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A communicative perspective on the trust-control link in Russia

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ABSTRACT

The question of whether trust complements or substitutes control continues to be debated in the literature. We contribute to this debate by adopting a communicative perspective on the trust-control link in Russia. Our qualitative study reveals dialectics in the trust-control link. Russian managers used various communicative activities to simultaneously nurture trust and exercise control towards their subordinates, indicating complementarity. By contrast, from an intercultural communicative perspective the Finnish expatriates failed to see this complementarity and regarded trust and control as substitutes. The dialectical perspective reveals the interplay between content and context of a message and their complementarity in communication.

1. Introduction

Trust and control are essential elements in manager-subordinate relationships, yet how they interrelate and are achieved at work in different cultural contexts varies. Trust is expected to facilitate cooperation, assure social interaction, and lower negotiation costs between organizational members (Cardona, Morley & Reiche, 2013). Control in turn is considered a core managerial activity to minimize the risk of uncertainty and to ensure that task outcomes comply with managerial expectations (Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). Given the importance of these two concepts and their seemingly conflicting and complex nature, their dynamics have occupied researchers for decades and continue to be much debated (Long & Sitkin, 2018). To advance our understanding, we take a communicative perspective and explore the role of communication in the relationship between control and trust.

Researchers have presented two alternative interpretations of the trust-control link, namely the substitution perspective and the complementary perspective. According to the substitution perspective, "trust and control are different sides of the same analytical coin" (Reed, 2001, 203). In other words, if trust is lacking, tighter control needs to be put in place (Knights, Noble, Vurdubakis, & Willmott, 2001; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007). On the other hand, some researchers argue that trust and control are mutually reinforcing and that they jointly contribute to a cooperative relationship between managers and their subordinates, hence complementing each other (e.g., Bijlsma-Frankema & Van de Bunt, 2003; Zucker, 1986). Yet, how this complementarity is achieved and how managers and subordinates perceive

the co-existence between trust and control are still not well understood and call for fresh theoretical lenses (see Long & Sitkin, 2018, for a comprehensive review).

We argue that one such lens is a communicative perspective. As prior research has conceptualized the link between trust and control as a process in which trust and control may interact (Jagd, 2010; Long & Sitkin, 2006; Möllering, 2005), communication is inherent in this interplay. However, very little research has explicitly examined how communication affects and explains the trust-control link. For example, communicative activities serve different functions (Myers, Seibold, & Park, 2011), and it is therefore possible that they differ with regard to their relative importance of conveying trust and exercising control, which in turn may affect the trust-control link. Moreover, while there is an abundance of research on trust and control, we know relatively little about how individuals in specific cultural settings perceive trust (Muethel & Hoegl, 2012; Reiche, Cardona, Lee, & Canela, 2014), control (Tsui-Auch & Möllering, 2010), or the relationship between these concepts (Tsui-Auch & Möllering, 2010; Weibel et al., 2016).

In this paper, we take a communicative perspective on the trust-control link in the context of Russian subsidiaries in a Finnish multinational corporation (MNC). Our objective is to understand how Russian managers and Finnish expatriates in these subsidiaries use communication to nurture trust and to exercise control, and how the subordinates perceive these communicative activities of their managers. Based on an interpretive qualitative study of personal interviews with 86 Russian managers and employees and 13 Finnish expatriates working for the Finnish MNC in Russia, we contrast the views of Russian managers and subordinates with those of Finnish expatriates on

assignment in Russia to capture an intercultural communicative perspective. In this study we ask: *How does communication convey the link between trust and control in Russia?*

Our study makes three contributions to the literature. First, we found that communication assists in uncovering the relationship between trust and control and how it is achieved locally. Russian managers use various communicative activities to simultaneously nurture trust and exercise control. The co-existence of trust and control in interpersonal communication reflects the main tenets of relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Unlike most previous research, the communicative perspective allows us to reveal the connection between the *types* of control managers apply and the *way* they apply them, which nurtures subordinates' trust. Thus, the dialectical approach served to convey how trust and control complemented each other, which is a contribution to research on trust and control.

Second, we contribute to international business research by looking at the trust-control link in manager-subordinate relationships from an intercultural communication perspective. We examine the viewpoints of Russian managers and their subordinates as well as those of Finnish expatriates on the interplay between trust and control in the Russian context. The interviewed Russian managers and subordinates largely shared the perception that trust and control are complementary, whereas the group of interviewed expatriates as third parties were more aligned with the substitution perspective. As representatives of a low-context communication culture (Hall, 1976), the Finnish expatriates failed to see the nuances in the Russian high-context way of communication. Further, from a dialectical perspective our findings point to the interplay of both communication context and content of a message (Cole, 2015), thus refining Hall's (1976) theory.

Third, we provide a contribution to research on the trust-control link in the Russian context. Much of the previous literature is conceptual in nature with very few studies examining the trust-control link empirically, and in a limited set of cultures (for exceptions see Mizrachi, Anspach, & Drori, 2007; Tsui-Auch & Möllering, 2010). Differences in concepts of trust between cultures have been identified in the literature (Saunders, Skinner, Dietz, Gillespie, & Lewicki, 2010; Wasti, Tan, Brower, & Önder, 2007; Zaheer & Zaheer, 2006), which explains why the relationship between these concepts may also vary across contexts.

In the following section, we first briefly review the literature on the trust-control link. We then discuss the role of communication in the trust-control literature and describe the relevant characteristics of Russia as our research context. After detailing the key steps of our interpretive qualitative study, we offer a nuanced view of the interplay between communication, trust and control in the case company. In conclusion, we develop a conceptual model that is positioned in the existing body of research, and offer theoretical and managerial implications as well as suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1. The trust-control link

Scholars have examined the trust-control link across different disciplines and at various levels of analysis ranging from interpersonal to inter-organizational (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998). In this paper we focus on the interpersonal level. Definitions of trust also vary between disciplines. To illustrate, Castaldo (2007) found 72 different definitions of trust since the early 1960s. Key to these definitions is that trust is a bi-directional and interactive process. As we are particularly interested in understanding how trust and control are achieved in the context of manager-subordinate relationships, we conceptualize trust as an attitude that involves positive expectations toward the actions of another party (McAllister, 1995). In the literature, control is viewed as a process that regulates behaviours of organizational members toward achieving organizational goals (Cardinal, Sitkin, & Long, 2004; Das & Teng, 2001).

The seminal review article of control and coordination mechanisms in MNCs by Martinez and Jarillo (1989) divides these mechanisms into two broad categories: formal and informal. Whereas the former refers to the utilization of formal rules, procedures, and policies to monitor and reward desirable performance, the latter focuses on the regulatory power of organizational norms, values, and culture to achieve social control (Martinez & Jarillo, 1989). Ouchi (1979) offered a similar classification by distinguishing between three types of control: output control, process control and social control.

Current research approaches the relationship between trust and control primarily from two perspectives: the substitution perspective and the complementary perspective (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; Long & Sitkin, 2018). The substitution perspective views trust and control as inversely related. In other words, a low degree of trust requires a high degree of control and, vice versa, a high degree of trust allows for a limited degree of control (e.g., Dekker, 2004). Most research in the field of management and organization has adopted a substitution perspective and views trust as an alternative to control (Knights et al., 2001). On the other hand, from the complementary perspective, trust and control are considered mutually reinforcing because they both are seen to contribute to the development of co-operative relationships between parties (e.g., Zucker, 1986). This perspective views managerial monitoring as a demonstration of care and a precondition for providing feedback, support and guidance (Bijlsma-Frankema & Van de Bunt, 2003).

These opposite perspectives on the link between trust and control raise several intriguing questions, such as when do they substitute or complement each other, and how do they play out in a distinct cultural and institutional context such as Russia (see also Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; Jagd, 2010). Long and Sitkin (2006) theorize that certain types of trust and control may interrelate by complementing each other while other types of trust and control may interrelate by substituting for each other. They further encourage scholars to examine various combinations of trust-nurturing and control-exercising activities. Existing research also argues that trust and control are not static phenomena, but should be seen as two interactive processes (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; Möllering, 2013). We respond to these calls by introducing a communicative lens on the interplay between trust and control.

2.2. Communication, trust and control

Interpersonal communication serves many functions in the workplace (Myers et al., 2011). In particular, the communication between managers and subordinates is vital, as most work tasks and organizational goals, including trust and control, are accomplished through communication-based interpersonal relationships.

Previous research has identified various ways in which communication between parties can be used to nurture interpersonal trust. Whitener et al. (1998) identify communication as one category of managerial trustworthy behavior. In particular, providing accurate information, giving explanations for decisions, and showing openness affect subordinates' perceptions of their managers' trustworthiness. Other communication processes, such as repeated interactions that are characterized by timeliness, honesty, and empathy have also been shown to positively impact individual trust (Fulmer & Gelfand, 2012). Thomas, Zolin, and Hartman, (2009) found that the quality of information predicted trust of one's coworkers and supervisors while adequacy of information predicted one's trust toward top management. Their study suggests that the relationship between communication and trust is complex and that simple strategies focusing on either quality or quantity of information may be ineffective for dealing with all members in an organization. Researchers also note that trust may be an antecedent of communication and collaborative interactions between organizational actors, rather than a consequence (Burke, Sims, Lazzara, & Salas, 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002).

Communication also serves as a necessary ingredient to achieve control when employees are informed about relevant performance standards or asked to correct deviant behaviour to stimulate effective performance (Sitkin, Cardinal, & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2010). Through communication, managers ensure that subordinates understand their responsibilities and have fulfilled their tasks. Managers use many different types of controls. Output control involves goal setting, feedback giving and performance appraisal (Langfield-Smith, 2008), regarding what subordinates produce to ensure that prescribed performance standards are met (Ouchi, 1979). Process control is targeted toward employee behaviours and relates to formalized procedures that are often communicated in written form stipulating how employees should do their work and how procedural adherence should be monitored, as well as sanctioned or rewarded (Snell, 1992). Social control is exercised by sharing common values and emphasising strong informal forms of collegiality (Ouchi, 1979).

However, while communication plays an integral part in both nurturing trust and exercising control, we know very little about its role in the potentially conflicting relationship between trust and control. A communication perspective allows us to simultaneously focus on the type of controls that managers use and the way they apply and implement them to influence trust in the specific context of Russia.

2.3. Communication, trust and control in Russia

Russia serves as a relevant context to examine the trust-control link, because trust and control are very important elements in Russian business culture (Butler & Purchase, 2008). Russians have a tendency to distrust individuals, groups, and organisations that fall outside their personal relationships. Trusting relationships in Russia exist within in-groups of family members, friends, and colleagues, while out-groups are typically distrusted because they are not seen to share the same values. During the Soviet era, personal networking and social connections were important for organisational survival; managers of industrial enterprises tried to achieve the goals set by government ministries through unofficial inter-organisational bartering and cooperative exchange to reallocate limited resources. This approach to gaining influence, making connections, and relying on personal contacts with people in influential positions is still widely practiced in Russia and known as 'blat' (May & Ledgerwood, 2007). Furthermore, control has always been an inherent part of the Russian society, which has been governed by an authoritarian style of leadership for centuries.

The transition period from the Soviet era to a market economy resulted in weak formal institutions, economic instability and profound societal changes. Russian individuals and organizations did not develop a Western-type of trust in government, regulatory agencies, and the judicial system (McCarthy & Puffer, 2008). Most state and public organizations are viewed as unpredictable, unreliable and failing to provide support (Butler & Purchase, 2008). This has resulted in even stronger trust at the personal level to mitigate the risks associated with turbulent economic and political changes (Batjargal, 2003; Michailova & Worm, 2003). Scholars stress that 'relationship trust' is a very important concept in the Russian context and applies both to personal and organizational settings (Puffer, McCarthy, & Boisot, 2010).

In terms of communication, Russia is considered a high-context culture (Hall, 1976), where face-to-face communication and the closeness of human relationships are emphasized. Informal communication and open demonstration of emotions are considered essential for building and maintaining trustworthy relationships (Andreeva, 2014). Studies on cultural value dimensions (e.g., Hofstede, 2001; House, Hanges, Javidan, Peter, & Gupta, 2004; Schwartz, 1994) characterize Russia as a collectivist society with high power distance. This distance is reflected in the reluctance of Russian managers to share information (Vlachoutsicos & Lawrence, 1990). Russian managers consider

information a source of individual power rather than a corporate resource. Most Russian managers also have difficulty accepting the fact that they can learn from employees on lower organizational levels (Michailova & Husted, 2003). In collectivist cultures, individuals feel a moral obligation towards their in-group such as family members, distant relatives, co-workers, and members of political and/or religious groups who have common interests and a concern for each other's welfare (Triandis, 1995), and a lack of interest towards those who are considered out-group members (Michailova & Hutchings, 2008). Due to Russia's communist history people have learned to keep things to themselves in the fear of being misinterpreted (Hutchings & Michailova, 2006).

Taken together, the Russian context provides an intriguing setting to explore the role of communication in the trust-control link between managers and their subordinates. In the present study, we pose the following research question: *How does communication convey the link between trust and control in Russia?* We believe that studying the trust-control link from a communicative lens from both local viewpoints of Russian managers and subordinates and from that of Finnish expatriates provides a richer understanding of how trust and control co-exist in manager-subordinate relationships in an intercultural setting.

3. Methodology

We undertook a qualitative interpretive single case study to uncover how managers and subordinates in Russia subjectively understand trust and control and make sense of the trust-control link. Interpretive research is concerned with understanding local meanings and everyday symbolic words at the level of subjective experience (Burrel & Morgan, 1979). A single case study is well suited to interpretive approach because it enables the detailed contextual description essential for understanding the phenomenon (Stake, 1995). We selected one company in the construction sector, a Finnish MNC and its six subsidiaries in Russia, as a research site. Trust in the Finnish culture – as in the Nordic cultures more generally – is considered high. While Finns believe that most people and institutions can be trusted, Russia, in contrast, is a low-trust society (World Values Survey, 2005-2008; Inglehart et al., 2014), where the need for control remains high.

Genro, a name we use to anonymize the case company for the sake of confidentiality, appeared to be a particularly suitable research site for our study for several reasons. First, trust is deeply embedded in Genro's values, leadership and human resources (HR) principles, which emphasize granting employees autonomy and independence to complete their tasks and hence trusting them. These corporate practices were transferred to the Russian subsidiaries by organising workshops and management trainings. Second, Genro has extensive experience of operating in the Russian market. As a journalist put it: 'When one hears the name Genro, what comes first to mind is Russia' (Talouselämä, 2007). Genro entered the Russian market in 1961. Since 1997 the company has established subsidiaries in six cities in Russia through partial acquisitions or greenfield investments. These units are partly or wholly owned by Genro. In the acquired units, the local management and part of the personnel were permanently transferred to Genro. This was considered important by Genro as the business is very local in character. Third, in 2014 the company employed almost 2000 employees in Russia with the average tenure of about four years. Besides Russian personnel, there were 13 Finnish expatriates working in production, development and finance. Thus, the company employs different groups of individuals who approach trust and control from their respective perspectives. The final reason for selecting Genro as the case company was that at the time of the interviews, the share of the Russian business of the overall operations of the company was considerable: Russia accounted for 26% of the revenue, 40% of the operating profit, and 33% of the personnel.

Table 1
Distribution of interviewees across interviewee positions.

Position	Number of interviewees
Top Manager	27
Middle Manager	39
Employee	20
Expatriate	13
HQ	1
Total	100

3.1. Data collection

The first author conducted a total of 100 in-depth, semi-structured interviews, of which 86 were with Russian managers and employees in different subsidiary locations, 13 with Finnish expatriates, and one with a headquarters representative, between May 2013 and April 2014. The interviewees represented different positions and levels. Top managers included managing directors as well as finance, development, production, sales and HR directors. Middle managers were also from all these fields. The employee group included, for example, a finance specialist, engineer, architect, bookkeeper, communication specialist, interpreter, and sales manager. Table 1 shows the distribution of interviewee positions.

Access to the case company was facilitated by the first author's employment at Genro as the Head of HR for International operations and responsible for Russia. She conducted the first interviews in spring 2013, but then stepped down from her position and completed the last interviews while being on study leave. Her in-depth knowledge about the culture and customs of the Russian people supported the establishment of good rapport with the interviewees and resulted in rich and informative interviews.

The interviews covered several themes concerning the relationship between manager and employee. The Russian interviewees were asked about their expectations at work, characteristics of their managers and employees, the managers' main duties, meetings and interactions with the manager, as well as the role of trust and control between the manager and employee. The same questions were also posed to the Finnish expatriates, albeit emphasising the way they saw the relationship between managers and employees in Russia. The importance of the trust-control link coupled with communication in the Russian organizational life was an emergent finding, and many interviewees even considered control the most important task of a manager's work. In most Russian interview accounts, the theme of intense and detailed control was related to high instance of trust. We did not expect this, because previous research on Russia emphasizes mistrust between managers and subordinates (Dixon, Day, & Brewster, 2014; May, Young, & Ledgerwood, 1998). The first author adjusted the interview questions accordingly to accommodate this important new theme, which represented a redirection of our study (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Questions such as 'Why is it necessary to control subordinates?', 'In which ways do you exercise control?' and 'How often do you exercise control over your subordinates?' were added.

The interviews were conducted in the interviewees' native language, Russian or Finnish. The interviews lasted on average 1–1.5 hours. All but two interviewees gave permission for their interviews to be recorded.

3.2. Data analysis

The data analysis started by transcribing the interviews verbatim, which resulted in some 800 pages of text. Due to the large amount of data, the manual analysis was supported by the Atlas.ti computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to facilitate the categorizing and comparison of data. The transcribed interviews were imported in Russian into the software. The initial analysis of the data was conducted in Russian in order to stay as close as possible to the intended meanings of the interviewees (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). It is worth noting that the interviewees themselves mostly used the masculine pronoun 'he' in the Russian language when referring to managers, which is also visible in the verbatim quotations.

The data were analysed in three stages in line with the principles of thematic analysis (Patton, 2002). The first stage of the analysis consisted of qualitative content analysis, which refers to identifying and coding raw data. We used open coding and proceeded sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph (Charmaz, 2006) to generate emergent topics. Codes such as ways of control, reasons for control, ways of trust, and ways of communication were created. For example, the sentence 'I like to control the situation. I need to control because I am responsible for the result of their work and my own result' was coded as 'reasons for control'. The sentence 'There is trust when an employee is assigned a task and he can choose the tool for completing the task' represents an example of the code 'ways of trust'.

In the second stage of the data analysis, we looked for various meanings of trust and control and discovered the literature on the trust-control link in line with the iterative nature of qualitative research (Gephart, 2004). We noticed how interviewees referred to communicative activities, such as explaining, advising and information sharing, when talking about both trust and control. Following Fairhurst and Putnam (2018), we used the technique of constant comparison between the codes to generate points of contrast in communication and categorised the data based on these communicative activities. At this point, we found the relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), which stimulated the generation of theoretical ideas from the empirical data and the articulation of our contribution, ie. conceptual leaping (Klag & Langley, 2013). We also categorised the data based on different interviewee groups and gained additional insights by comparing the Russian data with the Finnish expatriate interviews, which revealed another type of opposition in our data (Fairhurst & Putnam, 2018).

In the third stage of the analysis we clustered our findings based on trusting and controlling communication and dialectical communicative activities, as well as complementary and substitution perspectives on the trust-control link. The communicative perspective allowed us to uncover the relationship between trust and control and its local enactment.

Because we follow the interpretive case study tradition based on Stake (1995) rather than the dominant positivist approach to case study research (Piekkari & Welch, 2018), the traditional quality criteria of validity and reliability take on different meanings in our study (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). Since we consider the researcher herself the primary research instrument, the quality criterion of reliability and replicability become irrelevant for our purposes. We took several measures to ensure the validity of our study in the specific context of Russia. First, we followed a multi-stage process of data analysis as described above. Further, the personal involvement of the first author in the case company helped build rapport with the interviewees and was a source of interpretive insight rather than bias. Her in-depth understanding of the company context, her familiarity with the Russian culture and practices as well as her mastery of the company jargon enhanced the quality of the study. The findings were also taken back to the case company for validation purposes. Finally, as a research team, we also had members who had the necessary critical distance to carefully assess and challenge the data produced by the first author (Patton, 2002), further enhancing the validity of our findings.

4. Findings: Trust and control in manager-subordinate relationships at Genro in Russia

In this section, the trust-control link will be discussed from the viewpoint of the Russian managers, subordinates and the Finnish expatriates on foreign assignment at Genro in Russia. Trust is an inherent part of Genro's values, leadership and HR principles, as described in the previous section. In our study, the Russian managers and subordinates emphasized the importance of both trust and control in the manager-

subordinate relationship. By contrast, the Finnish expatriates highlighted control and considered trust to have less impact in the Russian workplace. We first discuss the interplay between trust and control in the interviews in order to show the dialectical viewpoints present in the interview data. We then analyse how communication uncovers the relationship between trust and control and how various communicative activities were used in nurturing trust and exercising control.

4.1. The interplay between trust and control

Our interviews revealed that for Russian managers trust and control primarily complement each other. The importance of both trust and control was evident from the fact that all Russian managers stated that without trust a working relationship between the manager and the subordinate would not exist at all, as illustrated by a top manager:

> I only work with those that I trust, if I don't, I tell them that they should look for a new job. (TM28)

It thus appeared that trust is the foundation of manager-subordinate relationships. Even though the managers highlighted the importance of trust in the working relationship, it became clear that trust in Russia can never be complete, as the following quotation shows:

> I trust my subordinates; I don't work with people whom I don't trust. Although in Russia trust is not a black-and-white thing, you can trust [a subordinate] 60%. (TM8)

Subordinates largely mirrored the managers' view. As described by one subordinate, 'if I didn't know that my manager trusts me, I would not be working here'. This comment highlights the harmonious understanding across managers and subordinates that trust plays a significant role as the foundation of working relationships. It appeared that for managers, control and trust exist at the same time and hence complement each other; control does not mean that the manager does not trust the subordinate. On the contrary, as explained by a top manager:

> If the person knows that he is controlled, he will work. If there is no control, then he will prolong the work. Control and trust are not in conflict. Trust means that I know that they will work correctly. (TM23)

Here the manager trusts the employee's abilities to complete the tasks, but by controlling she ensures the timely fulfilment of tasks. Subordinates seemed to take for granted the intense and detailed control exercised by the Russian managers, which signals the complementary perspective between trust and control. As one subordinate proclaimed: 'Of course managers need to control, they are managers!' Subordinates also considered control necessary because as employees they could not always evaluate the situation themselves, as the following quotation illustrates:

> Control is needed because it provides discipline, helps to set the right priorities. Managers also see the amount of work the subordinate does, what kind of tasks [he has], where he's going. So that what was done and which results were achieved will be understood for the performance evaluation. (Emp1)

The above quotation also reveals that when managers control, they see what their subordinates are doing, which is part of the performance evaluation and therefore beneficial for subordinates.

The Finnish expatriates expressed more of a substitutive rather than complementary understanding of the trust-control link in Russia. The expatriates were rather sceptical about trust in the Russian society and considered control to mainly substitute for trust, as the following comments of two top expatriate managers, who had both been working in Russia for some twenty years, illustrate:

> A Russian manager hardly trusts anyone in business, not even his

subordinates; no, there is always a certain suspicion. This [society] is very relationship-oriented, everything starts from who is whose relative, where has he been in the army, with whom he has studied, whether he has been invited to odnoklassniki [a social network service for classmates and old friends], [those people] can always be approached. If there is someone who is a relative in some way, there you always have access. The closest family circle is the most important. (Exp2)

This interviewee refers to the complicated nature of trust and the importance of networks in Russia. He seems to agree with the previous comment about the Russian top manager that a manager can trust the subordinate 60%. He thinks that Russian managers only trust their closest networks, mainly relatives and old friends; subordinates are not usually included in this group and therefore require more control. A second expatriate emphasised how control is expected to take place in the Russian working environment:

> I think here [in Russia] trust plays a smaller role than control, which is difficult for us Finns. It can be said that a Russian considers a manager stupid if he only trusts but does not control. Russians don't think that it is morally wrong to abuse trust; they think that he [the manager] was stupid because he didn't control me. Also, the reaction from the work community [in the workplace] is that they [the managers] were stupid since they did not exercise control. (Exp1)

This interviewee did not consider trust to be as important as control; in fact, based on his experience it is the opposite. He is also aware of the complementary nature of trust and control: to trust 'only' is not common in Russia – it should be complemented by control.

In conclusion, our study reveals that the Russian managers and their subordinates were unanimous about the necessity of both trust and control in the daily course of the work. The two complemented each other. The subordinates largely accepted being closely monitored and controlled by their superiors. This is in contrast with previous findings suggesting that the views are asymmetrical, i.e. that subordinates often resist control exercised from the top and prefer to be trusted and empowered (Spreitzer & Mishra, 1999). On the other hand, we found that the group of Finnish expatriates regarded trust and control largely as substitutes of each other. They were of the opinion that the high degree of control by Russian managers replaced their lack of trust in subordinates. Hence for the Russian managers and employees the dialectical interplay between trust and control was evident, whereas for the Finnish expatriates it was less so. Our findings are summarised in Table 2.

4.2. The role of communication in the trust-control link: the Russian perspective

Our findings revealed a number of ways through which Russian managers used informal communication in order to nurture trust and at the same time exercise control with their subordinates, as we show in Table 3.

In nurturing trust, the communicative activity of socialising with subordinates seemed to play an important role, as the following quotation from a top manager shows:

> I try to create trusting relationships with subordinates. We discuss different things, even personal. (TM6)

This manager emphasised discussing not only work-related but also personal issues in nurturing trust with his subordinates. However, it appeared that informal discussions and dialogues were also a way for managers to exercise informal process control towards their subordinates, as the following quotation reveals:

> Everything goes in the form of dialogue, orally. For me the document [formal, written report] is not important, for me it is important to understand how things are going, orally it is simpler to do. (TM6)

Table 2

The perceptions of the trust-control link between Russian managers, employees and Finnish expatriates in Russia.

	Manager	Employee	Expatriate
Complementary (trust and control reinforce each other)	"Controlling is very important, although employees have some responsibility and there is some trust in them. If tasks are assigned, they should also be controlled." (TM12)	"The manager does not control in detail. She just from time to time asks how things are going." (Emp19)	n/a
Substitutive (trust is alternative to control and vice versa) Russian view: Trust substitutes amount and certain types of control.	"The more I trust the person, the less I control. But currently I don't have people that I can trust. As soon as they show that they manage their work, that I can trust them, the level of control decreases immediately." (TM7)	"During my first year I met constantly with my manager. He gave me recommendations about how to implement my tasks, but over time we met less and less. I now have more independence and freedom, and responsibility. Now he trusts me and only checks the result." (MM3)	"Russian managers control their employees quite heavily. It is this 'trust is good, control is better'. It comes from the culture." (Exp9)

It appeared that Russian managers exercised control for the most part informally. The managers talked about 'soft' control, which involved interactions with subordinates, more specifically, not asking subordinates directly about a specific task but addressing them in more general terms regarding how things were going, i.e. through socializing. The following quotation illustrates such an instance of informal process control:

Control is necessary, but it is the form of control. I go to their rooms and ask what they are doing; sometimes we exchange a few words in the staff canteen… I often control softly, over a cup of tea, so that the subordinate does not notice. (MM3)

This quotation also reveals how the managers seemed to implement their need for control through showing concern and care towards the subordinate in order to support the implementation of ongoing work processes. Another middle manager highlighted the participation in nurturing trust and exercising control:

If you don't control, there is no interest. It is participation more than control; you show that to your subordinates. (MM34)

Middle managers often sat in the same office with their subordinates or very close to them, which allowed regular interaction to take place. Therefore, managers were constantly aware of how subordinates were dealing with the completion of tasks, their challenges and concerns, as described by a middle manager:

My door is open so I always hear what and how they are doing. If something happens I interfere immediately. (MM10)

This quotation further reveals how the manager uses intensive informal personal interaction to nurture trust and implement informal control, such that it will be possible to fix issues in time. Managers also emphasised interactions in the form of explaining and checking when assigning the task to a subordinate in order to make sure that the subordinate understands the task correctly, as described by a middle manager:

It is better when you give the task, and then after a few hours, days, weeks you check again. Unfortunately it often happens that [as a manager] one is not understood. Here is another moment [when], one needs to clearly formulate the task. Better to ask [the subordinate] ten times. (MM13)

Table 3

Different communicative activities in nurturing trust and exercising control.

Communicative activity	Function	Example quote
Socializing	Informal process control and trust nurturing	"I try to monitor the fulfilment of tasks of employees every day. I sit in the same room with them, interact all the time." (MM8)
Supporting	Informal process control and trust nurturing	"When you control, you don't say that you control, you just ask how things are, what's new, what obstacles to the job may have arisen, what is needed. It is like support." (MM16) "Employees without the manager's support are like employees without hands." (TM30)
Participating	Informal process control and trust nurturing	"I would say that control is participation at work. When employees see that you participate, they try to implement the work better." (MM34) "I don't only ask them [employees] to come to me; I go to them myself and discuss various work moments". (TM27)
Checking/ verifying	Informal process control and trust nurturing	"Control takes place around the clock, day and night." (TM10) "I meet with my employees every day, my door is always open, I see and hear what is done in the department, how they work. They can always come to me with their questions. Control is needed, otherwise the result that was planned wouldn't be completed." (MM6)
Explaining, advising	Informal process control and trust nurturing	"If there are problems, or questions, I can always go to manager for advice. We often communicate." (Emp18) "Employees expect advice from me and [so] I need to manage everything". (MM34)
Sharing information	Informal process control and trust nurturing	"We have regular meetings, email messages. It is important to give information the maximum amount directly. Worst of all to have rumours." (MM6) "Everything he [the manager] says, I take as face value. Otherwise it would not be possible to work" (MM17)
Having face-to-face meetings	Informal process control and trust nurturing	"I meet with employees every day. I am always interested in their work and implementation of tasks. I am always ready to reply to their questions. We can always organise a small meeting to discuss some theme." (MM21)
Reporting	Formal outcome control	"I fulfil my work independently. Then in the intermediate time, I show the result to my manager for discussion and correction; we discuss pluses and minuses. You don't run to show every detail, you implement and show the result." (Emp14)
Having group meetings	Formal outcome control	"I meet once a week, on Tuesdays at 9.30 with my employees in a staff meeting and there we discuss the goals for each project, agree on tasks. We put them all in a protocol and by the next meeting follow the implementation of these tasks." (TM12) "In our meeting we discuss the reporting of accomplished work. We have a protocol of tasks, what was done, what was not, and why not." (TM5)
Using electronic program	Formal outcome control	"In SKIP program there is a date when I should inform about the implementation of the task." (TM5)

The manager here points out that subordinates do not necessarily express their lack of understanding of the task to the manager, which might diminish managers' trust towards subordinates and therefore requires constant interaction on the part of the managers.

Oftentimes, subordinates also felt a need to consult their managers to verify a task, especially if the task was complicated and important, as explained by an employee:

> If it is an important task where I can make a mistake, I can ask him on my own initiative for control, ask his advice. He never refuses, he looks, verifies, advises, that's the way control is implemented. (Emp4)

This quotation shows the employee's awareness for how the informal interaction is a way for the manager to control and shows trust towards the manager. Hence, control complements trust, and it is implemented through informal interaction. As described by another employee, 'The manager should be aware of what's going on with the subordinate' (Emp9).

In nurturing trust managers emphasised the role of information sharing and openness, as shown in Table 3. For example, one manager found it important that 'subordinates hear the information from me first' (MM2). Communicating in this way, the manager also aimed to nurture trust towards him while exercising informal control in the form of implicitly securing access to information. Hence, nurturing trust is a two-way street, as the following quotation shows:

> I try to be open with my subordinates, trust them; then they also trust me and I get the information that I need. (MM2)

Here this manager, who works in production, emphasises how his openness in turn makes subordinates also more open to inform him about issues in the production site. This represents an instrumental view of communication, as the manager assumes that he will receive relevant information also in the future by getting his direct reports to trust him. By having access to information, this manager simultaneously has the possibility to exercise informal process control.

Similarly, several subordinates highlighted how information sharing was considered a sign of trust towards them, as described by a middle manager in a subordinate position:

> My manager tells me everything that I need to know. I think that he absolutely trusts me as I am in this kind of position… Accordingly, I also trust him, he is my manager; I should trust him, he assigns me tasks and provides information. (MM2)

Here the subordinate also sees his current position as a sign of trust towards him and his abilities. He also shows an instrumental view of communication: by trusting his manager he gets the information he needs. Other subordinates were also of the opinion that managers show trust when they discuss issues openly with their subordinates and ask for their opinion. As information is considered to influence the exercise of control in Russia, sharing information with subordinates is a clear sign that managers include subordinates in their trusted in-group and serves as a secure means for control.

Trust between the manager and subordinate was expected to grow over time through close observation and assessment of outcomes. This took place by having regular interactions in the form of informal meetings. Many managers explained that new subordinates in particular require considerable attention. Even top managers reported that when they started in their positions, they had daily face-to-face meetings with their manager (i.e. the managing director) and discussed their work or were given very detailed tasks, which signalled a lack of trust in terms of their skills. These regular meetings seemed to be a tool for the manager to support the inexperienced, new subordinate in acquiring adequate knowledge about the tasks. The following quotation from a top manager illustrates this view:

> Previously there were many detailed tasks. Once I received 39 tasks

in our meeting. It was quite a normal number. Now I have fewer such tasks, because I understand more about this business. Now I am assigned larger tasks. (TM1)

This quotation also suggests that the increased trust over time reduced the need for frequent strict control and formal communication, and freed managers to devote their attention to controlling only larger tasks and results. Thus, experienced and trusted subordinates were controlled primarily through verifying the output of their work. This also reveals the change from trust complementing control to substituting it, at least to some extent. Subordinates also reported how the increase in trust affects the form of control, as the following quotation illustrates:

> My manager trusts me and knows that I have been working for a long time. Control is not strict, I manage my time by myself. I resolve all the work issues. Control takes place at the end of the month, with tables, reports. He does not exert control on a daily basis. (Emp5)

The above quotation shows that when trusted in terms of their abilities and competences, subordinates were monitored less frequently and in a more formal way. In such situations the communication was implemented in a written form, leading trust to be a substitute for control, at least from the subordinate's viewpoint. However, earlier in the interview this subordinate described how she meets with her manager 'every, or every second, day', and if they don't meet, they discuss work issues on the phone several times a day. It seems that subordinates don't always recognise how managers, by having constant oral communication with them, simultaneously exercise control of their work.

As Table 3 illustrates, an important means of formal control in all Russian subsidiaries were weekly or bi-weekly staff meetings. The discussions in these meetings mainly concentrated on reviewing the results, instead of socialising. One middle manager described how she controls informally in daily interactions, 'and then once in two weeks (in our meetings) more strictly' (MM3).

Middle managers exercised formal control of subordinates also in the form of written communication. For example, in two of Genro's subsidiaries the company management had launched an electronic program called SKIP (sistema kontrolya ispolneniy porucheniy), which represented a tool for written communication between the manager and subordinate. This program was meant for personal delegation of tasks and for controlling the fulfilment of tasks assigned to subordinates. In this system the manager enters the tasks he wants the subordinate to implement with a schedule and checks implementation of the task through the program. The need for such a system is explained as follows by a local top manager:

> Interviewee: We put tasks in SKIP when they emerge… Unfortunately, nothing happens in Russia without control. Here, to control business and to manage business are in practice synonyms, if you don't control, you don't manage. People also expect control; if they don't see it, then they don't work quickly and effectively. It relaxes people, they require control
>
> Interviewer: Did you try alternative ways earlier?
>
> Interviewee: I have tried different ways, but without control there is low self-discipline in Russia. Less than 20% of the people are self-disciplined. In Finland it is probably the opposite. In Finland you need to control once, but in Russia you need to control at least three times. The lower the status, the more often control is needed (TM8).

This top manager reveals rather sceptical views about control in Russia and even draws parallels between controlling and managing: successful management of business is not possible without tight control in Russia. He explains this need for control by referring to the cultural characteristics of the Russian people, which differentiates them from

Finnish people, whom he knows after working for several years at Genro and before that in other foreign MNCs. For him, employees at all levels require control, although less at higher levels in the hierarchy. It is worth mentioning that this system was used only among the top management of the company. Even though top management is the most trusted employee group for this interviewee, they too require control. It therefore reveals the complementary nature of the trust-control link at all levels in the Russian case company.

To sum up, communication served as an important tool for the Russian managers to nurture trust on the one hand and exercise different types of control on the other. We identified various informal communicative activities that these managers used to achieve this dual goal. We also identified communicative activities that were used only to exercise control, and that were primarily formal in nature. In other words, we find that it is through informal communication that the complementarity between trust and control in the manager-subordinate relationships is achieved. This finding also illustrates the dialectical nature of informal communication between Russian managers and subordinates.

4.3. The role of communication in the trust-control link: the expatriate perspective

All 13 expatriates described the Russian way of controlling as formal in nature since it took place through various formal forms of communication such as weekly meetings, internal letters, as well as 'prikazy and ukazy' (orders and regulations). The following quotation illustrates how an expatriate, who had worked in the subsidiary only for a few months before the interview, experienced the Russian way of reporting:

> You have to report in written form about everything. In Finland we don't report so much like here. Here everyone reports all the time about something. (Exp4)

Since reporting is a necessary input for control, this seems to suggest that Finnish expatriates saw communication mainly as a means for control. An expatriate who is bi-cultural with several years of experience with Russian employees and fluent Russian skills commented:

> A Russian subordinate needs more control, say twice a week, you need to go through things more often than in Finland so that everyone understands what he should do. In Finland it goes a bit differently, people know what to do and if they don't know they find out. Here you need to talk with people, motivate, [explain] why it needs to be done like this and what will be the end result. (Exp5)

This expatriate approaches the question of control by comparing and contrasting the Russian and Finnish way of behaving. He shows sensitivity to Russian culture and understanding of the importance of communication not only as a form of control, but also as a way to show support to employees. Another Finnish expatriate who had also been working in Russia for over 20 years even used a proverb 'trust is good, control is better', to describe the role of control in Russia. He had introduced control in Finland as well:

> My work experience comes mainly from Russia. I am used to having to check whether subordinates have gone where they were told to go and done as agreed. In 2009 I went to work at a production site in Finland. A guy came over to me and asked, "why do you need to keep an eye on us? We agreed on this". He was a joker. I then mentioned a Russian saying, 'trust is good, but control is better', and consequently decreased in [control]. But I had many problems in Finland because subordinates felt that I supervised too much. Then I realised it and started to trust some people. (Exp9)

The interviewee makes clear the differences between Finnish and Russian culture in relation to control. In Russia he had become used to checking things constantly. When implementing the same kind of

behaviour in Finland, subordinates perceived this as lack of trust, because they were used to working autonomously with little control from their manager. Another expatriate, while practising the Finnish way of controlling only the output in Russia, realised that the task may have not been implemented at all:

> A Finnish manager must ensure that the task has been understood correctly. Many times when the task was left undone, the reason was not that the person bungled or was lazy, but that the person did not understand and did not dare show his so-called stupidity by asking what the task was really about. (Exp3)

This quotation highlights the need for communication and interaction that the Russian subordinates were used to and which Finns, who were used to more scarce communication, found unnecessary. Further, the interviewee here refers to the hierarchical culture in Russia that prohibits the subordinate from approaching the manager on his/her own initiative. Even though Finnish expatriates were aware of the personal face-to-face meetings Russian managers had with their employees, they saw them as a way for Russian managers to bolster their position. As described by one expatriate, 'A sign of a Russian manager is the queue behind the door'. (Exp2)

The formal department meetings were familiar to most of the expatriates. They saw the meetings as a place to exercise formal and strict control, where the 'information flow is only one-way' and 'with a tight agenda'. As described by one experienced expatriate:

> In weekly meetings it is discussed, which things should have been done, each project is gone through, a memorandum is written and it goes to each participant of the meeting. It is public humiliation; an old Russian way of behaving. (Exp2)

Unlike in many other countries, meetings in Russia are often not necessarily organised for information sharing and socialising, but for exercising strict control.

To conclude, Finnish expatriates saw communication between the Russian managers and subordinates as a way of exercising control. It seemed that they were not aware of the support that was provided through constant informal interaction and communication in order to nurture trust between managers and subordinates. Similarly, the expatriates did not acknowledge the communication activities of Russian employees as expressions of a need for support and nurturing of trust. Instead they perceived Russian communication as a way to control the delegation of tasks. Hence, the Finnish expatriates were of the opinion that control mainly substituted for trust and failed to appreciate the dialectical nature of communication between the Russian managers and their subordinates.

5. Discussion

This study examines the role of communication in the relationship between trust and control in an under-researched context, Russia. We visualize our main findings in Fig. 1, which shows the differential perceptions of the trust-control link at Genro in Russia.

To that end, we provide three contributions to extant research in international business regarding the trust-control link and research on intercultural communication. First, we identify the crucial role of communication in uncovering the relationship between trust and control, as Fig. 1 illustrates. Our analysis reveals how Russian managers used communication in many nuanced ways for nurturing trust and exercising various types of control in interactions with their subordinates. Through informal communicative activities such as socializing, participation, and information sharing – and their different functions – the dialectics of trust and control can co-exist and complement each other, as shown in Fig. 1. In identifying how a range of informal communication activities were used for both nurturing trust and exercising control our findings respond to the calls for examining various combinations of trust-nurturing and task-control activities
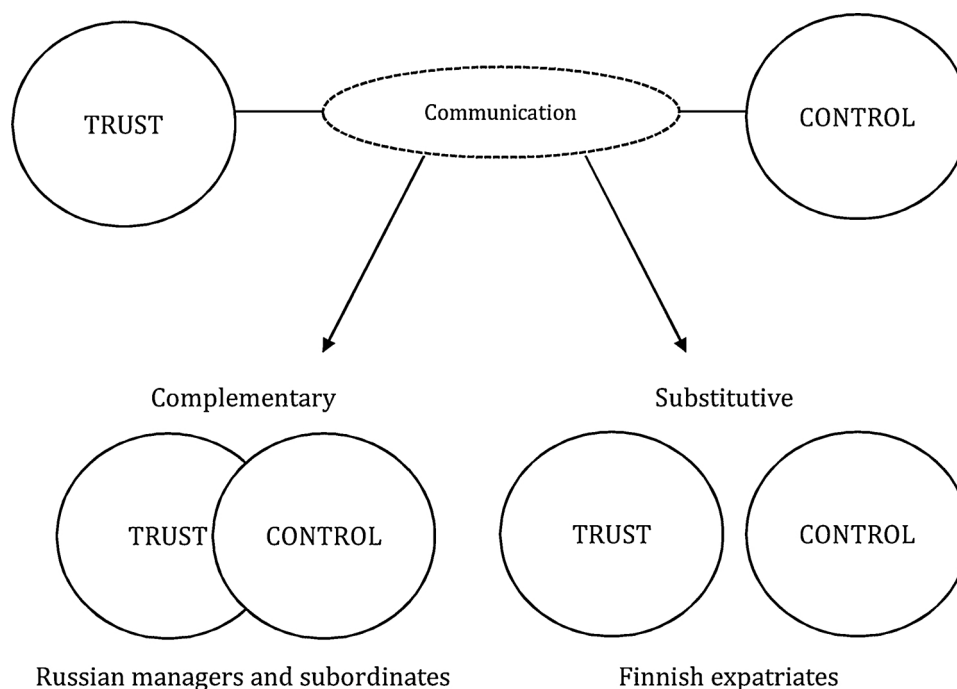
Fig. 1. Differential perceptions of the trust-control link at Genro in Russia.

(Long & Sitkin, 2018; Weibel et al., 2016).

Further, we exemplify how the specific types of controls were applied by Russian managers and the crucial role of communication activities in their implementation, which enhanced trust. Thus, our study not only lends support to previous empirical research stating that control and trust complement each other (Sitkin & George, 2005; Tsui-Auch & Möllering, 2010), but also provides a comprehensive view on how they do so. Specifically, in previous research the trust-control relationship has often been viewed differently because scholars tend to confound *what* type of controls managers apply and *how* they apply them in order to nurture trust (Long & Sitkin, 2018). We show that a communicative lens helps explain how various types of control, informal and process control, can be applied through different communicative activities to nurture trust.

In the communication literature, the co-existence of opposing forces has been discussed in the relational dialectics theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). This theory highlights the dynamic rather than stable nature of communication by emphasising contradictions in messages. It focuses on tensions – push and pull toward different needs – which have seemingly contradictory meanings (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2014). Contradiction, a unity of opposites, is thus a central analytic concept in relational dialectics. In our study, socializing, supporting and participation represented such communicative activities through which Russian managers achieved the dual goal of both trust and control. The relational dialectics theory helps us understand how meaning is constructed through the dual nature of communication. This theory views the process of communication as culturally specific: dialectics that circulate in one culture may not be recognised in another (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Existing research in interpersonal communication employing a dialectical perspective has identified three common contradictions: dialectics of integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Whereas the dialectics of control and support was identified in parent-child relationships (Minuchin, 1974), we in turn introduce the dialectics of control and trust to the organizational setting.

Second, we contribute to international business research by examining the trust-control link in manager-subordinate relationships through an intercultural communication perspective, from the viewpoints of Russian managers and subordinates as well as Finnish expatriates (see Fig. 1). As Table 3 shows, the communication between Russian managers and subordinates serving both control and trust functions is primarily informal in nature, which can be difficult for expatriates to grasp and interpret. One way to explain these divergent views between Russian interviewees and Finnish expatriates is by using Hall's (1976) classic theory of high and low context cultures. It suggests that the meaning of a message lies in how much it is contextually embedded. In low-context cultures, such as Finland, the context surrounding the message is less important than the message itself. In high-context cultures, such as Russia, the context in which the message is expressed and how it is expressed is often as important as the message itself. In our study, Finnish expatriates missed the subtleties of Russian communication patterns that were conveyed in dialectical messages.

More recent research has shown that the meaning of communicative activities is not only shaped by cultural context, but also by how individual actors adapt communicative content (Cole, 2015). For example, high-context communicators may shift from implicit to more explicit messaging when the original message fails to impart meaning for the recipient of this message. Such adaptation of communicative content, however, requires that the communicator is aware of the recipients' cultural differences. In our study, many of the Finnish expatriates, as well as the case company Genro itself, had been in Russia for an extended period of time. It is therefore possible that the Finnish expatriates were almost viewed as local Russians, which may explain why the Russian subordinates did not adapt the communicative content of the message. From a dialectical perspective, the interplay between the content and context of a message in communication (Cole, 2015) could be seen as complementary, thus refining Hall's work. Hence, the dialectical approach sheds light on intercultural communication by emphasising the fluidity and dynamism of both context (Martin & Nakayama, 2015) and content, and by accepting the complementarity of seeming opposites (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

Third, our study contributes to the trust-control link in a particular cultural context, thereby shedding light on some of the relevant contextual conditions in which the trust-control link is embedded that have received little research attention thus far (Long & Sitkin, 2018). In Russia there is a strong distrust towards individuals, groups, and

organisations that are outside personal relationships. Trusting relationships exist within in-groups of family members, friends, and colleagues, whereas out-groups are typically not trusted (McCarthy & Puffer, 2008). The importance that the local interviewees attached to trust in our study challenges previous research on Russian management. This body of work suggests that there is considerable mistrust between managers and subordinates (Dixon et al., 2014; May et al., 1998). A recent study by Svishchev (2013) also shows that the level of trust remains low between managers and their subordinates in the modern Russian society, where both managers and subordinates view trust as a helpful but not a vital part of the work process in organization. Our findings instead reveal that trust is the foundation for exercising control in the Russian manager-employee relationship and it is perceived as being imperative for these relationships to exist.

The need of Russian managers to constantly control the performance of employees can be explained by the high degree of economic and political uncertainty and frequent changes in all spheres of the economy. This puts considerable pressure on managers to monitor their subordinates and to be able to quickly react to external forces. The high need for control is also spurred by the personal financial pressure that managers face to ensure their own performance in terms of personal rewards. The rationale of constant control is further rooted in the historical heritage, values and attitudes heavily imposed by the Soviet regime. Despite the fact that the transition has been going on for more than two decades, Russian business culture still carries elements inherited from the Soviet times (Jormanainen, 2010). During this era, managers had direct authority and control over everyone below them. Recent studies still find that Russians have a need for powerful, charismatic leaders (McCarthy, Mary, Puffer, Ledgerwood, & Steward, 2008; Puffer & McCarthy, 2011), and therefore they take the control of their manager for granted.

More broadly, the coexistence of trust and control reflects dualism of the Russian national character as described by Russian philosophers (Kliuchevskij, 1990; Lossky, 1990). These philosophers argued that dualism in Russia is fueled by the Orthodox religion, harsh climate, vast geography and the borderline position between the great civilizations of East and West. Not surprisingly, the relational dialectics theory draws on the thinking of the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), who argued that all meaning-making can be understood as a dialogue – the interpenetration of different, opposing perspectives.

6. Conclusion

In this study we adopt a communicative perspective to examine how trust and control relate to and co-exist with each other, thereby illuminating a link that has puzzled researchers for decades. As today's organizations operate in a global and multicultural environment, striking a balance between trust and control has become increasingly difficult. We draw on a particular cultural setting to show important differences in how Russian managers and subordinates, on the one hand, and Finnish expatriates, on the other, perceive and enact the relationship between trust and control through communicative activities. By doing so, we emphasize the relevant effect of contextual factors on the trust-control link and the role of communication in revealing this link.

6.1. Limitations and future research

We acknowledge the following limitations of our study, which constitute fruitful avenues for future research. The interviews were conducted with top managers, middle managers and white-collar workers, but not with blue-collar workers, which would have provided a more robust and balanced view of the perceptions of trust and control. At Genro, the majority of the blue-collar workers were outsourced migrant workers, not local Russians. In addition, we did not study specific pairs of manager-subordinate relationships to uncover the trust-

control link. Further, the research data in our study consisted mainly of interviews, whereas observational data would have provided additional evidence of actual manifestations of communication for trust and control.

We also do not claim to have represented a culturally unique Russian view of trust and control in our study because local employees working for MNCs for many years may have been "contaminated" by the organization culture of the company they work for (Caprar, 2011, p. 609). In this regard, the Russian managers and subordinates participating in our study can be considered "foreign locals" (Caprar, 2011, p. 621). However, we note that the MNC is a particularly useful research context, because the high degree of internal diversity renders employees more aware of their cultural make-up than if they were working for a domestic organization (see also Roth & Kostova, 2003). In Adler's (1983) terms, we undertook a synergistic study of MNC subsidiaries, which assisted us in uncovering some more universal and other more culturally specific patterns of interaction in manager-subordinate relationships.

Further, whereas our study focuses on a single pair of opposing concepts, trust and control, future studies could identify other dialectics, such as stability and change in intercultural communication. Even though we are closer and more interconnected than ever in a globalised world, there are also rising tensions among nations (Ladegaard & Jenks, 2015) that call for new ways of looking at culture as complex and dynamic rather than stable and homogenous (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Finally, in line with the interpretive case study tradition, our aim was to provide a rich understanding of the Finnish-Russian business context rather than to statistically generalize to a broader population of countries. We argue that a dialectical approach provides a useful lens to appreciate the complexity of culture and its dynamic relationship with communication in specific institutional and cultural contexts. In addition to relational dialectics theory, scholars of international business could use other communication theories to advance our understanding of individual, group and organizational outcomes to improve global business practices.

6.2. Managerial implications

Our study provides several managerial implications for foreign MNCs entering the Russian market. It emphasizes the crucial role of communication in interpersonal relationships. It highlights that locals and foreign expatriates perceive various forms of communication in different ways. What might seem to Finnish expatriates as micro-management and control is for local managers and subordinates much needed and expected interaction, advice and support. Therefore, we suggest that MNCs offer contextualized communication training for their international staff.

Our findings show that intercultural communication competence goes beyond mere foreign language skills, and highlight the importance of enhancing cultural skills of expatriates (Barner-Rasmussen, Ehrnrooth, Koveshnikov, & Mäkelä, 2014) and their abilities to comprehensively grasp salient features of the local context. To start with, expatriates and HQ managers working in international contexts could expand their understanding of cultural dynamics by developing in-depth knowledge of the beliefs, values and behavioural expectations of other cultures. Understanding why different concepts such as trust and control are perceived differently across various contexts will provide foreign managers with tools to adapt their own behaviour accordingly. In addition, managers could increase their understanding of dualisms and dialectics that are relatively more prevalent in certain cultural contexts, reducing the risk of possible misunderstandings in their interactions. Moreover, managers could improve their knowledge of various communication protocols that are characteristics of certain cultures, such as non-verbal communication techniques (Nardon, Steers, & Sanchez-Runde, 2011), or the role of informal and formal communication in different contexts. More broadly, foreign MNCs may

explicitly draw on the expertise of bicultural, rather than bilingual individuals, especially for positions with frequent intercultural communication. Biculturals have been shown to develop a heightened level of cognitive complexity (Benet-Martínez, Lee, & Leu, 2006; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009), which provides individuals with greater awareness in intercultural communication.

Much of the cross-cultural management literature assumes that trust is essential for effective manager-subordinate relationships. However, our findings suggest that control in Russia may be a necessary precondition for nurturing trust. In other words, if some Russian subordinates perceive control exercised by their managers as care and interest in subordinates' work, control actually becomes a source of nurturing trust with these employees. These different interpretations of communication, trust and control point to the many challenges that foreign MNCs may experience when operating in Russia.

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