

Nice to Meet Your Avatar! Role Negotiation and Dialectical Tensions in  
Temporary Interorganizational Virtual Workgroups

By

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“Let the love of learning rule humanity.” Phi Kappa Phi Motto

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## **Abstract**

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Christina Jones

This qualitative study examined the role negotiation processes that members of Temporary Interorganizational Virtual Workgroups (TIVWs) use when collaborating. Further, the study examined the dialectical tensions that emerge in these workgroups and coping mechanisms these groups use to manage those tensions. The study found that one's identification as leader or member was, at times, a fluid identification process with many of the participants self-identifying as leader *and* member depending upon context. Four primary tensions emerged from the data: leader-identity versus member-identity, autonomy versus connectedness, leader-centered focus versus group-centered focus, and organizational value versus individual value. Finally, to manage tension within TIVWs members used a variety of coping mechanisms and combinations of coping mechanisms.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Modern organizational business plans increasingly require that multiple organizations collaborate to achieve combined organizational goals (Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010). Individuals or groups from various organizations are called upon to collaborate with members of other organizations to attain these interorganizational goals. While many businesses may spend time and money to have these interorganizational groups meet at face-to-face project kickoff meetings and at various checkpoints throughout the collaboration, increasingly businesses require that these groups collaborate over distances using various communication technologies (Rosenfeld, Richman, & May, 2004; Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004).

As organizations proliferate operationally, in terms of multiple employee locations and the flattening of hierarchical structure in favor of modular teams, smaller work groups within the organization gain greater levels of autonomy and increased levels of responsibility (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Educational publishing offers an example of this type of workgroup. While a large firm may act as the publisher and own the copyright of the publication, the manuscript is usually written by an autonomous author or group of authors, designed by a third-party production house, copy edited by another individual or group, proofread by another person and, finally, turned over to the publishing house to be printed, marketed, sold, and distributed. Generally, these different roles are the responsibility of different individuals from different organizations. While the total collaboration is ultimately accountable to the funding organization, the overall production and all the parties involved are responsible

to each other for completion of the product. Further, regardless of job title and rank within the employing organization, each person in the specific interorganizational collaboration is accountable to the other members of the collaboration for their role in the finished product.

This study examined how these Temporary Interorganizational Virtual Workgroups (TIVWs) use communication to negotiate their roles within the group without the benefit of face-to-face communication. Much of the historical socialization research on role negotiation has focused on newcomers entering an organization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Jablin, 1987; Van Maanen & Shein, 1979). However, more recently, communication scholars have argued that organizational socialization is an ongoing process that is not isolated to newcomers alone (Kramer, 2010; Waldeck et al., 2004). It would seem logical that role negotiation occurs in TIVWs whether the members are veterans or newcomers.

Examining how members of TIVWs negotiate their individual roles during the collaboration contributes to our understanding of organizational socialization and dialectics. Communication is at the center of role negotiation and group dialectics, and these constructs are ever present in our interpersonal and organizational social lives (Galanes, 2009; Kramer, 2004). The interplay of incongruent poles like *autonomy* and *connectedness*, focus on the *process* and focus on the *goal*, and commitment to the *organization* and commitment to the *interorganizational group* have been identified as the primary tensions when interorganizational groups collaborate and negotiate roles (Lewis et al., 2010). Identifying the tensions that exist in TIVWs and the communication

coping mechanisms employed by leaders and members of these groups will help scholars understand how TIVWs negotiate roles and manage tension during the ongoing socialization process (Kramer, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to understand how leaders and members of TIVWs negotiate their roles in the collaboration, manage the dialectical tensions that emerge in this specific type of collaboration, and make use of communication during the collaboration without the benefit of face-to-face communication traditionally used in organizational settings. The study will review organizational socialization and relational dialectics as the theoretical foundation for examining how members of TIVWs use communication. The data produced a compelling discovery as to how TIVW members identify with and establish the meaning of their role, and this role negotiation process is not necessarily classifiable by the traditional dichotomous dimensions of organizational socialization (individual versus collective or formal versus informal, etc., etc.) (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), nor does it seem that TIVW roles are overtly influenced by organizational hierarchical socialization in the traditional superior/subordinate sense (Jablin, 1979; 1987). Rather, TIVW role identity and negotiation seems to be dialogically constituted between and among the particular participants in the particular group within the context of the project or task (Baxter, 2011). Specifically, a leader-identity versus member-identity dialectic emerged from the data, and the interplay of this identification process seems to impact how roles are negotiated in TIVWs.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The structure of the literature review starts with an examination of role negotiation through the lens of organizational socialization theory, then discusses dialectical tensions and the coping mechanisms used in organizational communication, and ends with a set of research questions.

### **Role Negotiation**

Negotiation has been described as a form of conflict management in the sense that some issue, or a group of issues, must be present within the organizational setting for negotiation to be required (Putnam & Poole, 1987). Not all conflict is contentious. There are times when negotiation is required in non-contentious situations like when a new member joins an organization, or when established members are brought together to collaborate as a team for the first time (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Jablin, 1979). During these circumstances it is critical for scholars to understand how the roles, rules, and processes are negotiated through communication and how that communication impacts the success or failure of the collaborative endeavor.

In intergroup situations, like that of a TIVW, if negotiation is not offered the opportunity to occur in an open forum, the inherent operational and cultural differences can be exacerbated in several destructive ways (Putnam & Poole, 1987). Loyalty to the individual's employing group can solidify over loyalty to the collaborative group (Lewis et al., 2010). In-group versus out-group positions can emerge, which can lead to bad decision-making processes and accusations of group infidelity if the out-group disputes

the in-group position (Janis, 1972; Putnam & Poole, 1987). Finally, group agreement can be underestimated and group differences can be overstated (Putnam & Poole, 1987).

Organization socialization scholars have focused on role negotiation as it relates to organizational attempts to *socialize* the individual and new members' attempts to *individualize* their role within the organization to suit their requirements (Jablin, 1987; Van Mannen & Schein, 1979). Further, historical organizational socialization studies have focused on role negotiation through the lens of superior-subordinate communication (Jablin, 1979; Miller, Johnson, Hart, & Peterson, 1999). These studies examined how a supervisor's relationship with subordinates allows subordinates to, or dissuades subordinates from, actively individualizing the role and purpose they serve within the organization during the entry, or *encounter*, stage of the socialization process.

Organizational socialization research indicates that during the encounter phase of a new member's socialization, the new member will rely upon the schema developed during previous organizational experiences (Jablin, 1987). The schematic differences the new member faces upon entry into the organization leads the individual to participate in sense-making activities (Louis, 1980). Understanding how individuals' previous schema impact the negotiation communication employed by TIVWs is vital for scholars to examine, as these groups are temporary and often brought together without prior collaborative experiences with the members of the new collaboration. For this reason, this study investigates the conditions described by organizational members reflecting on participation in TIVW role negotiation.

Research suggests several antecedent conditions may determine whether an individual is willing to participate in role negotiation (Miller et al., 1999). One primary communication factor is subordinates' perceptions of their superior's openness to feedback and innovation. If subordinates feel comfortable that there is little risk of repercussions for voicing opinions or ideas, they are more likely to try to actively influence the nature of their position in the organization (Jablin, 1987). However, if there is a risk of negative cost associated with individualization attempts, people are less likely to participate in role negotiation.

Two other communication antecedent conditions have an impact on whether or not a subordinate will participate in role negotiation (Miller et al., 1999). Research indicates a supervisor must be seen as supportive and competent at leading groups toward their goals. Beyond being open-minded, a supportive supervisor is one who not only listens to the problems and suggestions communicated by subordinates, but also helps to solve problems or implement suggestions. Supervisor competence has been described as the ability to inspire group members to innovate, offer subordinates performance feedback, and empower employees so they can achieve their goals (Miller et al., 1999).

Role ambiguity and role conflict are two other considerations when contemplating the function of role negotiation in TIVWs (Miller et al., 1999). Research suggests that individuals' ability to openly negotiate their role lessens the negative effects of role ambiguity and role conflict (Jablin, 1987; Putnam & Poole, 1987). However, in TIVWs, leaders and members may be working together for the first time. For example, in the case of educational publishing, different titles on different subjects have different authors. So,

a project manager and an editor may have worked together on many titles, but each of those projects included a variety of authors, marketing and sales executives, designers, etc. Likewise, the authors may be meeting the project managers, editors, executives, and designers for the first time, too. This is important to note as the research submits that being comfortable with a superior is a key antecedent condition for a subordinate to feel able to negotiate their role (Miller et al., 1999). This study works to understand how members participate in or avoid role negotiation in TIVWs.

Role dialectics denote that organizational roles are a product of dialogical relationships and that these roles, like all human relationships, alternate between *stability* and *change* (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The temporary nature of TIVWs presents an interesting communication environment when examining the *stability* and *change* dialectic. Some members of a TIVW may feel they work for a stable organization while other members may experience instability and change often in their organization. How members from different organizations negotiate their role in an interorganizational collaboration is likely impacted by how they view and cope with the interplay between the stability and change dialectic within their employing organization.

Further, in team collaborations, leaders and members are not solely accountable to a single supervisor, but, rather, are accountable to a variety of supervisors, peers, and team members (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Due to this multifaceted accountability structure, this study works to understand how leaders and members of TIVWs negotiate roles, identify the dialectical tensions that emerge during

TIVW collaborations, and distinguish the coping mechanisms leaders and members of TIVWs use to manage the tensions.

### **Dialectical Tension**

Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) (Baxter, 2011) traces its roots to the dialogic essays of the Russian philosopher Bakhtin (1981) who put forth that the significance of a message dwells not in the message itself, but rather in the interactions between the message receiver and message deliverer (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Bakhtin (1981) claimed that every human practice and behavior is founded through communicative or symbolic interaction, and that dialogue and communicative behavior are central to our interpersonal relationships and all of humanity's social constructions. However, this is not a smooth, transactional process. Relating is underscored by the simultaneous dialectical interplay between the desire to remain *independent from* others and the desire to *connect to* others. However, these are not binary poles on a continuum, but rather, these are dynamic knots of various factors that exist in opposition or between competing discourses (Baxter, 2011).

Baxter (1988; 1990) identified three primary dialectical tensions when examining romantic relationships: *autonomy* versus *connection*, *novelty* versus *predictability*, and *openness* versus *closedness*. The research goes on to suggest a variety of coping mechanisms are used to manage the tensions and specifically identified six types of coping strategies. (1) *selection*: choosing one pole as dominant over the other; (2) *cyclic alternation*: alternating back and forth between the poles; (3) *segmentation*: denying that the contradictions are related, by contending that only one pole exists at a time and is not

simultaneously contradicted by the other, and therefore is not a pole at all; (4) *moderation*: offsetting the poles through sacrifice or compromise; (5) *disqualification*: subtly or unclearly offsetting the poles; and (6) *reframing*: transforming the contradictions into different proportions of significance until the poles are no longer regarded as incongruent (Baxter, 1988; 1990).

Baxter (2011) introduced an update to RDT that she described as “RDT 2.0” (p. 1). Baxter underscored five important differences between RDT 1.0 and 2.0: (1) RDT 2.0 moves away from using the term *contradiction* in favor of phrases like *discursive struggle* and *competing discourses*; (2) the concept of the utterance chain becomes central as RDT emphasizes the inability to isolate individual spoken utterances without also understanding the greater context of discourses already spoken and anticipated responses that interplay and impact the utterance in the moment; (3) meanings are established during the interplay of these competing discourses; (4) the competing discourses are not equal because certain discourses have more power than other discourses; and (5) *contrapuntal analysis* is the favored qualitative research method for examining dialogism as the discourse analysis centers around understanding the competing discourses in the written or spoken word and the meanings established through the interplay of these competing dialogues.

Although RDT had its communication scholarship beginnings in the realm of interpersonal communication, it is a metatheoretical perspective that can be applied to organizational communication and the socialization process (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter, 2011; Kramer, 2004). Meaning, “RDT is not a post-positivist theory; that

is, it is not a formal axiomatic theory of propositions and theorems designed to predict and causally explain an objective world” (p. 6, 2011). The goal of RDT is to provide an experiential way to make our socially constructed world graspable. In this way, it is important for organizational communication scholars to identify the interplay of dialectics in TIVW communication, and to examine the *management* and *coping mechanisms* individuals use as they navigate these dialectical tensions (Galanes, 2009).

Organizational group members often require their incongruent needs be addressed concurrently, and this presents a great challenge to leaders and members of these groups (Galanes, 2009). Managing the multitude of competing internal requirements produced by individuals from multiple organizations is a complicated and nuanced undertaking that requires adaptable approaches when collaborating to achieve a common goal (Lewis et al., 2010). Further complicating the situation, these inherent tensions are not transactional, but exist in a recursive process (Galanes, 2009). Individuals and relationships are always changing, which impacts the greater group and generates a dialectical interchange between stability and change (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Kramer, 2004; Galanes, 2009). Meaning, problems and conflicts are hardly consistent or predictable and the coping mechanisms used to manage those problems and conflicts will vary and change.

Historical research suggests two types of dialectical tensions serve as a starting point for understanding interorganizational virtual groups: *interpersonal tensions* and *organizational tensions* (Galanes, 2009; Lewis et al., 2010). These categories of tension result from the simultaneous interplay of various competing discourses: leader-centered

versus group-centered control, focus on the process versus on the outcome, emphasis on the task versus on non-task issues, focus on the simultaneous power of the organizations employing the members versus the multi-organizational people participating in the collaboration, and the coinciding pull concerning engagement in the process and management of the collaboration.

Driskill, Meyer, and Mirivel (2012) examined role negotiation, the dialectical tensions created, and the coping mechanisms used when leaders and members from different backgrounds and professions collaborate in civic groups. This study found that two communication processes are generated in temporary collaborations containing members who have not previously worked together: *diachronic processes* (dialogue that takes place over time) and *synchronic processes* (numerous dialogues at a particular time). From these dialogical processes, two main tensions emerge: (1) noncooperation versus cooperation, and (2) unity versus division.

How individuals communicate and manage tensions in groups that have not previously collaborated is a significant consideration for scholars examining TIVWs to consider. Driskill et al. (2012) found participants predominantly managed group dialectical tensions in four ways. Participants (1) created storylines to express ethical concerns, (2) vacillated between poles of the tension, (3) reframed tension using *segmentation*—one pole of the tension is prioritized over the other and they do not occur simultaneously, and (4) reframed the tension through prayer (the civic organization was a church group) (Baxter, 2011; Driskill et al., 2012).

The study found that these four management tactics (1) produced storylines that appealed to participants and inspired participation in group pursuits; (2) allowed for vacillation between poles that helped members face the unity-division and cooperation-noncooperation tensions as non-confrontational, which permitted intergroup pursuits; (3) encouraged use of segmentation as participants prioritized unity over division when appropriate and vice versa; and, finally, (4) led members to use the coping mechanism of reframing the tension through a form of unified prayer where participants focus on what their diverse backgrounds have in common (Driskill et al., 2012).

While this study focused on members of multiple voluntary church groups, their findings are essential for TIVW scholars to understand. The study identified intergroup dialectical tensions, focused on the strategies used to manage those tensions, and was able to identify how leaders and members managed the tensions toward change and action (Driskill et al., 2012). Further, this study provides an interesting link between dialectics and role negotiation, as much of the study's data revealed communication exchanges between leaders and members of the temporary group as they deliberated about what the different roles should or could be, and as they managed the dialectical tensions that emerged during the collaboration.

Perhaps one of the more compelling tensions TIVWs face is the interplay between *valuation* and *devaluation* that emerges when leadership determines which individual characteristics are of value to the group and which are to be devalued by the group (Jenkins & Dillon, 2012). This study indicates that when groups collaborate toward organizational goals, the individual is devalued in comparison to the value of the group.

Further, while multiple coping strategies were used, the primary coping mechanism employed by members to deal with this tension was the process of *separation* (vacillation between the two contradictory poles). This could be problematic for TIVWs, as dialectical tension research indicates that resolving or eliminating organizational tension is not always an appropriate or desired approach (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Bakhtin, 1981; Jenkins & Dillon, 2012; Kramer, 2004). The success of TIVW collaboration may be hindered if individuals are vacillating between self-identification at the expense of the group, and group identification at the expense of the self.

Instead of using separation as a coping mechanism, research indicates it is more effective to use *reframing* strategies to make sense of tension-filled situations (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Jenkins & Dillon, 2012; Kramer, 2004). By finding a way to accept a tension and reframe it toward a more constructive understanding, TIVW members have an increased chance of successfully navigating a scenario where their individual value is subservient to the organizational group's value—the norm for many organizational endeavors. Organizational members use the reframing tactic in an attempt to make sense of the situation and often create sense-making narratives that provide plausible solutions and allow for continued participation (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). This research indicates the importance of identifying the dialectical tensions within TIVWs and the coping mechanisms employed by TIVW members.

### **Research Questions**

Organizational socialization theory has often viewed role negotiation in terms of new-member entry into an organization and through the lens of the superior-subordinate

communication relationship (Jablin, 1987). Interorganizational collaborations create a unique dynamic in superior-subordinate communication as leaders from one organization are called upon to manage members of other organizations (Lewis et al., 2010). This study aims to examine how these relationships develop within TIVWs:

RQ1: How do leaders and members of TIVWs determine and communicate their roles within the group?

The historical communication research has listed a variety of dialectical tensions that develop during interorganizational group collaboration (Galanes, 2009; Kramer, 2004; Lewis et al., 2010). This study asks the following questions in regard to TIVWs:

RQ2a: What dialectical tensions emerge during TIVW collaborations?

RQ2b: What coping mechanisms do members and leaders employ in response to dialectical tensions during TIVW collaborations?

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

#### **Introduction**

To address the research questions established above, it was essential to locate individuals with experience working virtually, remotely, and interorganizationally. Further, it was essential to find a participant population that ranged in job title, years of experience, and organization type (sole proprietor to Fortune 500, entry level to president/owner) to better understand the dynamics of role negotiation in TIVWs. Finally, direct and dialogic interaction with the participants was required to examine the dialectical tensions and coping mechanisms individuals reveal through telling their stories about their experiences (contrapuntal analysis) (Baxter, 2011).

## Sample

This research project used *stratified purposeful sampling*, as the sample consisted of two key units that differ in a critical way (Patton, 2002). TIVW group *leaders* and group *members* participated so the study might better understand the dynamics of role negotiation among and between these groups, the dialectical tensions that emerge within these groups, and the coping mechanisms these groups use to manage tension. Participants were invited through LinkedIn, a network for working professionals, using the student investigator's network of professionals. A "Request to Participate in Research" posting was made available to the 298 members of the researcher's LinkedIn network. 102 members of the network viewed the post between January 7, 2016 (the posting date) and January 14, 2016 when the solicitation of participant's window closed. (LinkedIn, 2016). 36 responded to the request and contacted the researcher by phone, email, and the messaging function within LinkedIn. Ultimately, 16 were purposefully chosen for their stratified organization types and job descriptions as the study wanted participants from entry level positions up to president/owner working at large, publically traded companies, mid-sized private companies, small businesses, and sole proprietorships (see Table A). The study reached saturation early, as many of the individuals repeated similar concepts during their responses to the interview questions. Saturation was determined when interviews 15 and 16 did not produce any new themes or concepts from the preceding interviews. Eight men and eight women were interviewed.

The data introduced an interesting result when participants were asked if they identified as a *leader* or a *member*. Eight identified as "leader only," only one person

identified as “member only,” and seven participants self identified as both a leader *and* a member depending on the context of the situation (most of these “hybrid” participants attributed a 50/50 split between fulfilling the roles of leader and member). Seven of the participants held the position of president and/or owner, and were selected to participate to represent the leader portion of the sample. Interestingly, only three of the president/owners identified as leader only, while the other four identified as leader/member. Three participants were selected from the director/executive level. One identified as leader only (not member), even though they report directly to a leader. Two of the director/executive individuals identified as both leader and member depending on the context. Six participants were selected as their job titles indicated they were likely to identify as members of their organization given the many layers of job titles that would traditionally be considered superior in terms of hierarchy and the traditional role negotiation descriptors of superior/subordinate (Jablin, 1979; 1987). However, only one of these six participants identified as member only. Interestingly, one identified as leader only, while the other four identified as both leader *and* member depending on the context (See Table A). These findings will be more deeply examined in the results and discussion sections that follow.

Table A: Participant, Job Level, Organization Type, and Role Self-Identification Chart

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Job Level (Predicted Identity)*</b>	<b>Org Type</b>	<b>Self-Identified as Leader, Member, Leader/Member</b>
Participant 1	Director (L)	Fortune 500	Leader/Member
Participant 2	Account Rep (M)	Small Business	Leader/Member
Participant 3	President (L)	Small Business	Leader
Participant 4	Operations (M)	Fortune 500	Leader
Participant 5	Sole Proprietor (L)	Small Business	Leader/Member

Participant 6	Sole Proprietor (L)	Small Business	Leader/Member
Participant 7	Agent (M)	Public Small Cap	Leader
Participant 8	Partner (L)	Small Business	Leader/Member
Participant 9	Customer Rep (M)	Small Business	Leader
Participant 10	Account Rep (M)	Fortune 500	Leader/Member
Participant 11	President (L)	Small Business	Leader
Participant 12	Sole Proprietor (L)	Small Business	Leader/Member
Participant 13	Account Rep (M)	Fortune 500	Member
Participant 14	President (L)	Small Business	Leader
Participant 15	Sales Rep (M)	Large Private Co.	Leader
Participant 16	Director (L)	Large Private Co.	Leader

\*L = Leader; M = Member

### Procedure

The researcher conducted 16 interviews using a semi-structured approach that asked a series of open-ended questions. The primary purpose of the interview sessions was to allow participants the opportunity to self-report through a dialogic conversation so the researcher might better understand participant perspectives. The researcher had two sets of interview questions (see Appendix A). One set for those participants whom identify as *member/non-leader* and those whom identify as a *leader*. The interview questions probed for communication about leader/member interactions in TIVWs. Based on the compelling finding that 15 of the 16 participants, regardless of job title and description, identified as a leader as part of their role, the interviewer was called upon to ask questions from both lists with most of the participants. The interviews lasted an average of 28:42 (twenty-eight minutes, 42 seconds) with the longest lasting 47:18 and the shortest timed at 12:04.

### **Data Recording and Confidentiality**

After participants verbally granted consent, each session was recorded using the GoToMeeting platform as the interview sessions were conducted virtually. Participants were informed that their comments would be confidential and that any names, or organizational names, that they used during the interview would be deleted from the transcripts and not used in any of the documents created from the data. The recordings were then transcribed into text files for analysis. Based on the requirements of the researcher's IRB committee, these recorded files were stored using the graduate student's school-provided Google Drive storage folder. The recordings were deleted from Google Drive upon completion of the transcription as per the IRB's request.

### **Analysis**

The research questions examined the way individuals negotiate their roles in TIVWs, the dialectical tensions that emerge in these types of collaborations, and the coping mechanisms used to manage those tensions. This research project employed grounded theory as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), in the sense that the goal of the researcher was to let the participant narratives, as data, drive the theoretical implications of the study through an inductive process. This seemed the most appropriate method for the study to take given the research questions, the limited amount of research on TIVW communication, and the desire to examine dialectical tensions and coping mechanisms.

The interview data set consisted of 79 typed, single-spaced pages and contained 228,640 words. The data was constantly reviewed for repeated ideas and concepts and

categorized into themes systematically using open coding techniques. These ideas and concepts were coded and grouped into appropriate themes or categories using a constant comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). From there, using axial coding techniques, the data from the different sources were reviewed over and over to confirm coding and categorical accuracy, and to make certain the maximum amount of nuance within the data was captured for purposes of the study (See Table B). This cyclical data analysis and process provide greater credibility to the conclusions drawn from and reported about the research questions (Patton, 2002). After this constant comparative analysis was completed, the themes established in the data were reviewed for any similarities with the tensions and coping mechanisms identified in the literature review. Similarly, the codes assigned to the data were reviewed to see which of them might relate to the role-negotiation literature reviewed (See Table B). To triangulate the findings, an experienced coder and qualitative scholar reviewed the interview transcripts and codes (Patton, 2002). Further, three participants agreed to verify the analysis of their rich exemplars used in this study. Each participant agreed that the codes attributed to their interview statements were accurately interpreted. Finally, once codes that related to the previous research were identified, the unique findings of this study were revealed. The data were tagged accordingly and the grounded results and discussion follow.

Table B: Open, Axial, and Selective Codes Chart

<b>Open Codes</b>	<b>Axial Codes</b>	<b>Selective Codes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader</li> <li>• Member</li> <li>• Leader/Member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role Fluidity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader-Identity vs. Member-Identity Dialectical Tension</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual as Advantage</li> <li>• Virtual as Disadvantage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect vs. Disconnect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autonomy vs. Connectedness</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always With Family Good</li> <li>• Always With Family Difficult</li> <li>• Face to Face Beneficial</li> <li>• Face to Face Vital/Client Required</li> <li>• Virtual Communication a Deterrent to Business Development</li> <li>• Too Reliant on Virtual</li> </ul>	Dialectical Tension	Dialectical Tension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipated Needs</li> <li>• Actual Needs</li> <li>• Training Statements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader Priority vs. Member Priority</li> <li>• Structured Management vs. Fluid Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leader-Centered Focus vs. Group-Centered Focus</li> <li>Dialectical Tension</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Flexibility</li> <li>• Professional Flexibility</li> <li>• Financial/Time Savings</li> <li>• Experience/Established/Professional</li> <li>• Pseudo Commitment</li> <li>• Real Commitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional Relationship vs. Personal Relationship</li> <li>• Task at Hand vs. Other Task Focus</li> <li>• Task vs. Non-Task</li> <li>Dialectical Tension</li> <li>• Relationships vs. Structures</li> <li>• Process vs. Outcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational Value vs. Individual Value</li> <li>Dialectical Tension</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping: Selection</li> <li>• Coping: Cyclic Alternation</li> <li>• Coping: Segmentation</li> <li>• Coping: Moderation</li> <li>• Coping: Disqualification</li> <li>• Coping: Reframing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection</li> <li>• Cyclic Alternation</li> <li>• Segmentation</li> <li>• Moderation</li> <li>• Disqualification</li> <li>• Reframing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selection</li> <li>• Cyclic Alternation</li> <li>• Segmentation</li> <li>• Moderation</li> <li>• Disqualification</li> <li>• Reframing</li> </ul>

## Chapter 4: Results

### Role Negotiation: Contextual and Dialogically Constituted

RQ1 proved to be a dynamic research question in the sense that a variety of data addressed this question, which sought a better understanding of how members of TIVWs negotiate role and status within these interorganizational groups. The data revealed that this is a complex phenomenon that very much depends on a variety of variables and

context. The employing organization's culture and structure, the type of work or task involved, the experience and expertise of the assembled TIVW members, and self-perception regarding one's role were some of the key variables that seemed to impact role identity, and, therefore, role negotiation.

**Fortune 500: traditional role negotiation processes and fluid role identity.** To start, there were a few straightforward, traditional pieces of data that indicated, for some, the organizations themselves had policies, processes, procedures, and job descriptions that preemptively dictated who will fulfill the roles in the collaboration. In particular, participants who came from Fortune 500 companies often reported existing corporate policies, job descriptions, etc. that dictated who does what and when. For example, Participant 4, who works for the operations department of a Fortune 500 company who provides print-on-demand services made the following statement:

“It's basically a traditional workflow where you get the yes/no questions and that sort of determines who it needs. So, it's less the organization determines it, and it's more where you are in the selling cycle who gets it. In the early part of the selling cycle it will be the sales person, the middle part of the cycle would probably call on the engineers, and then the final stage will probably be operations.”

So, while the participant does not perceive their superior/s (management) or “the organization” as the “leader” determining the workflow, it is clear there must be organizational policies and procedures that impact how the work flows and who conducts the work. Who created the “yes/no” questions the participant referenced? Was it an organizational leader or team that established policy, formally or informally, through workflows and/or job descriptions? Who established the different divisions of labor that will address certain tasks (sales, engineering, operations)? Was it an organization leader

or team of leaders? Regardless of the answers to these questions, this member's ownership over the role and the avowed meaning assigned to the role (identity), combined with this member's operational schema developed while enacting the role, produced a self-identification of leader when fulfilling the role regardless of the job title, description, and rank in the traditional superior/subordinate hierarchical organizational structure. For example, Participant 4 identified as a leader, but during their description of operational processes, it became clear that there were traditional structures, and, therefore, superiors, participating in the collaboration:

“What we would typically do when bringing on a new account, and this was usually done in partnership with the sales engineers because this was part of the role. We would actually print what we called a playbook, which was basically a reference guide for each account, and it gave all the details of accounts. Everything from "who is who", what are people's roles, down to real specifics about supplies, specs, to statements of work and service level agreements. So, everyone was essentially working off the same document of really what the rules were. So that would be something done in a Word doc or PDF and distributed digitally. Then reinforced through webinars or conference calls to sort of review and communicate. Depending on the account and the volume of the account, maybe there would be internal monthly or quarterly reviews or reports on performance that would measure that. There were inventory levels that need to be managed, and that was done typically through email and Excel spreadsheet formats, but periodically reviewed during conference calls as well.”

This statement seems to reveal that accountability structures were in place, an organizational “playbook” describing “what the rules were.” The rules were reinforced during webinars or conference calls where leaders would clarify the rules and/or request reports on performance. This represents a much more typical superior/subordinate relationship, but this member identified as leader. It seems clear that the organizational job title, description, hierarchical structure, and presence of superiors did not factor into the self-identified role identity as leader. It seems some members of TIVWs establish an

identity of leader because of their perceived ownership over the communicative processes, which is perceptually more important to the individual when determining role identity than any organizational socialization attempts regarding job title or hierarchy.

Participant 10, a sales member of a Fortune 500 company, when discussing how roles and responsibilities are established within their collaborations said, “Usually it kind of falls within our assigned roles. I have a number of people that support me as a seller. There are certain tasks they can do for me. Whether it’s running reports or coordinating meetings for me with other departments. So, we pretty much kind of know our roles.” The four individuals who work for Fortune 500 companies had several comments like those listed above that indicate the employing organization has significant influence as to how these groups collaborate and who will be part of the collaboration, regardless of how “present” or “visible” the policy makers are during the collaboration, but those processes and influence do not necessarily dictate how one will identify their role: as a leader, member, or leader/member.

The identification as leader seems to also develop from one’s perception as the communication “conduit” that secures important client relationships for the employing organization. For example, Participant 1, a Fortune 500 employee, when describing his view of his role said, “. . . that flexibility to own and manage my business, if you will, and I’ve always treated myself as the conduit between my customers and my employer. So trying to work out the best arrangement that is suited for both, and is the best fit. And, because I kind of own that relationship, I have the flexibility to set my schedule accordingly.” It would seem these larger organizations provide a variety of information

that ascribes identity markers for the members, which the members combine with their avowed identities. This appears to coalesce with the organizational socialization research in that role negotiation at its most basic definition is an organization's attempt to socialize the member, and a member's attempt to individualize the role (Jablin, 1987).

However, it is important to note that one Fortune 500 individual identified as a leader despite the fact that person does not directly manage any other individuals and has no supervisory oversight or responsibility for any members of the collaboration.

Participant 10, who identified as a leader and a member, with a 50/50 split between the roles, had this to say:

“Just to be clear, I don't have any direct reports in this role. I'm not in management. I just have to manage myself. It's easier some days than others. But, in general, I would say there is a lot of corporate accountability here, and I don't find myself having to follow up on people very often. I can only think of one instance so far.”

In this case, the individual has not identified as leader (a person in the organizational hierarchy who manages multiple individuals within the organization) in the traditional superior/subordinate sense (Jablin 1979), but rather senses an autonomous need to manager the self, which leads to the leadership identity.

**Small businesses and sole proprietors: nontraditional role negotiation processes and fluid role identity.** For others in small organizations or sole proprietorships, the negotiation of roles and task assignments was a much more fluid process (moving back and forth between leadership and non-leadership roles) that tended to rely on context more than organizational policy. Certain individuals, specifically those operating in a consultant role, noted that whether they take the lead or follow the lead

primarily has to do with the specific client relationship and the role that client wants the consultant to take. For example, Participant 6, a sole-proprietor who owns and operates a consulting and training business, said:

“So, I tend to let them pick their problem solving method unless I see an issue that is too serious and then I might make a suggestion. I say, ‘would it help if we did ‘this’ at all? Or would it help you if you did this and such? What do you think?’ But I generally won’t be directive about it. It’s not my role in that group.”

In this case, the consultant may take on a role of leadership “if” something problematic emerges; however, primarily, in this group, she has actively chosen the role of *member* because that is what this specific group demands.

It is important to note that at times, those who rely on the contextual, fluid approach to TIVW collaboration can have an adverse reaction to other’s attempts to manage with traditional, policy-driven approaches. For example, Participant 12, a direct sales person (self-employed) who has spent over a decade working in TIVWs, said this about a traditional approach taken by a self-avowed TIVW leader:

“Primarily she conducted a weekly conference call, and being that I’ve been in sales a long time, really it (the self-declared leader’s approach) was super old school. [She] was going to teach you how to sell. And it was kind of a crack up because I can kind of tell that the person doing this probably doesn’t have a lot of experience in sales . . . ‘We are going to teach you how to sell,’ which kind of cracked everybody up. Nobody really talked. She has some sort of sales coach or mentor that is teaching her how to do this stuff.”

It is evident that Participant 12 does not view himself or herself as subordinate to the self-avowed leader in this case. Not only is there a lack of superior-subordinate identity in the relationship for Participant 12, but there is also a lack of credibility regarding the self-avowed leader’s sales ability that forces Participant 12 to assume a role of superiority to the self-avowed leader. Or, take this example from Participant 6:

“I would say in meetings . . . having a variety of ways to engage people in discussion. I get fairly frustrated when the only method is, ‘Ok, now we’ll go around the group in order and . . .’ it’s not natural conversation. Sometimes that is the best engagement method, but then other times it is better to use a different method. Yes, that would be the most important thing to me, and I don’t see that again as much. I would say that would be the one criticism I would have of the one meeting manager I do have that I like is that she is great with the time management and the meeting plan, but I think her leading discussion, she’s not as good at that.”

It would seem overt or inflexible structure can frustrate TIVW members, which may create a situation that suppresses input. In the first example from Participant 12, the organization created the formal structure. In the second example from Participant 6, the leader’s personal style introduced the inflexible structure. It seems TIVW member avowal and ascription processes (role negotiation) in combination with member perceptions and willingness for engagement with flexible or inflexible organizational processes significantly impact the communication effectiveness of these groups.

### **Dialectical Tensions**

**Leader-identity versus member-identity.** RQ2a asked which dialectical tensions emerge in TIVWs. Perhaps the most interesting result, pertaining to RQ2a (and RQ1), was the finding of the *leader-identity* versus *member-identity* dialectical tension that emerged during the interviews. It seems that identification as leader or member is a dynamic and highly contextual process for individuals participating in TIVWs. This is grounded in many of the comments made by participants. In some cases the context has to do with the norms within an industry. Participant 7, a real estate agent who self identifies as a leader, had this to say:

“Our closing department is our closing department. That’s who takes care of our files and takes care of all the behind the scenes work with the title company that

we don't know about. They basically babysit our files until closing. The broker is basically the boss of the office, but not really the independent contractors. I work somewhat for [the boss], but the back office works for the agents. But, if you are looking at a tier structure, the broker is definitely the boss, but in practice it's not necessarily viewed that way.”

While the hierarchy and nature of the arrangement is clear to all involved in the collaboration, the agent still identifies as leader because of the relatively autonomous nature of the work. Further, with much of the organizational work conducted “behind closed doors,” the agent is not necessarily participating with the operational portion of the collaboration which may further the autonomous identity.

Interestingly, a bit later in the conversation, the agent revealed that at some level the “back office” or broker-led organization exerts leadership influence over the agent beyond simply holding the “independent agent’s” license. Consider Participant 7’s comment:

“My closing department definitely has their checklist of everything I need to give them, and if I don't give them what they need or they need extra information or something from my sellers, then they go through me and I contact the sellers or buyers for whatever is needed for our files. They're the ones that mastermind and take care of all of our files to make sure things are done the right way.”

Essentially, the agent is required to provide information to the broker, but this is “not necessarily viewed” as a superior/subordinate situation. It seems Participant 7 places the value on the role the agent fills as the communication conduit between the “closing department” and the “sellers or buyers” as the primary driver of their leader identity. The structure of the real estate agent industry provides an opportunity for the leader-identity versus member-identity dialectic to emerge for the licensed agents. The impact of how

brokers and agents approach and cope with this dialectic will be discussed in the RQ2b results and discussion.

Another example of the organizational structure impacting the leader-identity versus member-identity dialectic was found in Participant 15's description of identity, "Ok. I view myself as a leadership position. Essentially we own, you own your own business. So, for me, I want to build my business, and with that I use these products along with the tools that are given by our company or my up line per se. Then I recruit people to do the same. And with recruiting people who also sell it benefits me." In this case, although there is a company and "up line" responsible for supporting this organizational member, the structure of the outside sales position creates a level of autonomy and responsibility that induces a leadership identity to the point that the organizational member identifies as a business owner, yet the member does not own shares in the company, nor does the member own the client list they service.

Interestingly, individuals who owned their own businesses (as mentioned above in the results for RQ1) still faced the leader-identity versus member-identity tension. In one instance this played out directly during the course of the interview. Participant 5 is a business owner and revealed the leader/member-identity tension by saying, "If you have somebody, in this instance the woman I'm talking about is my client, or maybe I'm her client as I'm helping her with work she doesn't have the time to do." Within the sentence the participant is reflecting on who is the client, who is the leader, and who is the member. Participant 5, owner of their own business, encounters the leader-identity versus member-identity dialectic in the sense that she views the client as a leader because the

client is paying her to provide a service; however that service the client needs performed requires the expertise of Participant 5. It would seem the interdependence of members of TIVWs contributes to the leader-identity versus member-identity dialectic. It is important to note that many of the participants seemed to recognize this tension, especially those who identified as a “leader/member.” Participant 1 had this to say about their role in a Fortune 500 company, “Most cases (I am the) leader in my specific role, but I am a member of the organization and have supervisors.” It would seem role identity and negotiations are significantly influenced by factors well beyond the efforts made by the organization to implement a superior/subordinate hierarchy. These findings and their implications will be considered further in the discussion section.

**Autonomy versus connectedness.** Another dialectical tension found in the data was the *autonomy* versus *connectedness* tension, or the desire to retain individuality versus the desire to connect with others (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). However, an interesting twist on the tension emerged for those who work remotely using technology. The ability to “disconnect” from work when your office is in your home, or in your hand in the case of smart phones, was noted by multiple participant statements. For example:

*Participant 2:* “I guess work never goes away. So, even, when they're (the family) sleeping, I'm working. So, whereas, when I did a similar job, but worked for someone, when I left work, work was done. I didn't work at night, and I didn't work from home. Where, here (home office), I usually work at night.”

*Participant 16:* “Setting up fair, healthy boundaries so people don't lose the balance of life. Priorities. I mean, when I say I work 70-80 hours per week it's because I'm on the phone at 5:30 am and I'm looking at my last email at midnight. And Saturdays and Sundays are all fair game. Vacation, fair game. First vacation I had was on a missions trip a year and a half ago to El Salvador and Guatemala for three weeks, and my company wouldn't pay for my cell phone plan for me to bring a device, computer, or cell phone, so I brought nothing. Within six hours I

felt naked reaching for my cell phone on my hip and it wasn't there to stay connected to the world.

*Participant 9:* “But there is also a down side to this, too, where I feel like I don't ever get a break from that work. I'm lucky enough that I do love it, so, to be able to do it on the weekends is not such a bad thing.”

Perhaps a more accurate description of this tension would be *connect* versus *disconnect* meant in a very literal way. The ability to always be connected and work anytime offers valued flexibility while simultaneously keeping one from disconnecting for needed breaks from work and time for other priorities.

Further, the idea of home office quite literally puts the workplace in the home.

Again, we see the connect versus disconnect tension emerge in an interesting way.

Participant 11 said:

“Well, I could tell you what my wife dislikes about the virtual office, which is important. I mean you are always here. That is that euphoria of "Daddy's home!" that is not a reality when you are always home. You have to be able to separate work from home life. That's a struggle for anyone, regardless of where they are working, but obviously that is heightened when your office is in your home. To be able to shut off for at least a couple of hours and leave your aggravations and bad humor checked within the confines of your home. That is the negative.”

So, not only does the connect versus disconnect tension have implications on the participant's ability to connect and disconnect, but it can also impact the way the family communicates interpersonally. What are the implications of the office's “aggravations and bad humor” operating within the family's domain? More research on the impact home offices have on the interpersonal communication behaviors of families seems of import to scholars and organizations.

The autonomy versus connectedness tension also revealed itself for some in the form of feeling isolated. The remote nature of a home office caused some to struggle with

feeling connected at times. As Participant 10 reflected, “Every once in awhile you can start to feel like you're on an island. You can start to feel a little isolated if you don't figure out a way to connect with your peers to keep you going.” Other participants discussed this feeling of isolation that emerges from working independently at a remote workplace. The lack of colleagues in a shared space seems to have a tangible effect on one’s level of connectedness to the group. Participant 12 had this to say:

“It's interesting, I've worked in an office, I've worked for a publishing company, and I've been independent. The thing that I probably dislike the most about being independent is (missing) the collegiately of working in a group with similar minded folks . . . as an independent, I have to make that happen with other independents that might share a product line. But it kind of requires outward activity. If I just didn't bother to contact anybody, I probably wouldn't hear from anybody (laughter). It's kind of like family or friends, you know. And I've always been that person where I don't really care if you haven't called me in a year, I'll call you anyway, and I won't hold it against you.

Some participants indicated feelings of loneliness due to the isolation of their remote workplace. Further, some described a lack of creative-thinking or problem-solving ability within the group, which they attributed to the lack of face-to-face interactions. Participant 1 described the autonomy versus connectedness dialectic this way:

“I'll just call it ‘loneliness’ that sometimes just prevails. Particularly around the holidays you don't have a lot of customer appointments. Just the occasional pop in, giving gifts, or something like that. Unless your activity is high, not having an office, and I think back to when I was a junior rep in the industry. Going into an office you built relationships and you had a team. Sometimes you went out for drinks after work. You had company events and things. Potluck dinners and things like that. Having that day-to-day interaction with that group to where you feel part of that, that camaraderie. Because I can work with you over the phone, I can work with you over video, but having that personal hand-to-hand touch, hand shake, sitting in your office, white boarding, whatever it is. There still is a necessity, to me, for that. And that's one of the hardest parts for me, and why I long for team sales meetings and national sales meetings, or events, opportunities to get together with my team at some level, because it does occasionally feel a

little bit lonely. It's a weird feeling. I've got friends. Still, (not) having that work group, you feel a little more isolated.”

Feelings of isolation or disconnectedness can be problematic for organizations, and several participants expressed these kinds of feelings. With the amount of time, money, and resource organizations spend on building healthy cultures meant to inspire and motivate success, it would seem this is an important aspect to consider for organizations using remote offices for employees. These feelings of isolation or loneliness might impact member identity, morale, productivity, and, ultimately, one's identification as part of the organization.

**Leader-centered focus versus group-centered focus.** Another tension present in the data and related closely to the findings in the research Galanes (2009) conducted on small-group dialectics was the *leader-centered focus* versus *group-centered focus* dialectical tension. Looking at Participant 12's comment, again, we see this tension grounded in the data:

“Primarily she conducted a weekly conference call, and being that I've been in sales a long time, really it (the self-declared leader's approach) was super old school. [She] was going to teach you how to sell. And it was kind of a crack up because I can kind of tell that the person doing this probably doesn't have a lot of experience in sales . . . “We are going to teach you how to sell,” which kind of cracked everybody up. Nobody really talked. She has some sort of sales coach or mentor that is teaching her how to do this stuff.”

It seems the leader here has made a decision about what the priority is going to be, but the members are not engaged in, or seeing the benefit of, the leader's approach. In this case, as Participant 12 said, “Nobody really talked,” it would seem this particular tension runs the risk of stifling group communication and participation. The leader's perceived lack of competence is causing members to withdraw from the conversation, which

reinforces Miller et al.'s (1999) research on the antecedent requirements required for subordinate role negotiation to occur.

Or, take this example of the leader-centered focus versus group-centered focus dialectical tension found in Participant 6's comment:

"A lot of the time she (the leader) takes it offline. She'll make a note and say, "I'll get together with 'so-in-so' about that." Or, "we'll have a separate meeting for that." And that is mostly an appropriate decision, but there have been a few cases where I thought we should do it as a whole team together. And again, I think she was somewhat making that decision based on time deadlines, which is fine, but ultimately we will be revisiting those conflicts. I know that. And, so that can be a little frustrating. They need to be resolved by the whole group.

In this case the leader is directing conflict and or issues toward offline discussions due to what appears to be a time consideration (leader-focus), which can be an appropriate approach. However, as the participant notes, there are times when conflict or issues are central to the attention of the group (group-focus), and this could make the individualization and privatization of the conversation among a select few problematic for the group as a whole. Understanding how leaders and members cope with this tension seems important to consider and will be discussed in the RQ2b results and discussion.

**Organizational value versus individual value.** Finally, the fourth main tension that was grounded in the data is labeled *organizational value* versus *individual value*. This tension addresses the interplay between what the organization deems important during the collaboration versus what each individual prioritizes during the collaboration. Participant 16, a leader, discussed how the organization's long-term growth needs required the sales force to change operational processes. This organizational value faced

resistance from the veteran and reluctant-to-change sales force who prioritized their old and successful sales processes over the new needs of the organization:

It's all about perspective. Very few of them have sold product, business-to-business sales for other companies. So, they don't have perspective on how normal companies want to grow. Good steady, healthy, profitable growth is much more important than just growing, and at the end of the month, the year saying great we grew 17% but not being prepared for that growth, is actually detrimental to the company. Teaching them perspective, that technology matters, these things matter, and as we grow we can't do things the old way with a handshake and "by gosh by golly" Wild, Wild West, we need procedures in place because we have to hire new people and technology is key to integration. And communicating that to multiple groups to what could very soon be three maybe four distribution centers West Coast to East Coast. So, now it becomes even more important to have us on the same page through email, teleconference, etc., etc., etc

From this leader's perspective the veteran individuals may be focused on what is making them individually successful and prioritizing their roles accordingly regardless of the demands placed upon them by their organization to take the organization's perceived necessary steps required for sustainable, healthy growth. The veteran sales force seems to fail to perceive the organization's value according to this leader, instead they remain reluctant to change what has been a successful process for many years and favor their personal value over the value of the organization. While this is not a unique tension for leaders and members of TIVWs, both leaders and members are forced to overcome the lack of face-to-face communication, and, perhaps, supervision that might make a transition like this easier to cope with and manage. Participant 16 indicates as much when he said, "I have a 25-year history to try and overcome without face-to-face. Which is tough because you can't have them sitting right here having a face-to-face conversation and call them out on something, individually or as a group."

Another interesting piece of data that related to the organizational value versus individual value dialectic had to do with members “checking out,” or “checking their email.” In the age of virtual collaboration, keeping individuals focused on the *task at hand* versus *other task focus*, more commonly described as “multitasking,” may have interesting implications in virtual work environments. Participant 8 put it this way, “. . . myself and others are both more easily distracted by multitasking when they are not in a room face to face, or in a virtual setting.” This statement reveals that when one is not in a face-to-face environment, say on a virtual conference call, one may be more likely to prioritize one’s personal agenda over the group’s agenda or the leader’s agenda in the form of working on other tasks instead of engaging in the present task with 100% attention.

To further emphasize this point, moments later during the same interview with Participant 8, the participant had this to say, “I’m sorry, could you repeat that question? I got distracted by an email I just received.” This study is referring to this tension as the *task* versus *other-task* dialectical tension as a sub-tension under the organizational value versus individual value tension. More research is required on the impact of how the media used to administrate TIVW’s impacts real commitment versus a distracted commitment to the collaboration. In general, it seems the advances in technology and ease of access for users to access a variety of forms of technology simultaneously is impacting how people “pay attention” and communicate in virtual group settings.

## Coping Mechanisms

RQ2b asked which coping mechanisms leaders and members use to manage dialectical tension in TIVWs. The four selected dialectical tensions grounded in the data revealed a number of coping mechanisms leaders, members, and leader/members use to manage these tensions. As indicated in the literature review, the traditional research suggests individuals tend to use one or more of the following coping mechanisms to manage dialectical tension: (1) selection; (2) cyclic alternation; (3) segmentation; (4) moderation; (5) disqualification; and (6) reframing (Baxter 1988, 1990). Each of these coping mechanisms was grounded in the data of this study.

In some instances, the individual's role within the hierarchy factored into which coping mechanisms the group used. Participant 3, president of a company, made this statement that indicates their group will first use *moderation*, but ultimately the presidential authority allows for the use of *selection* when required, "If something needs to be delegated that decision lies with myself, as president, but usually we try to do things as open as we can and get everybody's opinion (moderation). I guess you have to be [a hardliner] at some point (selection). Not everything is the way you would like it to be, but we do try to at least discuss it, and the person most capable usually takes on the task." As president, and the "final decision maker," this participant relies on their organizational structure as a method for coping with tension. This is not uncommon in traditional business practices, but it is important to note that using *selection* to cope with tension is a last resort for the president of this company who would much prefer to use a more

constructive and inclusive coping mechanism like *moderation* (Baxter, 2011; Balogun & Johnson, 2004).

Those in the role of “customer” in a TIVW introduced other tensions and coping mechanisms discussed by the participants. The medium a customer wishes (or demands) to use as the method of communication can introduce the *organizational value* versus *individual value* tension. Participant 14 provided this statement:

“I have been noticing more and more customers wanting things emailed to them. Even when they are asking for quotes and inquiring about services we've been getting more and more requests where people say, ‘please contact me by email and not by phone,’ which I think is kind of interesting. I usually have to go back to them and let them know that ‘I need to connect with you in order to give you a more accurate quote or to assess the situation more thoroughly.’ Most of the time they are open to that, but more and more people [want] to keep it more virtual. Unfortunately they don't give me enough of a description for me to give an accurate quote. I think I could give them more accurate and better pricing if we could discuss the situation so I can truly assess their needs. But they kind of give you this image or reference in some way that, ‘they want this information, but they don't want to be bothered.’”

The organization, at times, faces a client who has used *segmentation* to cope with the tension of the organization valuing a live discussion about the details so a clear understanding of needs, services, and, therefore, accurate pricing can be credibly established. Whereas, the individual values the ability to access this information via the static communication form of email without a live interaction. Essentially, the client used *segmentation* to cope with the situation by denying that they need a live conversation to establish accurate pricing (denying the organization’s value exists favoring only their individual value). Participant 14, to cope and manage this tension, explained how they respond to the client’s use of *segmentation*:

“Needless to say, I do try and contact them by phone. Just to try and get past that barrier. Then, if not, it ends up that I'm having to give a far more detailed quote with a variety of scenarios: ‘If this is your situation, this is how we would price, but if this is your situation and needs, than this is the price.’ Which makes it a lot more complicated. They are definitely the quotes I do not look forward to giving.”

Essentially, Participant 14 is determined to manage the tension through *moderation*, as the development of a more detailed quote offsets the tension through sacrifice and compromise (taking the time to provide a more detailed quote that addresses the multiple needs the client may require with the increased risk that the lack of communication may hinder business developing between the organization and the individual). The desire some hold to heavily rely on digital formats for communication in lieu of personal connection by phone (or in person) is an interesting communication obstacle for TIVW members to manage.

Another case richly represented a combined use of *disqualification* and *selection* when members of the TIVW faced a form of the *autonomy* versus *connectedness* tension. Participant 5 described how members of the TIVW would “lie in the weeds” on certain topics by not speaking up or voicing an opinion on a tension-filled topic:

“Well, I had a model called ‘go around the horn,’ so that I made sure everyone spoke. There are always at least one or two people who lie in the weeds and then later say they weren't on board. But they didn't speak up, so, when we had issues or when we needed to make decisions, we would usually go geographically. We would start with the West Coast or we would start with the East Coast and I'd call on each person. I'd try to pull some words out of them if they weren't talking. Later we got Web cams, but half the time people didn't use them.”

Certain members of this TIVW would use disqualification to subtly or unclearly offset the poles in tension by simply refusing to offer an opinion during the debate, waiting to see how things turned out, and then siding with the “winning” pole of the tension once

the results were known by claiming to have never supported the “losing” pole in the tension. This caused Participant 5 to “go around the horn” to force the members to engage in *selection*, choosing one pole as dominant over the other, in cases where a dichotomous choice was required. The idea of leader-forced *selection* as a coping mechanism is an interesting concept to understand. In moments where a clear decision between two poles is required, how do leaders and members of TIVWs competently communicate toward consensus? Further, if the context demands a single pole be chosen, is this really a form of reframing in the sense that the organization and/or the leader is informing the members they must have an opinion even if the reality is the members are uncertain as to which pole to select?

Participant 5 went on to explain how this particular TIVW also faced the tension of *organizational value* versus *individual value* due to organizational decisions to fundamentally restructure the organization without providing a clear plan as to how the current members would fit into that new organization. To help mitigate the uncertainty that Participant 5 believed to be impacting member understanding of the new organizational value, a coping mechanism of *reframing* was introduced:

“To me it seemed important, at least every other meeting, to make sure there was at least one positive thing on the agenda. Not totally problem solving and decision making and me trying to, basically, trying to convince them to get on board with some new requirement related to . . . extra work for everyone, no one wanted to do it, and they weren't going to get compensated. So, what I'd try to do was have agenda topics where people . . . I mean I talked to people a lot one-on-one on the phone and you find out when your employees have done something great, something noteworthy . . . so, we'd take some time just to go around and talk about customer successes. We would go around the horn and do that some weeks. It was always very leveling and heartening. We could get away from the negative stuff and focus on the clients. ‘Here's what the issue was, and here is what we ended up doing for them.’ Boy I tell you. So, a way for people to shine and have

their moment in the sun kind of. Sometimes you just have to say, ‘you can't see me right now, but I am smiling from ear to ear. Way to go! Great job!’ So, sometimes you do that publicly . . . I think it is possible to do it in a meeting setting particularly if it's behavior you want to reinforce among the whole group.”

As background to this statement, the participant described how this particular TIVW group was required to work on a long-term project for which most of the group struggled to see any personal benefit. The organization is a training organization that attempted to become an accredited university. Most of the individuals who worked for the organization, or were contracted by the organization, did not have academic-instruction backgrounds, but, rather, had professional training careers. The majority of the organization's assets had been committed to professional training (one- to four-day courses for working professionals), and their various members (full-time employees, part-time employees, and third-party contracted individuals) were compensated for training work. The organization's new focus on becoming a university left many group members to question the validity of the new mission at the expense of the historic mission. As leader, Participant 5 used *reframing* strategies by allocating group meeting time for the discussion of past successes meant to help reframe attitudes toward the present and future work that the group members did not necessarily perceive as beneficial to their futures.

Faced with *organizational value* versus *individual value* tension, Participant 16 also used reframing strategies but in combination with *segmentation* strategies. In this particular case the organization valued the digitization of the workflow; whereas the individual's valued “the way business has always been (successfully) done:”

“It [requires] me showing them this change will happen. It's not an option (segmentation). This is part of your employment. There is nobody two years away from retirement, so they're five to ten years away. This is a hurdle we have to

overcome. Just be open to it. Admit that you need help. Let's work through it strategically. That's through me teaching them, through me showing the value to learning this (reframing). Take the last example, send an email and some guys have four orders in their inbox the next morning before they even saw one customer physically. That's a victory because then they buy into these things slowly but surely (reframing). Our IT department is sending tutorials, how to videos, how to create more folders in your inbox, how to conference call with your customers, sending snip it tutorials and showing them how to file them for future reference. In the two weeks we are together we have IT time when we are going over policies and procedures and tools to give them to be more efficient. I have mandated some of them have one-on-one time over the phone with the IT department and the IT department will physically take over their computer in front of them while they watching an IT department from 17-hours away show them how to do something (segmentation). Nobody has taken me up on this, but I've offered five or six of them that really need a paradigm shift, go ahead and take on online course, go to a local technical college, go to a seminar, do whatever you need to do to get over this hurdle to learn this paradigm shift. You either need to get on board or you're going to have to get out (segmentation).”

This mixed-strategy of using segmentation and reframing strategies in combination is interesting as the historical research on dialectics indicates that reframing can be a very useful coping mechanism when managing dialectical tension; however, segmentation can be more problematic if all the parties involved are not willing to implement segmentation (Baxter, 1988; Kramer 2004; Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010).

Driskill et al. (2012) indicate that segmentation can be successfully employed to manage tension if the participants involved are willing to unify in support of one pole and deny the other. In this case, the leader starts with a segmentation statement of “. . . change will happen. It's not an option.” Here the leader is ignoring the incongruent pole that interplays with his position that the employees do “not [have] an option,” which is the very real option of non-compliance by the employees. This leader segmentation perception is self justified by indicating that the members are not at retirement age, but ignores the reality that the members are not obligated to work for this sole organization.

However, Participant 16 quickly moves on to the reframing strategy of asking the members to recognize the “value” in what the leader is presenting to the members. Participant 16 indicates this is done by showing his members how the new technological processes help generate new orders. Participant 16 then goes back to using segmentation by explaining that the members need to “get on board or . . . get out.” This combined use of segmentation and reframing may be successful if the message of “not an option” resonates with the entire group; the use of segmentation is likely to be less successful if the leader fails to unify the entire group under the premise that they have no other options.

In this same case we see that some of Participant 16’s (the leader) members are using *cyclic alternation* to cope with and manage the tension. This is revealed in Participant 16’s statement:

“ . . . He pulls over the car, he turns on the hotspot in his car, pulls up his laptop, and I say, ‘just send me back the original email from the original, copy me and see if the price is still good.’ They don’t understand the technology, so he pulls over, grabs his laptop, turns on his hotspot, ten minutes later ‘I’m getting there, I’m getting there.’ I say, ‘Timeout, why are you doing that? Pull over fine. Put me on speaker phone, get me off Bluetooth.’ I have them all on the android platform now, I could do this with my eyes closed, I say, ‘Go in your inbox, your sent items, hit search, put in Tina’s name . . .’” So, you can do this in five minutes, rather than fifteen minutes. It’s teaching this generation of 40-55 year old individuals who never were forced to use technology to their advantage. It’s teaching them to see value in it, actually make it a priority for them to learn it, and make them more profitable. Those are the guys. That’s the problem with our country; “I never needed it, why do I have to learn it now.”

In this instance of cyclic alternation, the technology resistant member is willing to try and use the technology as mandated by the organizational value (one end of the pole), but discovers that they are not functioning correctly or efficiently, which leads to the

alternate pole of, “I never needed it, why do I have to learn it now?” (The other end of the pole.) This excerpt also brings to light the discussion of age surrounding technology. Several of the participants made comments relating to age as a disadvantage toward understanding technology. In some cases going so far as to claim a generation (or more) is being left without agency as technology rapidly advances. Scholars and organizations would benefit from a deeper understanding of this potentially important finding.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Role Negotiation: Contextual and Dialogically Constituted**

One of the compelling results from the study had to do with how participants self-identified as *leader*, *member*, or *leader/member*. Nearly half of the participants identified as leader/member and were relatively articulate as to how the context of the collaboration, or even a task within the collaboration, impacts how one identifies with their role in that moment (See Table A). Seventy-five percent of those who identified as moving fluidly between the leader/member roles were not at the executive or upper-management level within the greater organization and in some cases did not directly manage any person or group of people. Perhaps more compelling, two people who identified as fluidly moving between the leader and member role owned their own business; however, as consultants, they often viewed their clients as “leader” in many situations, which caused them to identify as “members” of some collaborations.

These findings seem to support the idea that a multifaceted accountability structure is often present in TIVWs (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). Increased levels of autonomy, self-accountability, and organizational empowerment to “get the job done” on

one's own flexible schedule seems to be a natural progression for individuals who work remotely. The lack of the literal, "over-the-shoulder" oversight does not exist in these arrangements. So, one is literally, "on their own" to make certain they get the job done, but is simultaneously responsible to a variety of other individuals within the collaboration. This seems to be true regardless of job title and rank within the employing organization, which seems to make role identity and negotiation a dynamic, fluid, and dialogically constituted process more so than a rigid, dichotomous (*either* organizational socialization attempts *or* personal individualization attempts), or hierarchical process dictated by the organization.

However, the data revealed many utterances that reflected on the structure and order offered by the organization that was meant to inform the members of the TIVW as to expectation and process. This was specifically evidenced for those who were part of Fortune 500, or other large organizations. Still, a clear dichotomous line between the role of superior and the role of subordinate, as defined by the historic organizational socialization theory research, becomes blurred when examining role negotiation practices in TIVWs. The notion that greater levels of autonomy are afforded to members of these collaborations seems to have a direct impact on how individuals identify with their roles, and the multifaceted accountability structure seems to, at times, generate a sense of autonomous ownership over a role, regardless of the hierarchical leadership structure of the funding or employing organization (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005; Balogun & Johnson, 2004). It seems the terms *superior* and *subordinate* may not relate well to the self-perceptions held by some TIVW participants.

It also seems clear that flexibility, both personal and professional, impacts identity perceptions for participants in TIVWs. Every single participant referenced personal and professional flexibility multiple times during the course of the interviews. However, this flexibility was not always seen as a positive. Grounded in the data was the connect versus disconnect tension where participants described how the great flexibility afforded by technology was, at times, mitigated by the inability to “get away from work.” While increased flexibility impacts feelings of empowerment, autonomy, accountability, and self-perceptions of role for those operating within TIVWs, it simultaneously introduces the issue of disconnecting work from interpersonal relationships and environments.

### **Dialectical Tensions**

Four primary dialectical tensions emerged from the data: (1) leader-identity versus member-identity; (2) autonomy versus connectedness; (3) leader-centered focus versus group-centered focus; and (4) organizational value versus individual value. The leader-identity versus member-identity tension was discussed extensively in the RQ1 discussion. However, it seems important to mention this tension differs in an important way from some of the past studies on interorganizational communication. For example, Lewis, et al. (2010) indicated one of the primary tensions found in face-to-face interorganizational groups was the dialectic of *commitment to the (employing) organization* versus *commitment to the interorganizational group*. This was not a common code found in the TIVW data from this study.

Rather, the data revealed the *organizational value* versus *individual value* tension, with several statements by several participants identifying as an individual with

autonomous ownership over their role, even when employed by an organization. The remote nature of the TIVW member's workspace, in combination with the primary use of digital media for communication, has important implications as to how individuals identify with their employing organization. That is not to say this is problematic toward effectiveness. It may be an increased sense of autonomy is beneficial toward effectiveness. Scholars, and organizations need to better understand how TIVW membership impacts commitment and effectiveness.

Consistent with the historic research, there were many utterances related to the autonomy versus connectedness dialectic. However, an interesting sub-tension under the autonomy versus connectedness dialectic was the very literal *connect* versus *disconnect* tension that appeared in multiple statements by multiple participants. This particular tension is a relatively new development for communication researchers in the sense that the rapid growth of technology and convenience for people to access their work without having to leave their beds likely has a variety of implications worthy of study. Further, understanding how the connect versus disconnect dialectic impacts the interpersonal relationships within the family is an interesting area of study.

The other prevalent autonomy versus connectedness tension emerged in the form of expressions of isolation in the remote office versus the traditional communal workplace. Several participants, particularly those who have both experience in a communal office environment and with remote workplaces suggested that at times it takes effort and work to overcome the feelings of isolation. Fulk and Collins-Jarvis (2001) conducted research that implies that an individual's ability to understand and be

understood declines as the medium for communication moves from face-to-face to video to audio, as the *social presence* of the participating individuals declines according to the change in medium. The reduction in nonverbal signals impacts communication and may change behavior. This seems to indicate that the use of email, project-management software, conference calling, and online meetings in place of face-to-face interaction has a significant impact on meaning and identity during TIVW collaborations, and this likely contributes to issues of isolation in the autonomy versus connectedness dialectic. The findings in this study seem to indicate that the communication medium impacts the negotiation of roles, the tensions produced, and the coping mechanisms used in TIVWs when face-to-face communication is not available.

### **Coping Mechanisms**

How leaders and members of TIVWs identify and manage dialectical tensions in their collaborations is likely central to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the group (Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010). The data from this study found that the six main coping strategies identified by Baxter's (1988, 1990) work were represented in the participant reflections: selection, cyclic alternation, segmentation, moderation, disqualification, and reframing. Situational context, hierarchy, role identity, organizational type, and other factors influence the kinds of coping mechanisms, or combinations of coping mechanisms TIVW leaders and members use when managing dialectical tensions. Galanes (2008) indicated that a deeper understanding as to the perceived effectiveness of these coping strategies is important for communication

scholars to pursue. The findings in this study echo that sentiment, as how leaders and members engage in managing tension is a dynamic process.

This study retained the labels set forth by Baxter (1988, 1990), as it seems these tactics can be used in a variety of ways. In some cases only one coping mechanism may be present, like when a leader uses reframing strategies in an effort to expose the value of an initiative in the face of strong individual resistance. At other times a combination of coping mechanisms may be employed, as in the example where a leader of a TIVW used segmentation and reframing as a combined singular effort to overcome tension and resistance to an organizational value. Finally, various individuals within the collaboration may use multiple coping strategies that may incongruently or congruently interplay with each other. Each person's coping strategy will impact the utterance chain, which dialogically constitutes the meaning the group will find while navigating the tension, which will all inevitably determine the overall effectiveness and success of the group. The grounded findings in this data set make it clear that TIVWs offer a rich area of future study for communication scholars.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation is that the semi-structured interviews are a self-report tool. According to Baxter (2011), and various scholars throughout time (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Patton, 2002), over dependence on self-reports can cause researchers to overstress their findings regarding meaning. Deeply understanding TIVW role-negotiation processes, dialectical tensions encountered, and the coping mechanisms used to manage dialectical tensions would benefit from participant observation or ethnography.

According to Baxter (2011), dialectical tensions and coping mechanisms are best identified through direct observation of dialogical interplay among people engaged in an utterance chain. The goal is not to study the communication of TIVWs, but, rather, the goal should be to study TIVWs engaged in communication (Baxter, 2011). Further, Baxter (2011) indicates, a longitudinal study provides the researcher with the ability to observe the interplay between stability and change in relationships, something self-reports of past moments in the utterance chain does not fully, or accurately, accomplish. Further, the timeframe for this project was somewhat constrained by the Master's Capstone Thesis deadline. A longer timeframe would better allow for the preparation required to facilitate immersion into a TIVW to see it "in action." As Baxter (2011) said, "According to Relational Dialectic Theory, what something means in the moment depends on the interplay of competing discourses that are circulating in the moment" (p. 3). Self-reports from individual reflections on interactions in the utterance chain are useful for achieving introductory understanding, but self-reports are not as useful or dynamic as observing the experience as it takes place.

### **Conclusion**

TIVWs are a dynamic and emerging workgroup type that demands the attention of organizational scholars. The leader-identity versus member-identity tension that emerged from this data has implications for both organizational socialization theory and relational dialectics theory. How individuals view, define, and identify with their roles from remote locations, at times, seems to proceed differently from how roles have traditionally been negotiated in face-to-face workplace settings. The traditional

hierarchical structure, formal organizational processes, and formal job titles and descriptions seem to give way toward a level, multiple-accountability structure that produces a great sense of autonomous responsibility over one's role. Further, the "home office" introduces a compelling dialectical tension that impacts interpersonal relationships at home. When work is at home and home is at work the connect versus disconnect tension requires the management of organizational life versus personal life. Constant work interruptions during "family time" have been reported to disturb the work/life balance. Finally, organizational and interpersonal scholars would benefit from a deeper examination of the coping mechanisms TIVW members use when managing these tensions. The overall effectiveness of these coping mechanisms is likely to contribute greatly to how effectively and successfully these groups perform.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions—Members

1. Please tell me about your experience working virtually.
2. Who determines who will take on a task or assignment?
3. Who leads your virtual workgroup? How did you “meet” your group leader?
4. How does your leader support your role in the group?
5. How does your leader communicate with you individually?
6. How does your leader communicate with the group altogether?
7. How do you communicate with your virtual colleagues? What is it like communicating with group members from other organizations?
8. How do you communicate problems or issues when they arise?
9. What do you like about working virtually? Could you please provide me with a specific example?
10. What makes a virtual workgroup successful?
11. What do you dislike about working virtually? Could you please provide me with a specific example?
12. How do you communicate problems or issues when they arise?
13. What improvements would you like to see in your virtual workgroup?
14. Do you have any thoughts about the focus group you participated in?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience working virtually?

### Interview Questions—Leaders

1. Please tell me about your experience working virtually.
2. Who determines who will take on a task or assignment?
3. What do you like about working virtually? Could you please provide me with a specific example?
4. What do you dislike about working virtually? Could you please provide me with a specific example?
5. What is it like managing individuals in a virtual workgroup? What is it like managing individuals that work for different company or as a sole proprietor?
6. How do you support your group members?
7. How do your group members report problems or issues when they arise?
8. How do you report problems or issues to the group members when they arise?
9. What makes a virtual workgroup successful?
10. What improvements would you like to see in your virtual workgroup/s?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience working virtually?