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Leadership in conflict
Disagreement and conflict in a start-up team

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15.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how the members of a start-up team deal with a particular conflict across time and media. The start-up team constitutes a contemporary business setting without a formally assigned hierarchy or leadership roles. As no member has formal decision-making authority over the others, leadership within the team has to be negotiated and disagreements are to be expected. The chapter examines a specific incident of conflict – a disagreement regarding the name for the prospective start-up. It tracks and captures the emergence of conflict across a sequence of computer-mediated interactions on different channels (email and Skype) from its beginning in an email exchange until its emergence and resolution in a Skype conversation. A relational continuity perspective (Sigman, 1991) is employed to show how the participants orient to past and future communication in their current interactions. This allows us to examine the contextual factors under which the conflict emerges.

15.2 Previous research on conflictive disagreements

The topic of conflict has received much attention by discourse analysts. Seminal examples include “conflict talk” (Grimshaw, 1990), “adversative episode” (Eisenberg and Garvey, 1981), “conflict episode” (Gruber, 1998), “quarrel” (Antaki, 1994), “dispute” (Brenneis, 1988) and “disagreement” (Pomerantz, 1984). Of particular relevance for this study are the concepts of conflict talk and disagreement.

Grimshaw (1990) used the term “conflict talk” to describe discursive events in which two or more parties hold opposing positions towards a specific issue. The social actors involved work towards accomplishing certain ends, tied to their reconcilable or irreconcilable positions. Conflict talk can have certain outcomes, including but not limited to one party’s “victory”, “defeat” or a “draw”. In addition, conflict talk is not confined to a given act, stretch of talk or issue, or restricted to a specific communication channel. This is particularly relevant for this study. The conflict among the spatially separated German team members of the start-up we examine takes place across time and media, thus permeating both spoken and
written communication. The chapter acknowledges the dynamically emergent character of conflict as “a process, not a state” (Brenneis, 1996, p.43). It sees conflict as a relational process co-constructed between two or more participants across time and media. The addition of time and media is important as previous interactions between the participants can be seen as potentially preceding the conflictive exchanges examined and influencing their future encounters. Sigman’s (1991) concept of spatiotemporal relational continuity suggests that (continuous) social relationships are affected by prior, present and future exchanges, including experiences across time and space. It thus offers us a fresh lens from which to explore the dynamics of conflict (talk). This chapter shows how the behaviour between the team members is influenced by their previous exchanges across different communication channels and what the members orient to as future communication, with special attention to disagreements.

Disagreements can be generally understood “as the expression of a view that differs from that expressed by another speaker” (Sifianou, 2012, p.1554) or as contrastive utterances (Pomerantz, 1984). Contrastive utterances can be considered strong disagreements when they “contain exclusively disagreement components” and no “agreement components”, that is, where “a conversant utters an evaluation which is directly contrastive with the prior evaluation” (Pomerantz, 1984, p.74). Weak disagreements, on the other hand, contain “disagreement components […] formed as partial agreements/partial disagreements” (Pomerantz, 1984, p.74). Ishihara (2016, pp.32-3) distinguishes three categories of disagreements: mitigated, unmitigated and aggravated disagreement. Mitigated disagreements often contain hedges, silence, downtoners or certain modals (i.e. Pomerantz’ weak disagreements), whereas unmitigated disagreements (i.e. Pomerantz’ strong disagreements) are produced without delay or mitigating devices. The third category, aggravated disagreements are produced by adding upgraders. This additional subdivision of strong disagreement enables us to capture the directness/explicitness previously identified in German disagreement (see House, 2006; Kotthoff, 1993; Stadler, 2006). Disagreements have thus been generally conceived of as a potentially delicate marked reaction, a dispreferred second (Pomerantz, 1984). Participants would accordingly seek agreement and avoid (strong) disagreement. However, numerous studies have reported strong or aggravated disagreement as unmarked and even expected in certain settings (see e.g. Goodwin [1990] on dispute management among Black children; Schiffrin [1984] on sociable arguments within Jewish communities; Tannen [1981] on conversational conventions within the New York Jewish community). For example, Kotthoff’s (1993) study of German and Anglo-American dispute settings found instances of a structural shift towards a preference for disagreement. The contestants were expected to defend their position and not suddenly seek agreement. In addition, aggravated disagreements were found to be prominent among German men (Kotthoff, 1993, p.214).

Waldrong and Applegate (1994, p.4) suggested that disagreements should be considered as “a form of conflict” as they are “characterized by incompatible goals, negotiation, and the need to coordinate self and other actions”. Indeed, Kakavá (1993, p.36) considered disagreement to constitute “a potential generator of conflict” that “can lead to a form of confrontation that may develop into an argument or dispute”. She further argued that disagreement could also “constitute conflict since an argument is composed of a series of disputable opinions or disagreements” (p.36). Disagreements may thus be understood as part of Grimshaw’s (1990) conflict talk, assuming that they are being exchanged openly through discourse and not held back strategically by participants. Disagreements can often be found in the initiatory structures of conflict talk (see e.g. Goodwin, 1982), as an opposition marker, where opponents respond to statements with disagreement (example: Student A:
That exam was so difficult. Student B: No, it wasn’t). However, this can be reversed after self-deprecating statements, where disagreement would be the preferred response. Here, agreement can constitute a dispreferred second (Pomerantz, 1984) and thus potentially initiate conflict (example: Student A: That exam was so difficult, I’ll probably fail it. Student B: Yes, you will). In light of this, not all instances of disagreement should be considered inherently conflictive. The production of disagreements can pose the beginning of a conflict talk event. It reveals participants’ opposing positions on a conversational level. Therefore, it can allow previously underlying conflicts to emerge in discourse, as indeed it does in the data examined in this chapter. Accordingly, disagreement can be regarded as a spatiotemporal projection of conflict, particularly in a leaderless setting, such as the start-up team we examine here.

The team members’ alternative positions have implications for their interpersonal relations. Indeed, the expression of disagreement has been traditionally understood as a potential face-threatening act (FTA) or even as potentially impolite (see Goffman, 1967 on face; Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987 on politeness theory) in so far as they show little consideration for the recipient’s face needs. To mitigate the face-threatening potential of disagreements on the addressee’s “positive face-want” (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.66), politeness theory proposes that speakers maintain common ground by seeking agreement and/or avoiding disagreement (Brown and Levinson, 1987). A strong disagreement would thus, in theory, have a bigger potential to become face-threatening than a weak disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984). In a professional setting, such as the start-up team of this study, special importance can be attributed to an individual’s professional face, that is, an individual’s perceived competence in an institutional role identity (see Márquez Reiter, 2009). As the start-up team members hold no formal authority over each other, an interlocutor’s professional face poses an essential resource for individual leadership. The perception of individual competence would increase perceived influence on decision-making, potentially amplifying thus the individual voice during the negotiation of conflict.

However, a strong interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors might warrant the expression of disagreements. In this sense, certain instances of (conflict) talk between close friends might exhibit a high incidence and in some cases preference for unmitigated or aggravated disagreement. Prior research has shown that family or friendship ties support the expression of strong disagreements (see e.g. Habib, 2008; Tannen, 2002). Indeed, Wolfson’s (1988) bulge theory suggests that people tend to disagree more with those with whom they hold a close interpersonal relationship (cf. Lim and Bowers, 1991).

This short excursion into the literature has provided some insights into the complex relationship between conflict and disagreement. In the next section, we will introduce the participant team, the data and its collection. This will be followed by an analysis of selected exchanges, taken across different computer-mediated communication (CMC) channels, where we explore how the members manage conflict and disagreement with attention to face concerns and disagreement strength. The examples will be presented according to their chronological occurrence to take the reader through the conflict as it unfolds.

15.3 Data and methodology

The data for this study was taken from a corpus that comprises the discursive exchanges between the members of a German start-up over a period of six months. This includes communication on different synchronous (Skype calls) and asynchronous (Email, WhatsApp) channels, as well as instances of unmediated face-to-face communication. In total, the
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The focus is on the exchanges related to the selection of the company name – arguably, a critical moment in the life cycle of start-ups. The data consists of a Google calendar excerpt, three emails and six excerpts from a (voice only) Skype conference. These examples portray the procedural construction of the conflict, as it unfolds across time and media.

The participant team consists of three members partaking in a German government-backed founding scheme with the aim to establish a business. The incident we focus on took place six weeks prior to the official start of the funded period. At this point, the team had obtained full grant clearance and the team members can expect their grant-based collaboration to span over the funded period. This poses an incentive to reach consensus during conflictive situations, as a fall out or the team’s disbanding may jeopardise the team’s funding and damage the professional face of its members. Entrepreneurial teams – especially in the pre-start-up phase, that is, prior to the official establishment of the firm – are commonly characterised by a lack of hierarchy and hierarchically attributed leadership roles. As no member holds formal authority over the others, the use of authority-based conflict management strategies (see Holmes and Marra, 2004) is limited. A particular subcategory of the modern entrepreneurial team is referred to as virtual (entrepreneurial) team. It “consist[s] of geographically distributed individuals (entrepreneurs) who interact through interdependent tasks and are led by common (entrepreneurial) interests and/or goals” (Matlay and Westhead, 2005, p.281). As a result of this spatial separation, a large proportion of the members’ interactions do not take place via face-to-face interaction, but via CMC (e.g. emails, instant messaging applications, video- or voice-conferencing). The entrepreneurial team in this study could be regarded as a (semi) virtual team, as one of the members was geographically separated from the others. At the time of the data collection, Christian was located in the UK, while the other two members, Alex and Thomas, were in Germany. As a result, the communication between Christian and the other members, which involved working on interdependent tasks, exclusively took place via CMC.

Thomas and Christian shared a long-term friendship as “best friends”, while the respective relationship to Alex could be categorised as mainly project-centred. Thomas and Christian had been present in the earliest stages of planning and had filed a patent together, while Alex was later added by Thomas during the grant application stage. Thomas knew Alex as a co-worker and a classmate from his studies. The two, albeit not close friends, were thus well acquainted with each other. Alex and Christian, in contrast, had just met twice in real life at the time of the data collection. The interpersonal relationships in the team further affected the frequency of certain interactions as well as the participation framework within these exchanges. Christian and Thomas would have frequent and spontaneous Skype calls between them (upon seeing each other available on Skype). In contrast, Christian and Alex would interact in prescheduled appointments, which typically also included Thomas (see Example 15.1).

The data was collected through participant observation by the first author using an (auto-)ethnographic approach (see e.g. Chang, 2008). Christian had the status of a “complete member researcher” as he was both a researcher and a full member of the participant group (see Adler and Adler, 1987). This participation status granted him access to the closed setting (see O’Reilly, 2009) of start-ups and enabled the collection of numerous instances of communication. Ethical clearance had been sought prior to the study.
15.4 Analysis

The data analysis is approached from a general discursive perspective that draws on interactional pragmatics and is informed by impoliteness research. Ethnographic insights will be supplied to set the background for the analysis and to provide the necessary contextual information to understand certain observations. Detailed transcripts of the Skype conversations have been produced to portray the content and delivery of speech following GAT2 transcription conventions (Selting et al., 2009, 2011).

To decide the company name, a Skype meeting, involving all members, had been scheduled via email, using Google calendar (Example 15.1). The purpose of the meeting is reaffirmed by Thomas (Example 15.2), who suggests that the members prepare some ideas for the meeting. Alex follows this request by suggesting two different names and logo designs for the meeting (Example 15.3). Thomas responds by expressing strong support for one of the names (Example 15.4) but Christian expresses disagreement with the endorsed name before the scheduled Skype conference in a Skype call with Thomas (Example 15.5). The two then engage in conflict talk (Example 15.6). Eventually, Thomas voices agreement with Christian’s suggested strategy, which entails a rejection of Alex’s proposals. He then expresses major face concerns about how to communicate this decision to Alex (Example 15.7). In the later Skype call between all three members, Thomas and Christian aim to avoid initiating conflict by staying away from topicalising the quality of the proposal and instead praise Alex for his initiative (Example 15.8). Upon introduction of Thomas’ and Christian’s alternative strategy, Alex is reluctant to abandon his position, which results in conflict talk between him and Christian (Example 15.9). Eventually, Alex voices approval of the new approach and this helps to bring the conflict talk to a close (Example 15.10).

15.4.1 Email

*Example 15.1 Google calendar invitation*

(Translated from German)

**When:** Thu 19. Mar 2015 21:00 - 22:00 Berlin  
**Where:** At home in front of the computer (map)  
**Calendar:** alex.mueller@googlemail.com  
**Who:** Christian – Organiser  
Alex – Creator  
Thomas

Example 15.1 depicts the Google calendar schedule that was attached to a corresponding email entitled “Skype conference”. The conference had been scheduled with a view to finding a name for the prospective company. The location of the meeting – “at home in front of the computer” – constitutes a humorous reference to the virtual nature of the group’s communication. As observed, all members consented to the appointment and are listed as attendees. The calendar lists Alex as the creator, as he had initially scheduled the appointment using his Google calendar account. Christian is listed as the organiser, as he had rescheduled the time of the meeting. The calendar schedule serves to ratify all team members as participants (Goffman, 1981) in the task of choosing a company name. It could
be regarded as a preliminary, i.e. an action that should not be regarded as self-serving, yet as a preface, leading up to a projected action (Schegloff, 2007), in this case, the discussion of the company’s name. It constitutes a preface to a potential conflict as it sets the stage for an encounter where individual parties are likely to hold different positions towards an issue (Grimshaw, 1990). Indeed, as we will see in Example 15.5, the participants orient to their alternative positions from the very beginning.

**Example 15.2 Thomas’ response**

**Von:** Thomas  
**Gesendet:** Montag, 16. März 2015 19:30  
**An:** Christian  
**Cc:** Alex  
**Betreff:** Re: Skype Konferenz

Läuft ;) macht euch schonmal Gedanken zu möglichen Marken/Firmennamen!!!  
*Great ;) give some thought already to potential brand/company names!!!*

The example depicts Thomas’ response to the calendar invite. Notably, his message does not open with a greeting. This could respond to the fact that the initial invitation did not contain a greeting either and could be considered typical of prompt responses between people on familiar terms (Crystal, 2006, p.105). In this case, “Läuft” and a winking emoticon could be viewed as Thomas’ second pair part response to the initial invitation.4 Such verbal confirmation of his attendance might appear slightly redundant, given that he additionally confirmed his attendance via the calendar service. It does, however, display his personal commitment to the team.

Thomas also uses his response to give a directive to the other members: he asks the group to prepare for the meeting by giving some thought to potential names for the prospective company. The particle “mal” acts as padding. It reduces the level of coerciveness inherent in his directive (Márquez Reiter, 2000) and suggests that the task in question is comparatively minor (Thurmair, 1989, p.185).

**Example 15.3 Alex’s proposal**

**Von:** Alex  
**Gesendet:** Donnerstag, 19. März 2015 10:17  
**An:** Thomas; Christian  
**Betreff:** Vorschläge Namen / Logo

Hi,  
*Hi,*  
schaut euch mal die Dokumente an.  
*Have a look at the documents.*  
Lasst mal jede Seite einzeln auf euch wirken …  
*Let each page sink in individually …*
Wir besprechen dann heute Abend was ihr davon haltet bzw. ob ihr euch das auch so oder so ähnlich vorstellt …

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,
Yours sincerely,
Alex Müller

Alex’s message opens with the unpersonalised greeting “Hi”, directed at the other members, which he included as addressees. He attaches the relevant documents containing the different logo ideas and font styles for the two potential company names he has designed. Alex announces that feedback would be discussed later that day. By referencing the upcoming Skype conference, he restates and reaffirms the preceding arrangement, thus reminding the others of their agreed attendance and topic of discussion (Márquez Reiter, 2011). Alex orients to the agenda of the upcoming meeting as a “know-in-advance item” (see Svennevig, 2012, p.65). This constitutes an example of relational continuity within the team and how communicative events are linked to preceding and upcoming exchanges (Sigman, 1991). Alex expands his request for feedback by attaching a subordinate clause “or if you also imagine it like this or similar …”, where he takes a weaker stance on the design proposals while conveying an inclusive attitude. This strategy might serve to lower his own accountability and protect his professional face in case of rejection (Márquez Reiter, 2009). Alex closes the email with the expression “Mit freundlichen Grüßen” and his full name. This notably formal closing, which contrasts the informal language employed by Thomas (Example 15.2), can be attributed to his automatic signature and can consistently be found in all of Alex’s email within the corpus.

Example 15.4 Thomas’ reaction to Alex’s proposal

Von: Thomas
Gesendet: Donnerstag, 19. März 2015 10:30
An: Alex
Cc: Christian
Betreff: Re: Vorschläge Namen / Logo

Geil!!!!
Awesome!!!!

{Name A} ist auf jeden Fall schützenswert!!!
{Name A} is absolutely worth registering!!!
Hab schon mein Lieblingsschriftzug ausgesucht!
I’ve already selected my favourite logo!
The time stamps show that Thomas responded to the email 13 minutes after it had been sent. His omission of a greeting could be considered characteristic of the swiftness of his response which constitutes a second-pair part to Alex’s prior email. Thomas expresses a strong general positive endorsement with the informal term “Geil”. He then expresses strong agreement with one of the suggested names as “auf jeden Fall schützenswert”, which suggests that his support for the particular name would be strong enough to file for a trademark. This adds weight to his endorsement and could be regarded as making arrangements for future encounters (Sigman, 1991), namely the registration of trademarks. His extensive use of exclamation marks throughout his message, another common feature of informal email communication, adds emphasis and indicates his enthusiasm (Crystal, 2006, p.95).

Thomas closes the email with the announcement that he has already selected his favourite logo. He fully endorses Alex’s position on the subject and signals that he is ready to move on the decision-making process: from finding to designing the name. By including Christian in the “cc” field, Thomas signals his stance with respect to the proposal and his position relative to the relationality in the group. This clear positioning contributes to the construction of a proposal-centred alliance between Thomas and Alex, which, in turn, puts conformity pressure on Christian to approve the proposal as well (see Skovholt and Svennevig, 2006).

As a member of the team, Christian disapproved of both names and attached designs. This situation constituted the potential for conflict (talk) in that his position towards the proposals contrasted the position voiced by the rest of the group (Grimshaw, 1990). Nevertheless, Christian did not express his opposition via email, which would have revealed the underlying conflict to the other members. Part of the reason could be related to the intrinsic properties of email as a CMC channel and the affordance of the medium for conflict management (see Bradner, 2001; Gibson, 1977). When it comes to conflict resolution, email is often considered subpar compared with synchronous communication formats (e.g. face-to-face exchanges, phone calls or teleconferences) and might even lead to the escalation of disputes (see Friedman and Currall, 2003). Once a message had been sent, the expressed opinion could not simply be retracted and would alert the other participants to his opposing position. Christian’s disagreement would thus be on record. This may lead the other participants to enter the upcoming Skype conference orienting towards conflict, possibly with prepared responses and a hardened position. Disagreement might have been particularly problematic given Thomas’ previously expressed strong support, which contributed to the construction of an alliance between him and Alex.

Christian did not reply to the message. He withheld his opinion until the upcoming Skype conference. His lack of response could be interpreted as unmarked in line with Alex’s request for feedback to be given in the subsequent conversation. However, as the next section reveals, it was oriented to as marked for Thomas in their upcoming exchange.

15.4.2 Skype

Date: 19/03/2015
Duration: 62:50

Example 15.5 Christian’s vs Thomas’ positions on Alex’s proposal

Christian was already on Skype 20 minutes before the scheduled meeting and, seeing that Thomas was online, he called him. As previously mentioned, as best friends
they would frequently have unscheduled calls. As the scheduled meeting with Alex approaches, Thomas asks Christian’s opinion on the proposals.

((...))

0701 Thomas: geNAU; °h
exactly

0702 und was HÄLtst du eigentlich jetzt zu:,
and what do you now actually think about

0703 nur beVOR wir noch mit_m alex telefonieren, °h
just before we call Alex

0704 Christian: ja,
yes

0705 Thomas: ühm: von der iDEE {Name A}?
erm about the idea {Name A}

0706 also ich find des nicht verKEHRT.=also;
well I find it not bad well

0707 (1.6)

0708 Christian: EHRliche MEInung?
honest opinion

0709 (1.1)

0710 Thomas: <<all> komm ja naTÜRlich ehrliche meinung;>
c’m on yes of course honest opinion

0711 Christian: ziemlich beSCHEIden;
pretty poor

0712 (0.8)

0713 Thomas: nu_warUM,
why

0714 (1.0)

0715 Christian: hm: verSCHIEdene GRÜN:de: also:-
hm different reasons well
((...))

Thomas asks for Christian’s opinion on Alex’s proposals prior to the scheduled conversation with him (ll.701–705). While he does not address the email explicitly, the keywords “Alex” (l.703) and “{Name A}” (l.705) offer a link between the previous and upcoming exchanges. This shows the continuous nature of the social relationship between the group members (Sigman, 1991) across time and (virtual) space and the way in which the participants orient to it. While referring to the proposals originated from the prior exchange (l.705), Thomas orients to the following encounter (l.703), placing thus the current exchange on an axis between them. Additionally, the reference of the upcoming encounter marks the issue as pressing, considering that Alex is expected to join the conversation within the next few minutes.

Thomas’ support for the particular name is now voiced less strongly (cf. Example 15.4). He employs the double negative “nicht verKEHRT” (l.706), hedged by the repetition of “also” (l.706). This weaker position allows Thomas to protect his own professional face in case of disagreement. Thomas’ actions could be further interpreted as orienting to the topic as potentially interpersonally sensitive (Hansen and Márquez Reiter, 2016).

This is evidenced by the long pause at l.707 indicating dispreference and upcoming disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984). Christian does not directly answer Thomas’ question, but
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instead asks him whether he should provide his honest opinion (l.708), thus also orientating to the sensitivity of the topic. The delicate or problematic nature of the projected disagreement lies in the face-related implications and the impact this would have for the working of the team. A strong negative assessment of the proposal would question Thomas’ judgement and his competence as a team member – i.e. his professional face. However, there is another facet to this question: Christian’s question would add weight to the upcoming disagreement and “rub in” his disagreement with Thomas’ assessment (see Schegloff, 2007, p.48). Accordingly, the close friendship between Thomas and Christian would allow for the expression of aggravated disagreement, or in this case “rubbing it in” as the risk of interpersonal cessation would not be great (see Wolfson, 1988).

After a short pause (l.709), Thomas affirms that Christian should naturally express his honest opinion (l.710). Christian thus offers his opinion without further delay: a strong negative assessment of the idea (“ziemlich beSCHEIden”, l.711). The previous build-up and the use of the intensifier “ziemlich” (Smith et al., 2008, p.63) add further strength to the disagreement, upgrading it to that of an aggravated disagreement. It poses a challenge to Thomas’ professional face (Márquez Reiter, 2009), as it questions his competence in making appropriate decisions for the group. No further justification or rationale for this assessment is provided by Christian. At this point, his alternative position has been fully revealed to Thomas and the underlying conflict lies bare (Grimshaw, 1990).

After another short pause (l.712), Thomas warrants a justification (l.713) on Christian’s part in support of his position (Antaki and Leudar, 1990). Christian thus sets out to provide support of his unfavourable assessment of the proposals (l.715), allowing Thomas to dispute it.

Example 15.6 Thomas speaks up

The example portrays a later stage in the Skype conversation between Thomas and Christian. At this point, Christian has presented support for his position, referring to a potentially unfavourable name perception in Germany. Thomas so far has remained silent.

((...))

0730 Christian: ANgenommen wir heißen {Name C};
  let’s suppose we were called {Name C}
0731 oder SONSTwas; (-)
  or whatever
0732 des WÄR ja-
  this would
0733 DES wär doch deutlich GLAUBwürdiger.=oder?
  this would be way more credible, right
0734 als {Name A},(.)
  than {Name A}
0735 Thomas: ja DES ((räuspert sich))
  yes that ((clears throat))
0736 da hast du schon RECHT;
  you’re right about that
0737 aber ich GLAU:B? °h (.)
  but I think
0738 da HAST du komplett RECHT;=gell? °h
  you’re completely right about that, right
As Christian argues against the proposals, he asserts that another option would be superior to the name previously supported by Thomas (l.730–734). His statement is underscored by the modal particle “doch” and the tag question “oder” (l.733), which – by appealing to mutual knowledge – equals a call for Thomas to correct his position in alignment to Christian (Hagemann, 2009, p.170; Thurmair, 1989, p.112). Such use of assertives reflects a high confidence of the speaker in his knowledge base (Koshik, 2005). While Christian’s professional face serves as a resource to validate knowledge-based argumentation, this approach leaves his professional face vulnerable if the supported position and thus his competence is contested.

As Thomas initiates a response, he interrupts his turn to clear his throat (l.735), which might be a pathological phenomenon, yet could potentially indicate his hesitation (Poyatos, 2002, p.126) regarding the upcoming interpersonally sensitive action. He then states that Christian would be right (l.736). The particle “schon” (l.736) is employed to partially acknowledge Christian’s position (Thurmair, 1989, p.148), thus projecting upcoming disagreement. Thomas sets out to articulate his disagreement as observed by the particle “aber” (l.737). Prior to finalising his disagreement, he stops and repeats an emphasised acknowledgement, stating this time that Christian would be “completely right” (l.738). Thomas appears to be aware of the interpersonal sensitivity related to his approaching disagreement and uses a high degree of positive politeness – in this case, twice stating his agreement – to orient to this activity as delicate. He thus mitigates his challenge of Christian’s point of view as European-biased. While the disagreement could be classified as mitigated, the challenge is expressed explicitly, strengthened by verbal stress on the intensifier “!ZU!” (l.740). This constitutes a major threat to Christian’s professional face, the expression of which could be validated given the close interpersonal relationship between them (Wolfson, 1988).

Christian responds to the face-treat with unmitigated disagreement, as observed by the immediately expressed emphatic disagreement marker “!NEIN!” (l.741). With this direct and unambiguous disagreement, Christian defends his position and professional face. He explains that his approach acknowledges the Chinese target market (line 742) and sets out to back this claim (Antaki and Leudar, 1990) and elaborate on his position (l.743).

Example 15.7 Thomas looks out for Alex

The example portrays a later stage in the Skype conversation between Thomas and Christian. At this point, further arguments have been presented and a new strategy for deciding the company’s name that would suit the needs of both target markets has been introduced.
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Following the portrayal of further arguments, Thomas aligns with Christian’s position and expresses consent for the new strategy (ll.943–944). This ends the conflict between the two as they now share the same position (Grimshaw, 1990). After a short pause (l.945), Thomas topicalises the delicate issue of communicating this decision to Alex. This is observed in ll.946–947 where he suggests that a very careful approach has to be employed, including the modal “müssen” (l.946) thus indicating that facework is a necessity rather than a recommendation. The turn-internal tag question “gell” (l.947), marks the statement as particularly important and signals Christian’s acceptance of the proposition as evident (Hagemann, 2009, p.153). Thomas explicitly spells out the need for extensive commendation to be conducted (l.948), which further highlights the perceived importance of facework in this situation (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This suggested facework is not merely aimed at Alex’s positive face but especially at his professional face given his work-related role in the start-up. It is evident that Thomas considers the communication of proposal-related criticism to Alex as a highly interpersonally sensitive activity that should be approached with care. Direct and explicit confrontation would constitute a threat to Alex’s professional face and the harmony within the team might sustain damage in the ensuing conflict. Thomas orients to this by not only signalling awareness, but also proposing a concrete strategy to prevent FTAs.

Many enhancing elements are used here, such as “schön”, “auf JEden fall”, “in GROßem stil” and “wirklich” (ll.947–949), which stress the importance of this proposed approach. The occurrence of fast and contiguous talk throughout the sequence further underscores the importance of the issue (Poyatos, 2002, p.8). Thomas states that it was good that Alex had been the one to put forward the proposals (l.950), which could be regarded as a justification for the expressed face concerns. If Alex’s initiative would be met with rejection or criticism, it might discourage him from further contributions to the team, and this could negatively affect the organisational objectives.

Thomas’ proposed disagreement strategy contrasts that of his preceding disagreements between him and Christian. Especially on Christian’s side, no praise but strong criticism of the proposals had been brought forward and resistance had been met with unmitigated
(Example 15.6: “!NEIN!”) and even aggravated disagreement (Example 15.5: “ziemlich beSCHIEden”). While the close relationship between Thomas and Christian could validate such explicitness, the relationship between Thomas and Alex or Alex and Christian respectively could not be characterised as strong, with the latter being exclusively project related (Wolfson, 1988). Based on the prior exchanges, Thomas might be worried that Christian would not be sensitive towards Alex and also “rub in” his rejection of his proposals, a behaviour that would not be validated by a close friendship and might result in major face threats (and potential conflict) within the team. While Thomas displays face concerns for the absent Alex, the reference to Alex’s initiative (ll.949–950) infers (see Gumperz, 1982) that this pursuit of harmony might not be self-serving, yet in a wider context, it might contribute towards the achievement of organisational goals.

Example 15.8 Thomas broaches the topic of name selection

Alex, being late for the scheduled meeting, has joined the group about 40 minutes into the conversation. Thomas brings up the topic of the company name.

(…)

1900 Thomas: und jetzt HINsichtlich der MARkenfindung;
and now regarding the brand (name) finding
1901 da müß_n wir uns ma zuSAMmensetzen.
we need to sit down together for that
1902 des is noch WICHtig.=gell?
that is also important, right
1903 des is n PUNKT den wir jetzt äh:-
that is a point which we now erm
1904 (1.2)
1905 Thomas: ((räuspert)) ja;
((clears throat)) yes
1906 (1.1)
1907 Thomas: ma DRANbringen müssen.
need to address
1908 und dann [(        )]
and then
1909 Alex: [des muss ge]KLÄRT werden;=genua; (.)
this has to be solved, right
1910 (BRAUchen)
(need to)
1911 (1.2)
1912 Christian: !JA!.
yes
1913 ALSO: ähm: (.)
well, erm
1914 die VÖrschläge ham_mer geSEHen,
we’ve seen the proposals
1915 (1.0)
1916 Alex: hm_hm;
hm hm
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1917 Christian: sehr GU:T- 
very good

1918 find i(ch) äh: MEga, 
I find it erm great

1919 dass da jetzt ENDlich mal jemand n bisschen 
DRUCK macht. 
that there is now finally somebody putting some pressure

1920 
(0.7)

1921 Alex: hehehehe
hehehehe [laughs]

1922 
(1.1)

1923 Christian: und wir ähm: ich HAB mir da ma noch 
überLEGT; (.)
and we erm I have additionally thought about

1924 hab ich dir damals äh diesen WELT artikel, 
did I send you that Welt article back then

1925 mit den DEUTSCHen AUTOherstellern geschickt? 
with the German car manufacturers

1926 
(0.7)

1927 Alex: hm (-)
hm

1928 WEIß ich grad NICH- 
I don’t know right now

((…))

With all the team members present, Thomas once again initiates the exchange by introducing the topic of finding the name (l.1900). His use of the term “hinsichtlich” (l.1900) marks the topic as a “know-in-advance item” on the agenda (Svennevig, 2012, p.65) and constitutes a direct orientation to the preceding communication between the team members (Sigman, 1991). Thomas states the issue to be important (l.1902) and employs the turn-internal tag question “gell” (l.1902), which marks the validity of his assertion as evident (Hagemann, 2009:153). The modal “müssen” (ll.1901, 1907) signals the importance of the topic, while the softening particle “ma[l]” (ll.1901, 1907) weakens the degree of coerciveness inherent in his directive (Thurmair, 1989:185). Such padding might be warranted, as Thomas is part of a group of equal members and as such does not hold any formal authority. He underscores his alignment to the group by using the inclusive pronoun “wir” (ll.1901, 1903).

As the content of the most recent exchange between Thomas and Christian remains undisclosed to Alex, Alex and Christian are likely to have varying attitudes towards the importance of the topic and the nature of the particular agenda item. Alex might be waiting for the feedback, he had asked for in his prior email – which Christian had not yet provided to him – and might be orienting towards receiving approval of his proposals. In light of the most recent exchange with Thomas, Christian considers the proposals as rejected. For them, the respective agenda point has transformed into how to communicate this decision to Alex. The prior excerpts indicate that the members’ attitudes regarding the agenda point as part of their relational history have changed based on their varying exchanges across time and media (Sigman, 1991).
During Thomas’ turn, two pauses occur (ll.1904, 1906) in which he audibly clears his throat (l.1905). This might indicate that he feels uncomfortable about approaching the upcoming topic (Poyatos, 2002, p.126, p.165) and – given the potential for conflict talk to ensue – might be reluctant to take personal responsibility. Thomas’ hesitation could be explained by the previously expressed face concerns towards Alex (Example 15.7), the impact of which still carries over across the span of the preceding conversation (Sigman, 1991).

In line 1909, Alex takes up the floor to reaffirm the importance of the agenda item, thus displaying alignment with Thomas. The subsequent pause (l.1911) constitutes an opportunity for another speaker to take over the floor, which Christian seizes using an emphasised “!JA!” (l.1912). Holding directorship, he mentions that “we” have seen the proposals (l.1914), which prompts a continuer from Alex (l.1916). It is notable that Christian uses a plural form “ham_mer” (l.1914), which might give Alex a hint about the previous discussion. During Christian’s turn, several pauses (ll.1913, 1915, 1920) and hedges (ll.1913, 1918) indicate his hesitation about how to approach the topic (Poyatos, 2002, p.165). Christian’s following positive assessment (ll.1917–1919) is not directed at the proposals, yet instead at Alex’s initiative to advance the decision-making process, which – tied to his in-role performance – strengthens Alex’s professional face. It is noteworthy that any direct assessment regarding the proposals themselves is avoided. The issue is circumvented rather than addressed.

Alex responds by laughing (l.1921) possibly displaying embarrassment about the exaggerated praise (Poyatos, 2002, p.75). The subsequent pause (l.1922) poses another opportunity for an interlocutor to seize the turn, yet remains unused, thus prompting Christian to continue his deliberations. Again, he inadvertently uses a plural form “wir” (l.1923) when referring to further considerations. This time, however, he initiates self-repair by restating the singular form after a hesitation token “ähm: ich HAB” (l.1923) (see Schegloff et al., 1977). In this case, “wir” does not apply to the three group members, yet to the in-group, consisting of Thomas and Christian, present at the prior exchange. This hints at the preceding interaction between the two and, in the context of the statement, specifically at their disagreement alliance. However, it goes unnoticed by Alex, who does not address it.

At this point, upcoming disagreement is evident, as a quality-related statement regarding the proposals might be expected, based on the previous exchanges regarding the agenda of the meeting. Omitting any concrete assessment of the proposals, Christian asks Alex if he had previously sent him a certain newspaper article (ll.1924–1925). While (mitigated) disagreement could be inferred from this topic change, it is not directly expressed (cf. Example 15.5). Instead of using democratic authority to enforce Alex’s compliance, based on the disagreement alliance formed in the previous exchange, the article would serve as a neutral rationale. This way of introducing information to the discussion is aimed to convince Alex to reach the conclusion favoured by the other members while avoiding a face-threatening rejection of his position. The question allocates the turn to Alex, who cannot recall the article in question (ll.1927–1928). This allows Christian to introduce the article as support to authorise his position.

*Example 15.9 Alex speaks up*

This example portrays a later stage of the conversation between the three members. At this point, the new strategy has been introduced, using the article as a foundation. The initial design proposals have not yet been explicitly addressed.
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((...))

2069 Thomas: was hältst DU davon ALEX? (-)  
what do you think about it Alex
2070 [(())] der TAK(tik)? (.)  
(about) the tac(tic)
2071 Alex: [âh ]
2072 JA: ich (.h) hhh° (.)  
yes I
2073 <<all> WÜRD mir ganz gern mal den arTIkel> 
durchlesen;=  
would really like to read through the article
2074 =also geneRELL ja: kla:r wieso nicht,  
well in general yes sure why not
2075 <<all> kann ma ma proBIERN;>  
one can give it a try
2076 ob man da irgendwie: auf was ORdentliches  
KOMMT;
if one will somehow get decent results there
2077 und (. .) ich <<all> KÖNNT mir auch> VORstellen;  
and I could also imagine
2078 dass da was bei RUMkommt- °h (-)  
that something comes out of this
2079 aBER:- (.)  
but
2080 JA hab mir <<all> hab ich mir noch>  
keine geDANKen drüber geMACHT.=  
well I have haven’t thought about it before
2081 =<<all> ob ma des auch> !SO!:  
machen könnte;  
if one could also do it like that
2082 so: AUFziehen könnte;  
start it up like that.
2083 ich hab halt von anfang an gedacht man  
BRAUCH_n:(.)!NA!men;  
I just thought from the start that one needs a name
2084 un:d <<all> was wir halt jetzt>  
AUCH überLEGT ham; °h  
and what we’ve also just considered
2085 dass man sich n NAmen aussucht;  
that one selects a name
2086 und DArauf dann AUFbaut.  
and then builds on that.
2087 Christian: nee ich: ich HAB mi:r- (-)  
no I have
2088 des des stimmt AUCH.  
that that is also true
2089 des is âh ne gute SACHe.
that is *erm* a good thing

wichtig ist !DASS! wir den namen FINDen.

what’s important is that we find the name.

(0.7)

Alex: [hm_hm ]

hm hm

Christiane: [ja mit] mit diesen euroPÄischen NAmen is halt
die sache-
well with with these European names it’s just the case

((...))

In this example, which follows the introduction of the new strategy, Thomas explicitly allocates the turn to Alex (ll.2069–2070) enquiring his opinion on the matter. This systematic turn allocation constitutes facework, in that it shows Alex his opinion is valued and that time is allocated to hear him out (see Holmes and Marra, 2004, p.458). So far, Alex has remained rather passive, with the majority of his contributions being reception signals and continuers. Explicitly receiving the floor from Thomas, Alex now elaborates on his view over a long sequence (ll.2071–2086).

After a heavily hedged beginning (ll.2071–2072), Alex states that he would like to see the aforementioned article (l.2073). This could be regarded as disalignment to the team strategy, as his request for the article questions or even challenges the provided narrative. Alex then further introduces his position regarding the new approach. While he initially does not utter criticism or disagreement, he also does not seem particularly enthusiastic of the strategy either: He states that the team could give it a try to see if they could get decent results from the approach (ll.2075–2076) and accounts for the possibility of success (ll.2077-2078). Various downtoners, such as “generell” (l.2074) or “irgendwie” (l.2076) and the use of subjunctive verb forms such as “könnte” (ll.2077, 2081, 2082) indicate that Alex still holds a conflict position regarding the approach. Next, he produces the token “aber” (l.2079), which predicts upcoming disagreement and the introduction of Alex’s position. Alex then states that he has not given any thought to the approach before (ll.2080–2082). With this expression, he takes a relatively weak position, thus shielding his professional face should his upcoming contribution be met with disagreement.

Alex’s next utterance constitutes a shift in focus from addressing the others’ position to introducing his own. He states that he thought that an entrepreneurial team needed a name (l.2083), using the token “halt” (l.2083), which commonly serves to strengthen a statement, by highlighting its plausibility and marking it as common sense (Thurmair, 1989, p.125). This position itself would at first sight not be conflictive, as all members consider the selection of a name important. However, bringing it up in response to the new strategy constitutes mitigated disagreement and conflict, as it implies that the suggested approach might oppose this group goal. Alex then reminds the team of the previous approach towards choosing the name (ll.2084–2086), marked as plausible by the particle combination “halt (jetzt) AUCH” (l.2084) (Thurmair, 1989, p.228). While Alex uses the indefinite article “[ei]n[en]” (ll.2083, 2085) to refer to “a name”, it is evident that he is orienting towards the reintroduction of his previous name proposals. He now uses the inclusive “wir” (l.2084) for the first and only instance in his turn (cf. Alex’s previously exclusively used “ich” (ll.2072, 2077, 2080, 2083) and the indefinite pronoun “ma[n]” (ll.2075, 2076, 2081, 2083, 2085). By using the pronoun “wir” (l.2084), Alex is arguably orienting to previous exchanges with Thomas, possibly
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aiming at reinstating the agreement alliance in support of the old proposals. A conflict is evident, in that Alex has not yet adopted the viewpoint of the other members and still holds an opposing position.

Alex’s disaligning response prompts Christian to initiate disagreement characterised by the disagreement token “nee” (l.2087). However, he does not finish the utterance, as he enacts repair to acknowledge Alex’s position, using the expressions “stimmt AUCH” (l.2088) and “ne gute SACHe” (l.2089). Christian thus mitigates the disagreement and its face-threatening potential. It could be argued that his contributions are oriented towards politeness here, as he does not consider the relationship with Alex strong enough to utter unmitigated disagreement (see Wolfson, 1988). The observed behaviour could have additionally been influenced by the previous exchange with Thomas, where the latter warned him against uttering direct criticism. Instead, Christian attempts to construct common ground by stressing the importance of finding a name (l.2090). This is underscored by strong emphasis on “!DASS!” and the use of the inclusive pronoun “wir”, thus highlighting the outcome as a group goal. While this earns a reception token from Alex (l.2092), it does not put an end to the conflict. Instead, it opens up another round of argumentation. Building on the established common ground, Christian then sets out to challenge Alex’s position (l.2093). This constitutes a change in focus, as the team previously argued in support of the new strategy and would now move to addressing the weaknesses of the initial proposals. However, Alex’s initial name (and design) proposals are not challenged explicitly, as in contrast to the conversation with Thomas, where Christian referred to them as “pretty poor” (see Example 15.5). Concrete assessment is circumvented by Christian instead arguing against “European names” (l.2093) as a vague concept, thus paying attention to Alex’s professional face needs.

Example 15.10 Alex comes round

This example portrays a later stage of the conversation, where further arguments have been presented.

2300 Thomas: SO ungefähr.  
like this approximately

2301 Alex: ja: nee des KLINGT verNÜNFtig; °h  
yes no this sounds reasonable

2302 ich würd SA:gen ähm dann MACHen wer;  
I would say erm then we make

2303 oder mach ICH mit_m ((name omitted))  
or I make with ((name omitted))

2304 n terMIN für nächste woche;  
an appointment for next week

2305 zu dem du AUCH kommst. (-)  
to which you also come

2306 Thomas: oKAY;  
okay

After further argumentation, Alex eventually communicates approval, characterised by a positive assessment of the new strategy as reasonable (l.2301). His response is interesting in
that it combines the agreement token “ja:” and the disagreement token “nee” (l.2301). This seemingly contradictory combination might hint that Alex agrees rather reluctantly (Harren, 2001, p.63), yet willing to put the topic to rest and move on. However, his suggestion to organise a meeting with a Chinese contact (ll.2302–2304), with whom the team intends to discuss potential name choices, could be interpreted as alignment and acceptance of the change. Alex here not only accepts, but also co-constructs the new approach by making future arrangements for the group (Sigman, 1991). In line with this, he gives the directive for Thomas to attend this appointment as well (l.2305), which the latter confirms (l.2306). At this point, the conflict (talk) could be considered solved, in that the members no longer occupy different positions regarding the company name (in conversation) and are ready to move on (Grimshaw, 1990).

15.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined a critical incident in the early stage of a start-up venture – the selection of the company name – from its beginning through the encompassing conflict. In so doing, we analysed how the team members managed conflict with special attention to their disagreements related to the selection of the company’s name across time and media.

The expression of disagreement revealed conflict on a conversational level. It indicated the different positions held by the parties regarding the company’s name and its related strategy. However, their different stances regarding the topic in conversation did not constitute the source of the conflict. Conflict had been brewing from prior exchanges between the team members. Conflict was seen as a dynamic process, characterised by participants’ changing positions and the (de)construction of disagreement alliances. To capture and explain these dynamics, it was helpful to adopt a relational continuity perspective (Sigman, 1991). This allowed us to understand the import of participants’ orientations to past and future exchanges in their current interactions as well as the contextual factors under which the conflict emerged and issues of relationality in the way the disagreements were constructed.

The analysis revealed differences in disagreement strength according to the participation framework: the conflict between Christian and Thomas was approached rather directly with instances of unmitigated and even aggravated disagreements. In contrast, the conflict with Alex was approached reluctantly with Thomas explicitly stating overt face concerns prior to the encounter with the latter. When all the team members were present, disagreement was expressed implicitly or mitigated. This stands in contrast to the reported preference for direct and unmitigated disagreement behaviour among the male German participants (cf. Kotthoff, 1993). We argued that the interpersonal relationships within the team constituted a central mitigating factor. The close interpersonal relationship between two of the team members (Thomas and Christian) allowed for the expression of unmitigated and aggravated disagreements (Wolfson, 1988) between them.

The distinction between different disagreement types was helpful to highlight the contrasting approaches to conflict in the interaction where all three team members were present versus the interaction between two of the members. However, the categorisation of disagreement instances often proved difficult to untangle. For instance, the disagreement observed in Example 15.5 (“ziemlich beSCHEiden”) could be classified as mitigated (Ishihara, 2016) or weak (Pomerantz, 1984), if we take into account the preceding expansion (“EHRliche MEInung”) as mitigating. If we, however, consider this expansion as strengthening – an interpretation supported by the social relationship between the participants – the disagreement instead could be viewed as aggravated (Ishihara, 2016) or strong (Pomerantz, 1984).
Ishihara’s (2016) additional subdivision of strong disagreements into unmitigated and aggravated disagreements was helpful to show the explicitness with which the conflict was approached between Thomas and Christian but analytically it was not sufficiently accurate to consider whether the verbal emphasis in Example 15.6 (“‘NEIN!’”) would be strong enough to upgrade this unmitigated disagreement into an aggravated one. It would then follow that any categorisation of disagreements not only needs to take into account the interactional context in which they emerge but also needs to consider the relational continuity between the participants in a given setting. In view of this, we suggest that it might be more useful to approach disagreement strength as a spectrum as it would enable us to better understand the effect of different upgraders and/or downgraders and their concomitant strength on disagreements produced in the construction of conflict talk.

The findings also showed that the affordance of the medium influences the emergence of conflict. The participants of this study oriented to conflict and disagreement on synchronous (Skype) channels rather than asynchronous (Email) channels (Friedman and Currall, 2003). In Skype calls, individuals can dynamically fine-tune or adapt their positions according to their interlocutors’ reception. This could be considered beneficial for conflict resolution in a leaderless setting, such as the entrepreneurial team examined in this chapter.

The study should not be understood as a comprehensive portrayal of conflict in start-up teams but as a first examination of a single instance of conflict within this new and contemporary business setting. At the time of the featured exchanges, the team was still in the beginning of their venture, with the members still working out their specific roles. Further studies could expand the time range of observation to establish if the development of interpersonal relationships over time is reflected in different approaches towards conflict and disagreement. There is a clear need for long durée ethnographic studies on the construction of conflict in professional contexts. However, accessibility to such closed settings remains an insurmountable obstacle. With this in mind, the current chapter offers an insight into the typically restricted world of business start-ups.

List of abbreviations and transcript conventions
Adapted from Selting et al. (2009, pp.391–2) and Selting et al. (2011, pp.37–8).

Sequential structure

[ ] overlap or simultaneous talk

[ ] fast, immediate continuation with a new turn or segment (latching)

Pauses

(.) micro pause, estimated, up to 0.2 sec. duration appr.

(-) short estimated pause of appr. 0.2–0.5 sec. duration

(0.5) measured pause and duration (to tenth of a second)

Continuers

hm ja, nein nee monosyllabic tokens
hm_hm, ja_a bisyllabic tokens
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Accentuation
SYLLable focus accent
!SYLLable extra strong accent

Final pitch movements of intonation phrases
? rising to high
, rising to mid
- level
; falling to mid
. falling to low

Pace changes
<<all>> > allegro, fast talk

In- and outbreaths
°h/h° in-/out-breathe of appr. 0.2–0.5 sec. duration
°hh/hh° in-/out-breath of appr. 0.5–0.8 sec. duration
°hhh/hhh° in-/out-breath of appr. 0.8–1.0 sec. duration

Laughter
haha, hehe, hihi syllabic laughter

Other segmental conventions
: lengthening, by about 0.2–0.5 sec.
und_ääh cliticizations within units
ääh, öäh, ähm hesitation markers

Other conventions
((clears throat)) non-verbal actions
( ) unintelligible passage
((…)) omission in transcript
[annotation] annotations
{Name A}, {B}, {C} substitutes for omitted names

Notes
1 Lim and Bowers (1991) expand upon Brown and Levinson’s (1987) concept of positive face to distinguish between “fellowship face” as people’s “want to be included” and “competence face” as people’s “want that their abilities be respected” (Lim and Bowers, 1991, p.420). They suggest that speakers address interlocutors’ competence face by “approbation”, which – following Leech’s (1983) approbation maxim – entails maximising praise and minimising criticism.
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2 The team had been awarded an EXIST business start-up grant by the German Ministry of Economy and Energy (BMWi) and the European Union social fund ESF (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, 2016). This grant is targeted at technology-oriented start-ups in the pre-founding stage (Kulicke, 2014). As a competitively attributed one-year funding scheme, it permits a sponsored team to test its business idea with reduced personal risk. This is done by providing the team with a certain budget for company expenses, as well as a monthly stipend, covering the living expenses of each individual member to fully focus on their project-related tasks.

3 The entrepreneurial team members pursue their interdependent tasks “collectively and independently of formal leaders” (Vine et al., 2008, p.341). This is representative of distributed leadership constellations (see Choi and Schnurr, 2014, 2016).

4 Smileys are traditionally considered inappropriate in formal business email communication (Angell and Heslop, 1994, p.111). Their use by Thomas might be attributed to the relatively informal nature of this particular entrepreneurial team.

References

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