

Order and Openness in Virtual Teamwork

At NIC2014 we discussed a chat-session between two engineers situated in Sweden and India. At the end of this session, the Indian interlocutor was dismissed from the team due to a supposed lack of communicative skill. *In the present talk* we will discuss the same practice by examining another chat-session in which the interlocutors openly agreed with each other. And, with both examples in consideration, we will argue that the interlocutors took many kinds of interactional and cultural positions to get things done. That is, sometimes they reached consensus, but just as often they emphasised their own, or others', tasks and obligations. Likewise, at times they followed cultural stereotypes (e.g. collective Asians, individualistic Westerners), other times they displayed non-stereotypical behaviour. Of course, a presence of 'complexity' in international teamwork is not surprising for the NIC audience. However, what interests us is that the chatting, with all its internal dynamics, was only one means of collaboration, others were: telephone, video, visits to Sweden and India, screenshots and other visualisation tools. Therefore, we think that the most important communicative competence needed was not advanced chatting skills; and the team was not in pressing need of a better match of personalities or cultural backgrounds. What they had to handle each day was the paradoxical nature of virtual collaborations. As we will show, the participating engineers expected an ordered division of labour, and at the same time they were open to change – and different participants expected order and openness at different times (before, during, after a certain interaction) or about different aspects of work (scheduling, instructions, technology, etc.).

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