounts with explicit details regarding the basic functions of the institutions as well as their stakeholders. Although all these discussions were a part of the analysis, we had to leave out some of the content as a material for data extracts and examples. The deletion and modification of the original interaction transcripts would have made it almost impossible to present the extracts in an understandable form. However, we were able to use different segments of the data to present our findings albeit those segments would have not necessarily been our first choices.

In the context of positioning theory-oriented research, it is also important to pay attention to the ethical dimensions of the chosen methodology. Using a specific methodology is always a choice that entails ethics. In the context of my study,
the choice of approaching small groups as micro-cultures from the perspective of positioning dynamics is justified by the lack of both small group studies applying the basic concepts of positioning theory and the explicit investigations of small groups from the perspective of discursive studies. However, in the context of discourse studies, especially critical DA, ethical considerations entail issues beyond the chosen methodology (Graham, 2018). Conducting critical DA is ethical as it aims at unveiling or scrutinizing surrounding power structures that may result, for example, in oppressive practices. In the context of positioning theory, the analysis of local moral orders bares resemblance to these starting points. There might be some positionings within the groups resulting in practicing power over others and even silencing some of the group members. By shedding light on these processes my study undoubtedly has an ethical orientation to it. However, my aim is not to take an ethical stance as to what kinds of moral orders are perhaps favorable or questionable but to make these moral orders visible in the context of small groups. These considerations highlight the importance of making sure that the data used in this study remain anonymous.
5 FINDINGS OF THE SUB-STUDIES

In this chapter, I present the key contents and findings of my sub-studies in the order of their publication. All sub-studies include specific and detailed research questions, which are in line with the overall aims of this summary article.

First sub-study deals with the methodological aims in that it focuses on my investigations of applying positioning theoretical analysis as a method for micro-cultural group studies. Sub-studies two, three, and four tackle the themes of the pragmatic aim of this summary. In sub-study two, I focused on decision making episodes from the perspective of positioning theory in one of the institutions in my data in accordance with research question two. In the third sub-study, written together with senior lecturer Pekka Kuusela, we focused on the collective positioning of the management teams by investigating the use of we-positioning in strategy discussions. In the fourth sub-study, I focused my analysis on conflict episodes in the management teams investigating them through positioning theory and concepts of dialogical scenarios.

5.1 POSITIONING THEORY AS A TOOL FOR MICRO-CULTURAL GROUP STUDIES

In the first sub-study, I investigated how positioning theory would suit the aims and purposes of micro-cultural groups studies. For the purposes of this study, I analyzed the interprofessional team meeting of DS1 by identifying both positioning acts taking place in the interaction and the storyline structures of the meeting. Overall, the findings demonstrate the suitability of positioning theory when studying small group interaction and behavior. In addition, the findings unveil the ways different storylines guide the proceeding of and positioning in the meeting. According to the findings, the storyline structure of the meeting is in a constant dynamic state, meaning that although the meeting follows a certain storyline structure, the positionings take place in each storyline result in minor, ephemeral sub-storylines.

Previous small group research paradigms in social psychology can be coarsely divided in to two approaches—cognitive and psychodynamic. Cognitive approaches emphasize an experimental and individualistic approach to the investigation of small groups, whereas psychodynamic approaches—stemming from the starting points of psychoanalytic tradition—emphasize the investigation of unconscious motives of both individual and group level behavior utilizing a variety of methodologies (Poole and Hollingshead 2005). For the purposes of this study, my aim was to investigate small groups from a micro-cultural perspective (e.g., Hartley, 1997; Denzin, 1999) looking at the actual happenings of a small group from a discursive perspective. The micro-cultural perspective, like cognitive, or psychodynamic approaches, is not as uniform, and coherent research field. It can be regarded as an approach to investigate the everyday lives of groups, interaction, and culture, looking at groups as context bound and situated realities. Previous micro-cultural small group studies have focused, for example, on the social processes of leadership, power, integration, and cohesion (Burke 2003; see also Rohall, Milkie, & Lucas 2007). In addition, studies on institutional interaction, such as meetings, represent a critical perspective like micro-cultural
investigations and have focused attention to several interactional phenomena taking place in small group contexts (e.g., Firth, 1995). However, these studies, adopting mainly an ethnomethodological, and conversation analytical methodology, do not focus explicitly on small groups as it is done in the field of social psychological group studies.

For the purposes of this study, I chose a micro-cultural perspective of small groups as my starting point with the focus on positioning theory-oriented analysis. Harré and Moghaddam (2003a) referred to positioning theory as a methodology for the dynamic paradigm that aims at examining the situatedness and dynamics of social episodes. Since micro-cultural groups studies and positioning theory seem to share similar aims and interests, I sought out to investigate in more detail the possibilities of utilizing positioning theory as means for micro-cultural group studies. Previous studies utilizing the starting points of positioning theory have mainly focused on investigations of personal identity constructions, inter-group relations, or inter-institutional investigations (Harré and van Langenhove 1999a; Harré and Moghaddam 2003b). Surprisingly, analysis of small groups from the perspective of positioning theory seemed to be missing almost altogether. Using the basic concepts of positioning theory as my methodological approach, I started my analysis with a storyline analysis of the data assuming that the meeting at hand followed a structure identifiable in terms of storylines. This was followed by a closer examination of positioning in each storyline finishing with an investigation of the social consequences of these positioning acts from the perspective of the group and group work. I explained the detailed analysis process in section 4.2.

The segment of the meeting that I investigated in this study consisted of two larger storylines: storyline of starting the meeting and storyline of case discussion. Furthermore, the storyline of case discussion included sub-storylines of case presentation, discussion, and decision making. The analysis also revealed the variety of different kinds of positioning acts that took place in the meeting all of which were connected to the maintenance of social order, assignment of rights, and duties as well as adaptation and construction of specific positions.

During the storyline of starting the meeting, the members of the team-oriented toward the meeting by browsing through papers and getting settled in the meeting room. Both first- and second-order positionings took place in this storyline resulting in negotiations about who has the right to start the meeting and who can give instructions to others. First-order positioning dealt mainly with giving instructions and following them, whereas second-order positioning resulted in brief negotiations. Particularly, expert positioning took place in this storyline when someone else’s position was challenged with regard to specific information concerning the meeting. However, the analysis revealed the dynamic and volatile nature of positioning as the team maintained the social order of the meeting despite the challenging of other’s positions.

Within the storyline of case discussion, I identified three sub-storylines, all of which dealt with specific ways of working together as a group. I labeled these sub-storylines as storylines of case description, discussion and argumentation, and decision making. Each of the storylines included specific kinds of positions, mainly those of experts, and collaborators. The storyline of case discussion was all about the basic function of the group: discussing the client cases and making decisions regarding their home help benefits or possible nursing home placements. Therefore, it was quite evident that, in addition to first-, and second-order positionings, third-order positioning took place in this storyline. Third-order positioning refers to a situation, when an outside
member of a social episode is being positioned in the ongoing episode. In this case, the clients were the object of third-order positioning.

Overall, I noticed that the brief negotiations following the second-order positioning were particularly meaningful in terms of the group’s functioning. The second-order positioning resulted in negotiations about the central concepts and contents as well as constructing a shared understanding about these issues. In addition, second-order positioning resulted in discussions and negotiations concerning the proceeding of the meeting itself. Depending on how the group members adopted new positions or challenged other’s positions, the perlocutionary effects of these positioning acts had an impact on how the whole group functioned. In this sense, the second-order positionings resulted in micro-level social change concerning the functioning of the group. All these positioning acts, in return, resulted in manifestations of micro-level storylines (sometimes only few utterances) within the predominant storylines.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that interpersonal positioning in a small group context plays a somewhat significant role the group’s functioning and some group processes. The findings demonstrate the interconnectedness of positioning and progression of group work, elucidation of shared concepts and themes, argumentation, and decision making, conflicts and conflict resolution, and social change. The findings highlight the importance of micro-analytical research of small groups and the everyday interactions taking place in them highlighting the role of positioning theory to combining discursive investigations with explicit small group research. Overall, this sub-study demonstrated the suitability of positioning theory for the micro-cultural small group investigations.

5.2 POSITIONING DYNAMICS AND SMALL GROUP INTERACTION IN THE CONTEXT OF JOINT DECISION-MAKING

After discovering the usefulness of positioning theory to the investigation of group level phenomena, I wanted to continue with an analysis of a more specific theme of group behavior. In this sub-study, I focused my analysis on decision making episodes occurring in PRII of DS1. The findings demonstrate how decision making episodes consist of varying storylines and how positioning acts in these episodes result in task positioning and the re-creation of local moral orders. In addition, positioning during the episodes intertwined with different group-level phenomena, such as progression of the meeting, establishing the chair’s position, and negotiations on constructing an understanding regarding shared themes and concepts. In addition, my analysis in this sub-study led to conceptual developments of the theory, mainly defining task positioning as a specific group level form of positioning.

The reasons for choosing decision making episodes as the focus of analysis were two-fold. First, I wanted to focus my analysis on a more definite theme that already had an established research tradition within the field of small group research but had not yet been approached extensively from a micro-cultural perspective. Second, particularly meetings in PRII included quite a lot of decision making, namely, labeled in the meeting agendas as topics to be decided. For the purposes of my study, it seemed rather straightforward to choose this specific theme for closer inspection.

In the early stages of this sub-study, in addition to micro-cultural group studies and positioning, I was very much inspired by Rom Harré’s texts and considerations
regarding social episodes as a starting point for this sub-study. According to Harré and Van Langenhove (1999a), to comprehend how, for example, a shared understanding of an event is constructed, one must understand the dynamics of social episodes and how continuity is created through the unity and cohesion of social relations. Continuing with the same theoretical and methodological framework as sub-study one, the aims of this sub-study were to further examine what concepts and themes come into play when examining decision making episodes and their social dynamics in a group setting from the perspective of positioning theory. My aim was not to evaluate the end results of decision making but rather the social process of how the joint action of the team is constructed as a specific kind of decision making episode.

Studying decision making in the context of small groups is by no means a novel subject. Previous studies have emphasized either communication- or interaction-oriented perspectives. Group communication scholars have delineated different models and variables of decision making (e.g., Hirokawa & Scott Poole, 1996), whereas discursive investigations on group-level interaction have highlighted the in-situ social processes of group decision making. Previous conversation analytical studies have paid attention to these themes by investigating, for example, the effects of situated work practices (Alby & Zucchermaglio, 2006), formulation of proposals (Asmuß & Oshima, 2012) and problem solving talk (Angouri & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011). In accordance with the starting points of positioning theory, these studies of naturalistic decision making talk have emphasized the social constructionist and intersubjective nature of decision making. However, investigations of this nature have focused very little, if any, on social positioning, or explicit investigations of groups in the context of decision making.

On the basis of my analysis, I identified the structure of the decision making episodes of the investigated meetings according to storylines. The overall storyline of decision making created an institutional and conversational moral order in which, through both pre-positioning, and interactional positioning, different positions were assigned to the team members entailing specific sets of rights and duties. The decision making storyline consisted of two sub-storylines—storyline of presentation and storyline of discussion—both of which contained also more micro-scale storylines. The relational aspects of positioning came about in these storylines as, for example, in the presentation storyline, the presenter was positioned as an expert and the other team members as requiring information, accordingly. The expert positions were mainly constructed through tacit first-order positioning of the self or through explicit other-positioning. However, the latter form of positioning was more emblematic in the discussion storyline.

The findings demonstrate the central role of the chair to the proceedings of the meeting, as the transitions form one sub-storyline to another often took place through the chair’s initiative. In some cases, however, the presenters themselves made the initiative to move from one storyline to another resulting in task positioning and creating a new local moral order. The micro-level storylines taking place within the sub-storylines of presentation and discussion entailed positioning that resulted in either establishing the role of the chair as the facilitator of the meetings, negotiating meeting procedures, and negotiating concepts, and themes concerning the decisions. The chair’s role as a facilitator in the meetings became apparent when, for example, someone else in the meeting attempted to proceed from one storyline to another without explicit permission of the chair. Micro-level storylines of negotiation also took place when one of the group members did not act according to the position
assigned to oneself in a given storyline but rather challenged the position. This resulted particularly in negotiations regarding the meeting procedures. In turn, challenging the expert position of the presenter via second-order positioning resulting in brief manifestations of conflict storylines leads to negotiations concerning the meeting procedures or the discussed concepts and themes.

Analysis of positioning in a small group in this context led me to the conceptualization of task positioning. The positioning acts and the storylines created during decision making often entailed an element that dealt with how the team should continue with the task at hand, what the central concepts regarding the task meant, or what should be done about the matter in the future. For example, by simply stating that the matter at hand is important and allowing more time for presentation resulted in creating specific kind of an institutional (e.g., What is the meaning of the matter to the institution?) and conversational (e.g., How should the team members orient toward the task?) moral order. I have demonstrated this process in a simplified form in Figure 4.

Findings presented in this sub-study demonstrate the social dynamics of group decision making from the viewpoint of positioning. By highlighting the construction of local moral orders of small groups, the findings bring forth something that has been
previously somewhat neglected by positioning theory scholars. As a result, my findings also demonstrate the overall episodic structure of group decision making according to storylines and the micro-level storyline structures resulting in task positioning and creation of local moral orders. Particularly, the analysis of positioning in a group context sheds light on both the social and instrumental elements of positioning. From the perspective of positioning theory, separation between task, and social elements of group work seems rather artificial. Analysis of this nature makes it possible to investigate what social aspects are related to the construction of group tasks such as decision making.

5.3 COLLECTIVE POSITIONING IN SMALL GROUPS: A DIALOGICAL APPROACH TO STRATEGY DISCUSSIONS

In the sub-study three, I wanted to focus my analysis on the collective positioning taking place in the meetings. Together with the first writer of this sub-study, we chose to analyze the strategy discussions of the management boards of the institutions in DS2. Our analysis focused on how the members of the management boards positioned themselves through we-positioning during strategy discussions simultaneously establishing an understanding of who they were as representatives of a specific kind of institutions. The findings demonstrate three kinds of we-positions, or collective voices, occurring in the meetings: a we-position focusing on the overall nature of the institution, a we-position with reference to the use of specific performance indicators, and finally a we-position dealing with communications and public relations.

Previous studies focusing on strategy discussions in an organizational context have focused on the study of language from the perspective of narratives (Brown & Thompson, 2013), discourse (Kwon, Clarke, & Wodak, 2014), and conversations (Pälli, Vaara, & Sorsa, 2009). These studies have highlighted the language use in strategy making and the situated and interactive practice of strategy construction. However, previous investigations of in-situ interactions in a group context dealing with strategy related issues have been scarce. Our aim in this sub-study was to analyze the collective positioning in the management teams by applying a qualitative method developed to the analysis of dialogicality in the context of individual identity construction. This three-step analysis method, developed by Aveling, Cornish, and Gillespie (2014), aims at identifying the multivoicedness in interpersonal dialogs. Within this approach dialogicality should be understood as locally and historically constructed processes in a similar manner as positioning in the context of positioning theory. Aveling et al. (2014) suggested that this method could also be adapted to organizational investigations “by examining, for example, the voices within an organization’s documentation, mission statements, procedures and processes” (p.15). We chose to focus our analysis on strategy making processes in an organizational context due to the amount of strategy discussion taking place in the institutions and the importance of strategy work in current public research organizations as well as due to the lack of previous research on the issue from this perspective.

Strategy discussions in organizations are a central forum for the construction of shared identity and understanding of current affairs and future aims. Although we did not apply a positioning theory-oriented perspective to our analysis, we were able to identify different we-modes of action that could also be understood as different kinds of we-positions. Our findings highlight the use of both I- and we-positions in
the meetings. Out of these two forms of positioning in the individual turns taken during the discussions, the we-positions were most common. Depending on to what was referred to as “we” by the team members, we identified three levels, or forms, of we-positions. The first we-position was used when referring to “we” as an immanent entity, the team as here, and now. The second we-position referred to sub-categories within the team. The third we-position referred to the institution itself as an object of appraisal and specification. Out of these three we-positions, the third one was the most common, which was not surprising, as the strategy discussion were basically all about what the institutions were and what they were supposed to do. Our main qualitative analysis focused on this third we-position category.

In addition to the analysis of individual I-positions, we identified three different collective voices that the team member used in their talk about the strategy. The first mode of the collective we-position was we-as-public-research-institution. This we-mode of action entailed talk about the nature of the institutions of themselves. Particularly, the voices of New Public Management (NPM) and New Public Governance was used when constructing this we-position. It seemed that, at least in these cases, this type of talk had somewhat overshadowed the traditional public administrational discourse. The second mode of the collective we-position was we-as-users-of-performance-indicators. The use of this we-position came about especially in discussion related to the difficulties of operationalizing the performance indicators. Using this we-position, the institutions identified themselves as responsible to measure and evaluate their performance perhaps with reference to political steering systems. The third we-position was we-as-part-of-organizational-communication-and-public-relations and entailed talk about the meanings of the strategy’s central wordings. The use of this we-position aimed at constructing a shared understanding concerning the strategies and how to communicate these contents to both personnel and outside stakeholders. From the perspective of dialogicality, these different parties represented the different inner-others of the PRIs.

These three we-positions represented the three significant voices that the team members used in the strategy discussion. Using these voices, or we-positions, the management boards made sense of the strategy as well as constructed a collective identity with reference to the strategies themselves. All the we-positions entailed also the use of different kinds of I-positions. During the strategy discussions, the team members shifted effortlessly between I- and we-positions although the use of the collective we-positions was more frequent. We interpreted this as a sign of high levels of consensus and agreement.

Although we did not apply the starting points of positioning theory to our analysis, our findings can also be viewed from this perspective. The three different we-modes of action can be understood as we-positions that follow specific storyline structures. The first we-position (we-as-public-research-institution) follows a storyline of development and improvement, which positions the institutions with the duty to constantly develop and improve their aims, purpose, and functions. In the case of the second we-position (we-as-users-of-performance-indicators), the storyline structure focuses on evaluation and appraisal whereas in the case of the third we-position (we-as-part-of-organizational-communication-and-public-relations) follows a storyline of sense making and evaluation. In this storyline, the evaluation refers particularly to evaluations concerning the means of communication. I have outlined our central findings from the perspective of positioning theory in Figure 5.
Our findings highlight the intertwined and dynamic use of different voices and positions in strategy discussions. Through these different voices and positions, the members of the management teams constructed a shared understanding of their strategic aims and functions with reference to both internal (intra-institutional) and external (extra-institutional) voices and inner-others. In addition, our analysis and findings demonstrate the usefulness of the method of analysis of multivoicedness while examining processes of collective identity construction. This further highlights the possibility of applying a dialogical methodology to the analysis collective positioning in a group context.

5.4 POSITIONING, CONFLICTS, AND DIALOGUE IN SMALL GROUPS

In the sub-study four, I focused my attention on conflict episodes in the management board meetings. Starting with the micro-level positioning analysis, this sub-study looks at the fine-grained social dynamics of interpersonal and team conflicts. Findings of sub-study one already suggested me about the usefulness of applying positioning theory to the investigations of small group conflicts. For this reason and since other researchers have indicated the usefulness of positioning theory in the analysis of conflicts, I wanted to focus one of my sub-studies on this theme. The findings of this sub-study illuminate social positioning entailing and resulting in conflicts and different kinds of dialogical scenarios. Episodes that entailed second-order positioning represented conflict episodes that resulted in either generative or degenerative dialogical scenarios depending on how or if at all the conflicts were dealt with.

Several scholars have demonstrated the usefulness of positioning theory to the investigations of interpersonal and collective conflicts (see Moghaddam, Harré & Lee, 2008). Within these studies, conflicts are often approached from a narrative perspective.
looking at how individuals or collectives position themselves in conflict narratives. However, detailed analysis of what kinds of positionings result in conflicts seem to be missing in these analyses. Similarly, traditional small group studies focusing on conflicts from experimental or statistical perspectives often neglect the situated nature of conflicts ending up with classifications of conflicts without examining conflicts in-situ. This has mainly been covered by discursive investigations of conflicts (Grimshaw, 1990) but without the explicit focus on small groups themselves. For the purposes of this study, I operationalized conflicts as a sequence of interpersonal interaction in which one of the interlocutor’s position is challenged by another group member. In terms of positioning theory, this is referred to as second-order positioning. This is a form of positioning in which a previous first-order positioning act is questioned as “the first-order positioning is not taken for granted by one of the persons involved in the discussion” (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 20). Understanding conflicts as a fundamentally social processes and as a result of specific kind of positioning, this allowed me to investigate both the micro-dynamics of group interaction and the surrounding moral orders highlighting the role of the local context of the conflict episodes.

In addition to the explicit investigation of small groups, I contextualized this sub-study as an investigation on managerial work particularly from a moral practice perspective (Jackall, 2010). From an organizational research perspective, this represents a meso-level analysis of managerial work as an interpersonal phenomenon taking place in a group context. Within this context, I applied Kenneth Gergen’s distinctions on different kinds of dialogical scenarios looking at conflict episodes from this framework. I paid special attention to the social outcomes of each conflict episode and labeled them entailing either generative dialogue, which has an aim that the participants construct together by adding to each other’s inputs, or degenerative dialogue, which can “move toward animosity, silence, or the breaking of a relationship altogether” (Gergen, 2015, p. 125).

In my analysis, I identified altogether 34 episodes entailing second-order positioning. Based on the interactions and positionings that occurred after the original second-order positioning and how the conflict was managed, eight of these episodes were labeled as degenerative conflict episodes and 26 as generative conflict episodes. In the former case, the original second-order positioning of one of the group members was followed by positioning acts that did not include re-positioning of the conflict counterparts and the original conflict was left unresolved. This involved either silencing the initiator of the conflict altogether or simply just moving on in the meeting without explicit attempts to find a solution to the conflict (e.g., re-positioning the participants).

In the case of generative conflict episodes, the group members were able to solve the conflict resulting in the construction of a new shared understanding of the issue at hand or in constructing a new local moral order related to the group’s tasks. The new understanding was achieved through the re-positioning of the conflict counterparts as one of the group members explained and made sense of the details regarding the discussion or the statements of conflict counterparts. In addition, the conflicts were also resolved in a subtler fashion by positioning the topic of the conflict as something that should be dealt with in the future resulting in the creation of a new institutional moral order.

Concerning the storyline structures of the groups, the conflict episodes can also be viewed as conflict storylines initiated through positioning acts and changing the storyline structure of the group. In addition to the possible negotiation or discussion
storylines following the conflicts, the conflict storylines represent micro-level storylines taking place within the larger storyline structures of the groups. Within these storylines and dialogical scenarios, the positioning can result in the construction of malignant or salutary conflict storylines. In other words, the ways conflicts are managed and dealt with result in either positive or negative outcomes. I have outlined these central ideas and findings of this sub-study from the perspective of storylines in Figure 6.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 6. The construction of degenerative and generative conflict episodes and storylines.

The findings of this sub-study demonstrate how interpersonal conflicts are intertwined and connected to the surrounding structures that small groups both provide and construct. Originating from the local moral orders, different storylines entail different positions that might be questioned or challenged. Whenever this kind of challenge occurred, it represented an interpersonal conflict that was interconnected with the surrounding context and had different kinds of group level effects. This kind of investigation of conflicts adds to the previous discursive investigations of conflicts offering both a new conceptualization to the understanding of conflicts in interaction and a new perspective to the explicit investigations of small group conflicts. Understanding conflicts from the perspective of positioning dynamics and as forms of different kinds of dialogue adds to the discussions related to whether group conflicts should be regarded as negative or positive events.
6. POSITIONING DYNAMICS IN SMALL GROUPS: RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In this chapter, I draw together and summarize the key findings of my sub-studies from the perspective of the first two aims of this summary article: the methodological task and the pragmatic aim. First, I present my findings from the perspective of the methodological task aiming at presenting a sketch of positioning theory-oriented small group research methodology. Second, I present my key findings of the pragmatic aim, relating them to themes often presented in small group research and handbooks covering group and team dynamics. These themes and key issues are often also considered as the quintessential cornerstones of successful groups and teams. These key themes include clear role division, clearly articulated aims, and tasks, a sense of collective identity and trust, as well as established forms of making and evaluating decisions, and solving conflicts. I look at what positioning theory could possibly offer to further our understanding concerning the social processes involved with these themes.

6.1 AN OUTLINE OF POSITIONING THEORY-ORIENTED SMALL GROUP RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As stated, positioning theoretical research aims at unveiling and delineating the discursive practices and local moral orders that assign and equip individuals, institutions, and groups with different kinds of rights and duties. In this sense, positioning theoretical investigations underline the understanding of psychology as a moral science highlights the moral nature of psychological investigations (Brinkmann, 2011; Harré, 2012). How could these moral orders and the rights and duties associated with them be investigated in the context of small groups? This starting point turned out to be quite the challenge for me, since previous research on small groups from this perspective was somewhat nonexistent.

A basic principle behind positioning theory-oriented analysis is the idea of strips of life unfolding according to narrative conventions. This is the clearest connection of positioning theory to other narrative studies and research approaches (e.g., Bamberg, 1997; see also Depperman, 2015). Thus, it can be argued that positioning theoretical investigations should focus their analyses to the identification of these narrative conventions and continue from there to a more detailed analysis of positioning dynamics within each of these narratives. However, as Harré and Van Langenhove (1999b) stated, positioning theoretical analysis can start from any of the three vertices of the positioning triad. In addition to the narrative analysis, or storyline analysis, one could start with the identification of positions in interaction or text data or take a closer look at the speech acts and the social forces of each interaction. For the purposes of this study, I started my positioning analysis from the perspective of storylines analysis.

According to Harré and Dedaić (2012), to produce an intelligible episode, schemata, or shared understanding of the ways in which events typically unfold (storyline), are needed. Therefore, storylines function as schemata-like structures for interpersonal and group behavior. It is important to note that in contrast with psychological and individual conceptualizations, schemata are considered here as social in origin (Harré
& Dedaić, 2012: see also McVee, Dunsmore, & Gavelek, 2005). Previous studies that have applied this kind of narrative approach as a starting point for analysis have focused primarily on identity construction. In these studies, storylines are considered as a cultural resource for interpersonal sense making, constructing a sense of self and others. However, investigations regarding the episodic analysis and the construction of a shared understanding of these episodes based on storylines as originally suggested by Harré and Van Langenhove (1999b) have been somewhat non-existent. It is for this reason why I consider some form of a methodological conceptualization as to what this kind of research should contain to be important to focus on.

In accordance with Harré and Dedaić (2012), my study suggests that at least two forms of schemata-like structures become manifest in storylines. First, storylines function as implicit generic scripts relying on previous experiences, cultural expectations, and histories. The ways group members know how to behave and what to expect in meetings are an example of such a script. In my study, I started with the overall question of what the schemata, or the generic storyline structures, of meetings are. All the groups that I analyzed had established a rather systematic way of working together and seemed to share a sense of understanding regarding their overall meeting procedures. These were enforced using meeting agendas. These generic scripts, or storylines, pre-position the group members, and the group itself assigned with specific rights and duties, expectations, and demands. Second, storylines come about as implicit and explicit specific scripts resulting from the positioning dynamics taking place within the generic scripts. These scripts are more ephemeral in the sense that they take place at the level of interaction and can be somewhat fine-grained resulting in the in-situ positioning of the group members. These storylines come about as the positioning takes place in the actual episodes. An example of a specific script could be the task positioning taking place during decision making that results in specific and contextually bound ways of handling the decision making process.

On the basis of my findings, I have outlined an explicit conceptual framework for the purposes of positioning theory-oriented small group research. This presentation starts with the storyline analysis but could easily start with the overall analysis of positions or speech acts. The aim of applying these analytical steps is to first and foremost identify the episodic structures of group activities from the viewpoint of storylines. This is followed by taking a closer look at the positioning dynamics within the storylines and delineating their social consequences from the perspective of the group. This form of analysis represents a thematic storyline analysis stemming from abductive and latent analysis of qualitative data (see Braun & Clarke, 2006).

My suggestion for an analysis of this nature in the context of small groups consists of the following four analytical steps:

1. Thematic analysis from the perspective of storylines
   a. identification of generic scripts (main storylines)
   b. identification of storyline transitions (e.g., When does the group move from one storyline to another?)
   c. identification of pre-positioning (e.g., explicitly assigned tasks, and duties in advance)

2. Identification and analysis of speech acts and positions within the generic scripts/main storylines
   a. positioning dynamics within each storyline
   b. positioning dynamics in the transition of storylines
3. Identification and analysis of implicit and explicit specific scripts
   a. What sub-storylines come about as a result of positioning dynamics in the groups?
4. Identification and analysis of the social consequences of the positioning acts from the perspective of the group. For example,
   a. changes in the interaction order
   b. task positioning
   c. construction of dialogue
   d. specific group processes

As a form or a version of a thematic analysis, this kind of perspective focuses on the data aiming to “identify the features that gave it that particular form and meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). In this sense, the theoretical concepts already play a significant role in the analysis, particularly when labeling the themes or scripts according to specific storylines, as “the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorised” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

In addition to unveiling the episodic structure of group work and group behavior, positioning analysis of this nature aims at not only to identify the key moments of storyline transitions and positioning but also their social consequences (i.e., perlocutionary effects). Whenever a member of a small group positions another group member, or the group is moving from a storyline to another because of particular kind of positioning, the group faces a moment in the interaction that holds the potential of steering the group to different directions. These transitions can be regarded as striking moments, or key moments (Shotter, 2006), regarding the functioning of the group. With the help of storyline-oriented analysis, these key moments become identifiable. Including a more detailed positioning analysis of these moments assist in illuminating the possible social consequences of these moments from both interpersonal- and group-level perspectives.

In the context of my study and data, the institutional storylines of the meetings as a specific kind of social episodes represent generic storylines. These generic storylines included the larger storylines of the meetings assigned already to some extent in the meeting agendas (e.g., presenting a case to others) or that were based on previous experiences of working together. This was evident in the notions regarding the discussions and decision making as often the chair of the meeting, in most cases, explicitly stated that a presentation would first take place followed by a discussion and decision making.

Within the larger storylines, the subtler sub-storylines represented the specific scripts, or storylines, taking place as a result of interpersonal positioning. For example, in sub-study two, the small negotiations in decision making episodes concerning the meeting procedures resulted in brief negotiation storylines that resulted in framing the local moral order of the task at hand. Similarly, the conflict storylines in sub-study four represent these specific scripts as they were the result of second-order positioning and took place within the larger main storylines of the meetings. All these sub-level storylines are tacit in nature and ephemeral following specific contextually bound scripts.

Approaching small group and multiparty interaction from this perspective sets the focus of analysis very close to the initial starting points and aims of positioning theoretical analysis—the investigation of the dynamics of social episodes (Harré &
Van Langenhove, 1999a, p. 5). It is quite striking that only a handful of studies has shared this analytical focus mainly associated with micro-social constructionists. Instead, in many studies the starting points of positioning theory have been applied to the investigations of identity construction often distancing themselves from the investigations of in-situ interactions rather focusing on other forms of textual data (e.g., interviews and reports) and adopting a macro-constructionist perspective. For sure, there are several explanations as to why this is, and I would presume that methodological issues, as well as the lack of discussions related to methodological procedures of applying positioning theory to investigations of social episodes, plays one crucial role in this. Positioning theory is often regarded, and explicitly positioned within positioning theory scholars, as a form of discursive psychology resulting in specific kinds of investigations, which suggests distinct analytical procedures. Outlining the methodological procedures, albeit quite roughly, might assist in the development of micro-culturally and discursively oriented investigations of small groups. Other discursive forms of discursive studies adopt an implicit approach to small groups, whereas this form of positioning theory-oriented research introduces an explicit approach to the study of small groups through the analysis of situated interactions.

6.2 POSITIONING AND THE CORNERSTONES OF SUCCESSFUL GROUPS

Tasks, aims, and roles

Several scholars have investigated the central features of successful work groups and teams and listed several key features that the groups must obtain to function (e.g., Katzenbach & Smith, 2001; Scholtes, Joiner, & Stribel, 2003; Levi, 2017). Clearly defined goals and tasks are often mentioned at the top of these lists. Here, goals refer to the shared aims of the group, whereas tasks can be regarded as both individual- and group-level tasks (e.g., Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2015). Having clear goals and clearly defined tasks is not enough, as groups and teams must also pay attention to these issues throughout the work process making sure that group members share a similar view as to what they need to do. Quite often, these listings also include practical examples as to how, for example, team leaders must pay attention to these issues and even explicitly list these goals and tasks for everyone to see. However, these discussions often lack the detailed analysis or even descriptions of the social processes that take place when these goals and tasks are created, negotiated, and assigned.

In terms of positioning theory, shared goals and tasks are the result of collaborative discursive practices that to some extent always entail a moral element. That is, they include the rights, and duties of groups and their members. The findings of sub-study two highlighted the construction of local moral orders through positioning resulting in task positioning. The group members discussed the meeting procedures creating micro-level storylines and positions regarding these negotiations and discussions. As a result, for example, some of the tasks were outlined as important matters that needed more time for the presentation as well as discussion, whereas in some cases the discussion storyline was positioned as something that should be dealt quickly. These positioning dynamics did not only involve the elements of here-and-now tasks but
also what and how specific tasks the groups should focus on in the future creating a local institutional moral order concerning the future functioning of the groups.

In addition to task positioning, the above-mentioned episodes taking place in the management meetings also dealt with the overall aims of the groups. More specifically, in the case of sub-study three, as the groups positioned themselves as particular kinds of collectives through we-positioning, they also implicitly outlined their tasks, rights, duties, and responsibilities. In the light of our findings it could be cautiously stated that the multivoiced collective positioning entails not only the construction of collective identity but also implicitly the construction of shared aims and goals.

Since one of the central aims of positioning theory is to investigate the dynamics of social episodes, the theory is often regarded as a critique for the concept of role and role theory. From the viewpoint of positioning theory, roles are considered too static and rigid for the purposes on investigating the fine-grained dynamics of social encounters (Davies & Harré, 1990; Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999b). Rather, positioning is identified as “the assignment of fluid ‘parts’ or ‘roles’ to speakers in the construction of personal stories” highlighting the possibility of adopting multiple and ephemeral positions within acting according to a role (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 17). Nonetheless, clearly defined roles and role structures are often mentioned as one of the key elements of establishing well-functioning groups (e.g., Levi, 2015; Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2015). Among some small group scholars, these starting points have been specified toward an understanding that singular group members can obtain or act according to several roles (e.g., Belbin, 2010). However, what these conceptualizations and theories often lack is the detailed analysis of group interactions in which these multiple roles are constructed and made somehow visible. These role classifications also resonate ideas of individuality and categorization, or even personality, distancing the classifications from the origins of actual social episodes and their dynamics. Surely, not everyone in a group of people have the right to position themselves as “initiators” or “blockers,” whereas some might be forced to occupy a specific role. Perhaps a more constructive approach would be to examine the plurality of individual roles within small groups from the perspective of positioning and positioning dynamics. The findings presented in all my sub-studies highlight the dynamics of contextual positioning showcasing the importance of investigating small group behavior through the processes of fluid positioning instead of fixed roles.

On the basis of my findings, I would argue that the concept of pre-positioning comes close to the concept of role in the context of meeting interaction. Pre-positions, too, are equipped with rights, and duties that are made explicit in the actual conversations within the groups. For example, in sub-study two, some of the group members or outside members were pre-positioned as presenters, but during the meetings, they positioned themselves and were positioned by others in several different ways (e.g., negotiators, experts, and critics). In addition to this, the relational aspect of positioning should also be considered. As some of the group members positioned themselves as experts they simultaneously positioned the others, for example, as someone requiring information or as collaborators. The counterpart of a role might not be present in the interactions of small groups, whereas the counterpart of a position might be. Overall, my findings shed light to the processes of interpersonal positions and roles in terms of local moral orders, the manifold of both individual and collective rights and duties, expectations, and responsibilities.
Collective identity

Examining group identification is one of the key themes in social psychological small group research. In this context, particularly, social identity theorists have focused their attention to the construction of both individual and collective identity examining the processes of group memberships in the construction of identity, sense of self, and intergroup relations. Studies on social identity underline the importance of group memberships as a part of the construction of identity and self-conception (Hogg, Abrams, Otten & Hinkle, 2004). Within the group dynamics literature, however, collective identity is first and foremost mentioned as a key feature of successful teams. This is often explained as a result of individual team members’ positive identification with the group that they consider important and worthy of their commitment (e.g., Druskat & Wolf, 2001; Griffith & Dunham, 2015). As it is the case with many other small group research themes, investigations on collective identity have also lacked the analysis of everyday interactions of groups and their construction of collective identity or a collective self.

Our findings of sub-study three highlight the potential of using a discursive dialogical analysis and positioning analysis as means of investigating the construction of collective identity using naturalistic interaction data. Our analysis and findings suggest, that groups construct multiple meanings of themselves as collectives, often implicitly in course of everyday interactions. In the case of strategy discussions that took place in meetings of DS2, the management boards positioned themselves through collective we-positioning in three different ways emphasizing their responsibilities and tasks as PRIs. Using voices that referred to themselves as institutions and to cultural expectations, the use of we-positions constructed a contextually bound, diverse, and changing collective identities. In terms of positioning theory, these collective identities followed different storylines and were constructed by using explicit we-positions indicating an active collective identity consisting of constant themes of development and improvement, evaluation, and sense making.

The detailed analysis of multivoicedness and we-positions also illuminated the stratification of the collective identity. Looking at what the we-position referred to in addition to the institutions themselves, we were able to identify the situated use of we-positions that referred to either the groups themselves there and now and to sub-groups within the management boards. The use of these more immanent we-positions created local moral orders that dealt with, for example, the rights, and duties of the sub-groups and the momentary functioning of the groups. Taking a closer look at the construction of collective identity using we-positions demonstrates the dynamic and multilayered nature of collective identity that has previously been perhaps overlooked. Analysis of this nature would suggest that in the context of the investigated management groups social or collective identity contains elements of both relational and group-based social identities (Brewer, 2001). Relational social identity refers to the interpersonal relationships and positions within the groups, whereas group-based social identity refers to the traditional view on social identity as a collectively shared sense of self.
Decision making and conflicts

The everyday lives of small groups entail manifold decision making varying from minor, situational decisions to major, long-term decisions, and management boards are no exception. Previous studies on small group decision making have emphasized the social processes surrounding decision making that might result in problematic decision making behavior. For example, previous studies on group polarization (e.g., Myers & Lamm, 1976; Kerr & Tindale, 2004) have highlighted the possible outcomes of risk taking or risk avoidance and following a dominant position in decision making episodes. In addition, studies investigating groupthink (e.g., Janis, 1972) have outlined the situational characteristics of small group decision making that might result in devastating outcomes. These studies have focused particularly on the “major” decisions that small groups make. That is, looking at different components, and factors that come into play when a group makes an explicit decision. On a different note, discursive investigations in the context of decision making (e.g., Alby & Zucchermaglio, 2006; Clifton, 2009) have delineated the micro-landscape of decision making episodes highlighting their situational characteristics and the social construction of such episodes. From this perspective, members of small groups constantly make “minor” decisions concerning the interpersonal relationships and interaction orders of the group.

Although I did not set out to explicitly investigate small group decision making in sub-study two, my findings bring forth the positioning dynamics taking place and resulting in small group decision making. Approaching decision making from the perspective of positioning theory, my findings shed light on both the “major” and “minor” decisions that groups engage themselves in. The “major” perspective focuses on decision making as a social episode consisting of fluctuating storylines. Instead of looking at the effects of different variables on the outcomes of decision making, this perspective focuses on the overall description of decision making episodes. As stated by Zaccaro, Rittman, and Marks (2001), groups and teams coordinate their actions based on shared mental models that create anticipations for actions and reduce the need of constant repetition of procedures and practices. Storyline structures or generic scripts of decision making can be understood as mental models of decision making that are created based on previous experiences and history. For example, the members of the management team in PRI1 followed storylines of presentation and discussion in their decision making episodes resulting in outlining and finalizing their decisions. What surprised me was the lack of explicit decision making storylines in which the decisions would have been outlined in clear and distinct manner. In this case, I labeled the overall decision making episode as a storyline of decision making.

The positioning acts taking place during the decision making episodes that resulted in the emergence of sub-storylines often dealt with the “minor” decisions within the group. For example, whenever a presenter asked for details regarding the presentation, other group members asked questions or as the chair steered the episode from one storyline to another, minor decisions were made that involved the group and decision making episode itself. This sheds light to the often unnoticed, micro-dynamics of decision making that members of a small group might end up taking part in and which result in negotiations related to rights and duties of individual group members.

In addition to decision making, conflicts are often mentioned as one of the many everyday challenges, and sometimes opportunities, that small groups face (Aldag &
Indeed, small group conflicts can be regarded as both negative and beneficial for the functioning of a group (Mosovici & Doise, 1994). As many previous studies have indicated, small groups may be confronted by conflicts related to interpersonal and social, procedural, and task-related issues (e.g., Jehn & Mannix, 2001). If the conflicts are managed and dealt with appropriately, particularly, the last two types of conflicts have been associated with beneficial group level outcomes (Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Yong, Sauer & Mannix, 2014). However, from the perspective of PT, it is slightly problematic to differentiate between different types of conflicts. The overall starting points of the theory and this study emphasize the fundamentally intertwined nature of interpersonal relations and different social processes as a result and creation of local moral orders. My findings bring forth a perspective of small group conflicts that enables a closer examination of the actual social actions resulting in conflicts in small groups while also investigating the interaction dynamics of conflict resolution. This highlights the embeddedness of interpersonal relations and conflicts regardless of the content or type of the conflict.

In the management team meetings, the conflicts were the result of second-order positioning of the group members as they challenged each other’s previous turns and positions. This led to changes in the storyline structures of groups and the emergence of conflict storylines. From the perspective of identifying and resolving conflicts, these moments of changes in storyline structures represent critical turns in the overall flow of interaction and group work. Depending on how the other members of the group orient toward these new storylines might result in the development of different kinds of conflict storylines and interpersonal positions entailing them.

**Trust**

Acting appropriately according to a specific storyline or a pre-position connects the themes of this study perhaps to one of the most fundamental features of groups, teams, and intimate relationships—trust. In an organizational and interpersonal level, trust can be understood as willingness to be vulnerable to other’s actions that roots to the previous experiences of the individuals involved and the expectations individuals have for one another based on those experiences (Mayer & Davis, 1995, p. 712). Whether trust is based on trustworthiness of individuals, categories, roles, rules, or history (Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2015), it is self-evident that trust is a key component of functional groups and that trust is related to the expectations what individuals can or should do. In other words, to moral appraisals, and practices. This opens an interesting perspective to the investigations of trust from the perspective of positioning theory.

Several studies have examined the effects of trust to the everyday life of groups and teams (e.g., Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; de Jong & Elfring, 2010) but somewhat little is still known about the discursive practices and interactions related to trust. Some discursive investigations have tackled the themes of trust in interaction in different kinds of institutional settings (see Pelsmaekers, Rollo, & Jacobs, 2014), outlining trust in interaction as a mutual commitment to the ongoing practices and creating an understanding of these commitments. In terms of groups and teams, investigations of this nature could be outlined as investigations of rule-based trust—how individuals govern appropriate behaviors based on explicit and implicit rules of social behavior (Aldag & Kuzuhara, 2015, p. 72).
Studies on trust in the context of positioning theory have been non-existent, not to mention investigations of trust from this perspective in the context of small groups. Nonetheless, taking a rule- and role-based (trust based on an acquired role or position) versions of trust, a positioning theory approach to the study of trust in small groups seems reasonable. Based on my findings on the analysis of small group conflicts, investigations of different dialogical scenarios also shed light to what kinds of rights and duties individuals must express their opinions and suggestions in small groups and how generative or degenerative storylines are constructed. Looking at the positioning dynamics within these storylines reveal how the group members orient toward the rule-governed ways of working and acting together and what happens when these rules are not followed or someone is forcefully positioned to act in a certain way.

By analyzing the rights and duties connected to the local moral orders offers one opportunity to approach the issues of rule- and role-based trust. This focuses the analysis on the ways group members follow the ongoing storyline, or social order, or on whether they end up challenging or breaking it through positioning. For example, in sub-study two, the positioning acts of the chair were connected to establishing the role of the chair as an initiator in the meeting. Whenever someone challenged this position, they also challenged the ongoing local moral order and storyline simultaneously perhaps challenging the trust between the chair and the other group members. In the case of degenerative dialogue in sub-study four, one of the group members were positioned as someone who no longer had the right to participate in the discussion as the group had already moved on to another theme. From the perspective of rules, the silenced group member was positioned as someone who did not follow the ongoing structure of the group and thus perhaps, at least to the extent of following rules, as an untrustworthy group member. On the other hand, in the case of generative dialogue, group members were positioned in the negotiation storylines as members who had the right to take part in the discussion and speak out their mind. This could cautiously be interpreted as creating an atmosphere of trust through dialogue. If I had focused my analysis on more individually oriented themes such as identity of the group members, one alternative would have been to also analyze in detail how the group members were positioned and positioned themselves as trustworthy employees and colleagues.
7 DISCUSSION

"The study of group life should reach beyond the level of description; the conditions of group life and the forces which bring about change or which resist change should be investigated. The term “dynamics” refers to these forces" (Kurt Lewin, 1945, p. 130)

In this chapter, I conclude this summary by interweaving the findings of the methodologically and pragmatically driven tasks with the perspective of moral orders in accordance with the third aim of this summary article. As a result, I outline an overall description of small groups as fields of moral orders. The key findings of the methodological storyline are discussed more implicitly, as they are presented merely as means to investigate the interrelatedness of local moral orders, positioning dynamics, and key features of work groups. In addition, I present my conclusions alongside the implications of this study. Finally, I evaluate my study, and present suggestions for future research.

Interpersonal positioning should be understood as moral activity in which the local moral orders of a given episode play an integral role. Therefore, looking at positioning dynamics, and their connections to the central features of work groups should also entail a moral evaluation. Examining the key themes of my findings from this perspective connects the themes of tasks, aims, and roles, collective identity, decision making, and conflicts to the overall framework of moral orders. This discussion was inspired by Luk Van Langenhove’s (2017) recent work on the discussion related to agency and structure from the perspective of moral orders.

7.1 SMALL GROUPS AS FIELDS OF MORAL ORDERS

Starting this discussion chapter with a quotation by Kurt Lewin brings me back to the overall starting points of this study. As one of the key figures of social psychological investigations on group dynamics, Lewin was particularly interested in the underlying dynamics of group life and how those dynamics could be influenced to create social change (Lewin, 1973). In his investigations on group dynamics, Lewin adopted an interactionist perspective in which both the individual, or person, and the surrounding group have an impact on how individuals behave in a given group context. The focus of analysis should be set to the dynamics between the person and the environment. According to Lewin (1975), the surrounding environment consists of different forces that can push forward, force, or resist individual’s actions. Overall, what happens in these situations with reference to these forces and the actions individuals take can be regarded as group dynamics.

The Lewinian approach of surrounding forces and individual actions bares resemblance to discussions and debates related to individual agency and structure. Looking at interpersonal behavior, for example, from the perspective of positioning theory and local moral orders offers one perspective to this discussion (see Van Langenhove, 2017). Inspired by the Lewinian tradition, quantum physics, and discussion related to nature of local moral orders, Van Langenhove (2017) has outlined the varieties of moral orders that function as fields, or structures, of personal, and interpersonal actions. In accordance with Harré and the interactionist approaches,
Van Langenhove regarded that the analysis of interactions makes visible both the structures and those processes by which actors shape these structures. Outlining the moral orders on a scale from general to specific moral orders, Van Langenhove (2017, pp. 4–6) divided the moral orders into cultural, legal, institutional, conversational, and intrapersonal moral orders. Although they are presented in a cluster-like fashion, Van Langenhove notes that the moral orders often overlap and co-exist as some of them might become more active and some latent depending on the ongoing social episode. Further, I am not suggesting that moral orders function as forces or conditions in a deterministic fashion but as one alternative framework to approach small groups as micro-cultures that assists at examining both the structural and agency-related themes surrounding such cultures and behaviors within.

Next, I will present these moral orders in the light of my key findings constructing an overall landscape of small groups as fields of different moral orders. Even though I present these conclusions according to the moral orders, it is evident that these orders overlap and most of the themes discussed within a specific moral order relates to other orders as well. In addition, I have excluded considerations related to intrapersonal moral orders as this goes outside the scope of the methodology used in this study.

**Cultural and legal moral orders**

According to Van Langenhove (2017), *cultural moral orders* are of the most general nature and refer to the multitude of cultural practices, conventions, norms, and habits that have an impact on the everyday lives of individuals, communities, and cultures. Stemming from a variety of sources, such as religious writings, or shared practices, these moral orders “can be regarded as the umwelt in which people are born and raised” (Van Langenhove, 2017, p. 5) and become often apparent in our everyday practices as implicit structures or expectations of preferred behavior. In the context of my study, cultural moral orders were of very implicit nature and they did not become an object of negotiation. However, this does not mean that they did not play a role in the ways that the groups functioned and how individuals behaved in the groups. On a very descriptive level, the cultural norm of punctuality, characteristic especially to Finnish culture, was very much present in the meetings. For example, negotiations regarding the schedule of the meeting often took place resulting in different constructions of storylines and task positioning implicating the need to pay special attention to schedules and time tables.

In addition to the generic cultural moral orders framing particularly the Finnish context, I would argue that other cultural moral orders related to managerial practices became evident in the study. For example, in sub-study three the construction of collective identity through neo-liberalistic discourse exemplifies a cultural moral order in which public institutions are required to examine their functions and aims from this perspective. As outlined by Osborne (2006), Public Administration and Management has undergone a significant paradigm change within the past 40 years or so from the hegemony of Public Administration to the logic of NPM and New Public Governance. In this case, this shift in the cultural moral order played a significant role in the ways the management teams in DS2 positioned themselves through the logic of NPM and New Public Governance. This came about in the collective storylines of development and appraisal with the simultaneous positions of the public research institutes as units of evaluation and users of different kinds of performance indicators.
Legal moral orders deal with the explicit laws and legal regulations that set limits to the rights and duties of individuals, institutions, and even societies (Van Langenhove, 2017). As Van Langenhove (2017, p. 5) stated, “legal moral orders and procedures are organized at the geospatial level of states or regions” and are therefore bound to these states and regions. This moral order was perhaps the most latent in my study. The legal moral order became explicit in some discussion storylines as some negotiations concerning the legal elements of specific actions of the institutions were tackled. These negotiations over the role of legal procedures were intertwined with positioning dynamics as some group members positioned themselves as experts regarding a legal issue. Overall, the nature of legal moral orders was thematical as they were the topic or theme for discussion but not the actual driving force of interpersonal behavior in the sense of interpersonal rights and duties. This said, legal moral orders most certainly had a role in the functioning of the groups and institutions (e.g., paying wages or taking care of staff’s rights), but they were not explicitly present in the actual interaction as the other moral orders presented here were.

Institutional and conversational moral orders

Looking at the groups that I studied, institutional and conversational moral orders were perhaps the most crucial orders on the one hand steering the positioning dynamics of the groups and on the other hand being re-constructed in interaction. Both moral orders became active and were often inextricably connected to one another. By institutional moral orders, Van Langenhove (2017) referred to the institutional rules, roles, and practices that individual engage themselves with whenever taking part in an institutional activity. These moral orders are always artifactual since they are connected to the physical surroundings of the institutions themselves. Institutional moral orders can be regarded as one part of organizational cultures, since often different organizational cultures entail different kinds of expectations, rights, and duties based on previous experiences and histories (e.g., Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). In this sense, organizational, or institutional groups form their own institutional moral orders in addition to the official institutional moral orders, such as specific roles, and tasks within the institution. In terms of Gary Alan Fine (2012b), the local, group-specific cultures are referred to as idiocultures that entail own specific local moral orders.

In the case of my study, all the groups followed an institutional moral order that relates to the purpose of the groups and the aims and goals of the groups. In DS1, the institutional moral order, and the reason why the group exists is to make interprofessional decisions related to elderly care, whereas in the DS2 the management teams oversee functional and strategical issues concerning the institutions. Based on these institutional moral orders, certain members with a specific institutional role and expertise are selected to the groups and assigned with different kinds of tasks, rights, and duties. For example, in DS2, the CEO of the institution functions as the chair in the meetings. Depending on the content of the meetings, some of the group members are pre-positioned to act as, for example, experts, preparers, initiators, or presenters. Later, during the interactions taking place in the groups, these pre-positions are made real as the group members act according to the pre-positions. However, these pre-positions might also be contested or challenged.
Perhaps the most evident presentation of the institutional moral order were the meetings themselves. As social episodes, the groups followed an institutional storyline of a meeting with its implicit features of rights and duties regarding participation in the meetings. For example, the ways the groups dealt with decision making demonstrated tacit knowledge of the group member related to the appropriate behavior related to decision making. In other words, it was not necessary to go through the rules of decision making beforehand as the decision making episodes unfolded in a very fluctuating and smooth fashion. In addition, the institutional moral order became evident whenever a group member acted according their institutional status or role. For example, whenever the chair of the meeting in DS2 assigned turns to the other group members, they acted according to the institutional moral order demonstrating their deontic powers to control the proceeding of the meeting. In sub-study two, one of the group members challenged this institutional position of the chair by moving on in the discussion only to be interrupted by the chair who still wanted to continue with the previous discussion and had not given permission to move on. In addition, in sub-studies two, and four, whenever task positioning took place and concerned how things should be dealt with in the future, an institutional moral order was construct dealing with the future responsibilities of the groups and their members.

Conversational moral orders refer to the rules and conventions guiding everyday conversations entailing the actual speech acts of the interlocutors. In the context my analysis, conversational moral orders became visible or active whenever the group members negotiated their interpersonal positions with reference to, for example, the proceeding of the group work. Conversational moral orders were particularly connected to the proceeding of the meeting (sub-studies one and two) and to the interpersonal conflicts taking place in the groups (sub-study four). The positioning acts also resulted in changes is the storyline structures in the groups, which in turn resulted in changes in the conversational moral orders. Particularly, in the case of micro-level storylines, the conversational moral orders were made explicit and, in some cases, re-constructed. As a result of these micro-level storylines, the ongoing storyline was delineated as a particular kind of storyline with a set of specific rights and duties. As pointed in sub-studies one, two, and four, quite often these conversational moral orders dealt with task positioning related to how the group should proceed with the task at hand as well as with how conflicts were created and resolved. In the case of conflicts, the conversational moral orders and positioning taking place in them resulted in different kinds of dialogical scenarios depending on whether the conflict was resolved or not.

All in all, as presented particularly in sub-study four, looking at small groups from the perspective of different moral orders creates a framework for understanding group dynamics resulting from positioning steered by fields of moral orders. As suggested by Van Langenhove (2017), some of the moral orders might be of a more latent and some more active nature, depending on the episode in question. However, all things considered, developing a new field theory of small groups goes outside the scopes of this study. Here, I have gone through the key findings of my study from the perspective of moral orders resulting in a both macro- and micro-social constructionist understanding of positioning theory-driven small group research.
7.2 EVALUATIONS

From the beginning of this study, it was self-evident to me that I would investigate naturally occurring interactions as my primary data. This seemed natural both from the perspective of investigating the everyday lives of small groups and from the perspective of Harréan dynamic paradigm, which considers the conversational realm as the primary level of our social lives. Ever since my master’s thesis, I have been lucky enough to gain access to this kind of data that had already been collected giving me the advantage of not having to collect the data myself. This of course has its pros and cons. Collecting the data myself would surely taught me a lot and made me perhaps more aware of my intentions and aims as to what kind of data would be the most suitable for my study. However, this saved me a lot of time and assisted me to go forward with my analysis sooner. In addition, having access to a relatively large corpus of data early on surely assisted me in the process of applying research grants. Of course, I could have collected the data myself with a specific context in mind. This would have been, if not necessary, but at least preferable if I would have had a specific research topic in mind while starting my study. Since the overall aim of my study is explorative and experimental, as this kind of research has not been conducted extensively previously, a convenience sample was more than suitable for the purposes of my study. All the positives aside, I needed to transcribe most of my data according to conversation analytical conventions and this ended up taking me almost a year. This in mind, I can proudly say that I am familiar with the amount of work and effort it takes to obtain qualitative interaction data without stepping my foot “on the field” myself.

Regarding the research process itself and the trustworthiness of my study, there are surely many things I could have done differently. According to Shenton (2004), trustworthy in qualitative inquiry discusses issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. As stated by Shenton (2004) and many other scholars (e.g., Silverman, 2014; Guba, 1981), these discussions can be considered as the alternatives for positivistic means of evaluating the trustworthiness of research. However, quite often, many of these qualitative counterparts resonate positivistic tones as they imply a pre-established, universal, and fixed criteria for evaluation. Nonetheless, I find some of these considerations of trustworthiness useful and even necessary in the evaluation of this study.

Concerning the credibility of my study, I struggled with this issue ever since the first days of conducting my study. For the most parts, this struggle comes back to the idea of ensuring credibility of the study by using well-recognized and appropriate research methods. Although many discursive studies have also applied positioning theory in their analyses, there is still a lack of well-established method of conducting such analysis. To overcome this challenge and concerning the credibility of my study, I have aimed at making my research method as transparent as possible and developing an overall scheme for the analysis of small groups from a positioning theory perspective. However, I am aware of the alternative ways of conducting positioning theory-oriented analysis and have tried to do my best at convincing and justifying the choices I have made regarding my analysis procedures. In addition, peer scrutiny alongside discussions and debriefings with my supervisors throughout my research process have had a significant role in achieving reasonable level of credibility for my study. In this regard, also the comments and suggestions made by the anonymous reviewers of my sub-studies have had an important role in improving the credibility of...
my work in addition to the vast amounts of comments from other experts in different conferences and symposiums.

Concerning the transferability of my findings, the used convenience sample and definite contexts of institutional interaction set limits whether the findings of my study are transferable to other contexts. For most parts, this has not been my aim. Nonetheless, since I was able to demonstrate variability and some general features of positioning in all the data that I analyzed, perhaps few cautious notions related to transferability can be made. For one, positioning dynamics come into play whenever people engage in interpersonal interaction, whether in dyads, or small groups. The different positioning acts and their social consequences, or perlocutionary effects, have a role to play in the ways groups function and how they organize collective action. Secondly, a variety of moral orders both steer and are constructed in small groups. Depending on the context of the small group and its aims, different moral orders can have either an active or latent role in the dynamics of that particular group. And in accordance with Jackall (2010), this study suggests that organizations and institutions, groups, and teams therein, consist of practiced moralities through which daily activities become reasonable and comprehensible. Finally, in accordance with the methodological aim of my study, the methods used in this study are surely transferable to different contexts of small group behavior.

It is also important to consider the logic of analytical generalization that I have used in my study. Analogously with Halkier (2011), I have aimed at making analytical generalizations both by category zooming and generalization by analyzing positioning in my data. The former refers to delineating or zooming in on specific categories within the data. In my study, I zoomed in on decision making, construction of collective identity, and conflicts from the perspective of interpersonal positioning. Zooming in on these categories or themes allowed me to build a more thorough understanding of these themes in the light of positioning theory. The selection for zooming in on these themes came rather naturally to me based on the precursory analysis of my data. Conducting analytical generalizations through positioning refers to identifying positioning patterns within the data and building on generalizations based on those findings. I conducted this in two ways: by analyzing the storyline structures of the groups and by investigating the positioning taking place within these storylines. This assisted me to construct an overall picture, or analytical generalizations, of my data according to positioning dynamics. Overall, I would argue that I ended up with a combination of these two analytical generalization methods by both zooming in on specific parts within the data but with the perspective of positioning as the key aim.

Regarding the dependability of my study, I have tried to make my research process as transparent and clear as possible. This includes the explicit presentation of the research designs and the steps taken to fulfill the aims of that design. I have also presented the limitations and benefits of gathering my data by using a convenience sample. Finally, evaluating confirmability of my study requires scrutiny over how well I have been able to represent the reality of the research participants as they experience it. This is somewhat problematic in the case of using naturally occurring data without any member checks or interviews. However, starting with the original interaction data as the starting point of my analysis allowed me to look at what really happened in the studied groups and how the group members reacted to each other’s actions. Although my analysis was closely rooted in the data, the adaptation of theoretical concepts to the analysis admittedly takes the analysis one step further from the ideas of data-driven analysis. Notwithstanding, this allowed me to make sense of the everyday lives of the
small groups on a perhaps more conceptual level connecting my findings to a broader discussion related to positioning practices.

7.3 FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The overall purpose of this study was, on one hand, to investigate the applicability of positioning theory to micro-cultural investigations of small groups, and on the other hand, take a closer look at the positioning dynamics of institutional groups from the perspective of group processes and group phenomena. Sub-study one targeted at examining the methodological aims of this study, whereas sub-studies two to four aimed at investigating decision making, construction of collective identity, and conflicts from the perspective of positioning theory. These starting points locate this study to the micro-cultural and symbolic–interpretive investigations (Denzin, 1999; Frey & Sunwolf, 2004) of small groups as well as to the meso-level investigations of organizations and their cultures (Fine, 2012a; Fine & Hallett, 2014). Analogously with these approaches, it is not enough that we investigate groups as categories or memberships but also pay attention to and consider the social surroundings in which the groups operate. In the context of this study, social surroundings create fields of moral orders that come into being in the everyday lives of small groups. In this concluding section, I draw together the key findings of my sub-studies with the aims of this summary article alongside presenting possible implications of this study.

Looking at the findings of my sub-studies from the perspective of moral orders sheds light on the structural elements guiding the everyday lives of small groups as well as how these structures are constructed in conversations within the groups. From a methodological perspective, I approached these themes by utilizing the key concepts of the positioning triad developed by Harré and Van Langenhove (1999a). Focusing first on the storyline structures of the meetings assisted me to identify the institutional moral order guiding the meetings episodic structures. These structures formed the basis for collective action but were also talked into being during the meetings. Most notably, this kind of analysis underlines the importance of shared storylines in social episodes as generic script-like schemata for interpersonal action. Also, this differentiates the concept of storyline from the individual level of analysis that highlights the use of storylines as resources for identity construction (e.g., Søreide, 2006; Andreouli, 2010).

Particularly the institutional and conversational moral orders were connected to interpersonal positioning within the groups resulting in creating and changing the storyline structures. This resulted in the unveiling of, as Harré (2012, 2015b) implied, the generic, and specific scripts of the episodes. Scripts of this nature can be regarded as shared mental models that groups rely on in order to work together (see Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001). Based on previous experiences and shared histories, these shared mental models consist of shared views on tasks and procedures. More importantly, shared mental models also entail views on social behavior such as expectations of appropriate behavior and how to adjust individual behaviors in a social setting. However, previous investigations have left room for improvement as to how these shared mental models can be investigated and how they can be made explicit and somehow visible. Understanding shared mental models as script-like storyline structures with connections to local moral orders offers one alternative to these investigations in the context of everyday lives of groups and teams.
Identifying the storylines as an expression of institutional moral orders was followed by the detailed investigations of the other two vertices of the positioning triad—looking at the actual positioning dynamics within the storylines focusing particularly on the perlocutionary effects of positioning. From this perspective, my findings shed light on key small group themes and processes. From a descriptive perspective, focusing on the key issues of well-functioning groups and teams, these themes, and processes can be regarded as some of the cornerstones for successful group work. Considering the key themes of group work from the perspective of moral orders, my findings suggest that collective identity in the groups was constructed with reference to the cultural and legal moral orders. Although this was investigated using a dialogical analysis, it can be argued that the we-positions were constructed particularly with reference to cultural and to some extent legal moral orders. Although institutional and conversational moral orders played a role in these processes—after all, the construction of the collective identity took place in the meetings—it was interesting to more broadly at how moral orders of a more general nature were also a part of the group’s everyday interactions. In this context, collective identity is understood as a jointly constructed and shared identity answering the question “who we are?” (see Brewer, 2001; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Angouri & Marra, 2011) instead of considering it as a part of individual identity construction or basis for intergroup relations (e.g., Tajfel, 1982; Hogg, 2016).

In addition to considerations on collective identity, my findings illuminate the interconnectedness of moral orders and positioning dynamics with the creation of the shared goals and tasks, decision making, conflicts and conflict resolution, and even themes of trust within groups. These processes took place within the sphere of institutional and conversational moral orders. My findings shed light on these themes in terms of how positioning lead to the creation of new storylines, how new local moral orders were created and negotiated. In addition, the analysis of video-recorded data led me to directional investigations regarding different multimodal practices regarding interpersonal positioning. Themes of this nature have recently been discussed briefly with regard to positioning theory (Harré, 2015a) but are nonetheless significant in the context of group interaction.

Overall, the analysis and findings presented in my study open one perspective to applying positioning theory as a tool for micro-cultural group studies. Investigation of this nature makes visible the key moments in the everyday lives of small groups—the shifts from one storyline to another—resulting in different kinds of outcomes depending on what the perlocutionary effects of positioning acts are. This kind of perspective offers implications to the delineation of the theory itself and to the explicit investigation of moral orders. In terms of positioning theory, my findings introduced a new concept regarding the different varieties of positioning. Positioning, resulting in the construction of new institutional and conversational moral orders regarding joint tasks and aims, was referred to as task positioning. I consider this to be particularly characteristic for positioning taking place in small groups and in work context as it results in framing the rights and duties of the group members and the group with reference to a task. Nonetheless, this form of positioning can be considered typical for all work- and task-related interactions, whether in dyadic, or group-level interactions.

In addition, applying the starting points of positioning theory to the systematic investigation of small groups lead me to further examine the basic methodological procedures of conducting such investigations. Analysis of this nature can benefit from a storyline analysis as a starting point resulting in investigations of episodic
structures of small group behavior, positioning dynamics, and the construction of moral orders. Not only does this add a welcome perspective to the somewhat nonexistent discussion regarding methodological procedures in the context of positioning theory, this study offers one perspective to the execution of micro-cultural small group investigations.

In a recent overview highlighting the possible landscapes of future small group research (Keyton, 2016), Gary Alan Fine argued for investigations on the micro-cultural aspects of small groups. By stating so, Fine emphasized the need for studies that consider the interaction orders of small groups as the basis of constructing and establishing micro-cultures in the groups. From this perspective, it can be cautiously stated that this study offers one alternative of conducting such research and implicates the need for further investigations. In the context of organizational research, this means looking at small groups as the arena for organizational cultures and as the nexus between the surrounding social structures and the actual interactions taking place in small groups.

In accordance with organizational research, this study also implies for the possibility of applying micro-cultural and positioning theory-oriented investigation of small groups to the context of managerial work studies. Looking at managerial work as a relational process (Korica, Nicolini & Johnson, 2017), taking place in the everyday relationships and interactions between individual, would surely benefit of this kind of small group research perspective. After all, many of the managerial processes take place in the context of small groups within organizations and institutions, just as it does in the context of my study. Looking at the relational side of managerial work from the perspective of positioning theory and small groups offers a novel approach highlighting the moral practices involved in such work.

7.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Concluding this summary article with an overall discussion on the moral orders of small groups was not my original intention. Because of recent publications and the encouragement of Luk Van Langehove, I decided to broaden the scope of my analytical investigations by looking at my findings in more detail from the perspective of moral orders. This development can also be seen in some of my sub-studies. This said, surprisingly little amount of studies has focused on the theme of moral orders in the context of positioning theory. Studying, for example, organizations from the perspective of moral orders by focusing on small-group-level investigations would be an interesting endeavor. Particularly, in the context of small groups, focusing on moral orders would offer two different levels of analysis: firstly, the analysis of moral orders that guide and shape the ongoing work of small groups and, secondly, analysis of how different versions of, for example, cultural, and legal moral orders are constructed in the context of small groups. Approaches of this nature would offer an applied social psychological perspective when studying organizational cultures and everyday lives of organizations and institutions. In addition, an approach of this nature offers much needed tools for the study of post-bureaucratic organizations.

Keeping in mind the meso-level perspective applied in this study, utilizing positioning theory-oriented perspective to the different meso-level phenomena would be interesting. According to Fine (2012a), the meso-level investigation of cultures offers opportunities to investigate social identities, social capital, collective action,
idiocultures, extended networks, and even the role of small groups in constituting civil societies. All these perspectives would benefit from a positioning theoretical investigation that combine the micro-level analysis of interaction orders as well as macro-level investigations of moral orders.

Additionally, positioning theoretical analyses would benefit from a broader perspective of social behavior that goes beyond the conversational realm. Instead of focusing on conversations as the primary level of interpersonal and social action, analysis of different multimodalities in the context of positioning would broaden the discussion to perhaps somewhat fruitful direction. Although Harré (2015a) himself has suggested that positioning also entails the physical and corporeal elements of behavior, studies combining the conversational and corporeal or multimodal have been almost non-existent excluding few exceptions (Clifton, 2014; McVee & Carse, 2016).

Finally, positioning theory has recently been introduced as a complementary framework to the research on social representations (Harré & Moghaddam, 2015). Social representations can be understood as the values, beliefs, or practices shared by a group or a community that assists their members to orient toward social world and communicate with one another (Moscovici, 2000). In this context, the starting points of positioning theory could possibly highlight how different kinds of positions equipped with specific sets of rights and duties become relevant forms of social representations. Previous studies on social representations that deal with group-related behavior have investigated mainly intergroup relations and collective identities (e.g., Echabe, Guede & Castro, 1994; Staerklé, Clémence & Spini, 2011). Approaching small groups from the perspective of PT and micro-cultural investigations offers a perspective to investigate how social representations are constructed in the everyday activities of small groups in terms of positioning. This is something that would be fascinating to investigate further in the future.

Overall, studying small groups from the perspective of positioning theory holds the potential to investigate interpersonal actions by acknowledging the themes of agency and structure. After all, as Harrington and Fine (2006, p. 16) quite aptly stated, “small groups are still where the action is.”
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ARTICLES

ARTICLE 1

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ARTICLE 2

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ARTICLE 3

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ARTICLE 4

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This study lies at the nexus of two social psychological research paradigms: interaction and small-group studies. By analyzing institutional meeting interactions, this study examines how positioning theory can be utilized in the study of small-group dynamics and how discursive positioning connects with processes such as decision-making and conflicts. This study highlights how positioning in small groups is intertwined with the surrounding cultural, legal, institutional, conversational, and intrapersonal moral orders.