V. Model and Propositions

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented results of the empirical analysis of 50 interviews conducted in five Organisations of the United Nations Organisation. In the course of constant comparison and a deep analysis of interview data, pivotal patterns which helped to answer the two research questions of this study emerged. These patterns were grouped into categories which depict the factors of influence on the work environment. The research questions will again be presented and each of the categories that have been developed will be discussed in detail. Furthermore, a conceptual model of group work in an intergovernmental organisation will be presented as well as propositions which have been deduced from the empirical findings.

Research question 1: What kind of team/group work exists in the United Nations?
Research question 2: What are the factors of influence?

The answers to the two research questions unfolded themselves in a process. The vantage point being an assessment of what kind of team/group work is practised in the United Nations Organisations under investigation. Data analysis revealed a typology of group work that is grounded in the interview data and directly related to the developed categories. The typology comprises:

- task forces described as a temporary group that are given a specific problem to solve,
- project groups which carry out specific projects within a given time frame, and,
- collaborating individuals which predominately work on individual tasks in collaboration with co-workers.

Moreover, the analysis in the course of answering research question 1 revealed a complex set of factors which influence the work environment. These factors were reduced to three main categories as shown in figure 6 and explained throughout chapter IV. All of the categories have been identified as being major and intertwined influences on group work and collaboration. The three main categories are:

- the organisational context (organisational structure and culture),
- the relationship between managers and employees as well as the relationship between employees and co-workers, and
• the individual and his/her personal background, personality and motivation.

Lastly, boundary spanning activities have been identified as a moderator. The empirical analysis furthermore showed that there are mutual causal relationships between the factors of influence and that these factors are highly interdependent. An integrative view of all factors of influence leads to a conceptual model of group work in five Organisations of the United Nations Organisation which are illustrated in figure 11.

5.2. Model
The model shows at the very top the formal structure of the United Nations System as an overarching element which directly influences group work. The circle in the middle of the model represents the group which best can be described by the relationships between employees and managers and the relationships between employees and co-workers. The position of the management on top of the individual aims at showing the closeness of management to the organisation as well as the position of power of management. Ultimately, the relationships between individual employees are closely linked to the individual characteristics of employees comprising their personal backgrounds, personality and job motivation. Whilst the individual can be seen as a major component of group work, the boundary activities illustrated by arrows represent the moderator of group work. Lastly, all of the described properties of group work constitute the culture of the organisation.

The properties of the model have been described in detail throughout the empirical analysis in chapter IV. The next part of this chapter aims at discussing the propositions which can be deduced from the underlying empirical findings of the conceptual model.
Figure 11: A conceptual model of group work in five UN Organisations

Source: data analysis
5.3. Propositions
The following propositions are deduced from and grounded in the data and address the factors of influence on group work and the barriers for team work in the context of an intergovernmental organisation, respectively five Organisations of the United Nations Organisation. The propositions will be developed according to the categories of influence which have been identified throughout the data analysis.

5.3.1. Organisation
Data analysis showed that the typology for group work is determined by the structure of the organisations under investigation and their culture. In line with existing research (e.g. Rousseau & Fried, 2001) this research has shown that the description of the context of a particular organisation is vital to understand underlying processes and phenomena.

Hence, in the following propositions with regards to the organisational structure and culture as a factor of influence comprising the context of the organisation will be discussed.

The strong hierarchy and specialisation of tasks implies that the formal structure of the United Nations Organisations under investigation is not yet compatible with a team structure. The concept of hierarchy and the concept of team work are found to be mutually exclusive in this specific context. However, there is evidence grounded in the data that group work as per definition is incorporated in the structure and actually performed. Nonetheless, the structure of the organisation presumably is stronger than the structure of the group. This shows that it is in the hands of the organisation to establish structures that allow for group work. As a consequence, it can be assumed that the same it true for team work provided that the strong hierarchy will be flattened.

The propositions aim at underscoring that hierarchy and bureaucracy, which are both major components of the organisational structure of the five organisations, and which were found to challenge the introduction of teams, should not be regarded as a barrier. It is rather suggested to use the advantages of these major components as a tool which has the potential to support the introduction of team structures.

**Proposition 1:** The hierarchy of the United Nations System challenges the introduction of teams and overarches the work of groups and individuals.

Proposition 1a: Hierarchy should be associated with responsibility rather than with restriction.
Proposition 1b: Hierarchy should be seen a factor of stability for individuals rather than an element of power.

An intensive bureaucracy is explained to be necessary to assure accountability in a political, intergovernmental organisation whose individual organisations are financed by governmental money and/or membership fees. Moreover, the rules and regulations offer stability and predictability. However, the plethora of rules and regulations was reported to be a factor which limits group work, the reason being that individuals may only act if authority is granted. The latter ultimately involves numerous administrative tasks which are described to take up a major part of individuals' work responsibilities and in turn keep individuals from working collectively. On the other hand, interviewees reported that bureaucracy is the only stable factor in a frequently changing environment which demands lots of flexibility from the individual. Moreover, the rules and regulations help to neutralise diversity in the sense that they can be learned and understood by everyone and regulate in such a detail that a misinterpretation becomes less likely. If bureaucracy is seen as a factor which offers consistency and helps to deal with diversity it may also be regarded as a means to facilitate group and team work by reducing complexity in a multicultural context.

**Proposition 2**: The bureaucracy of the United Nations System overarches group and individual work.

**Proposition 2a**: Bureaucracy assures accountability.

**Proposition 2b**: Bureaucracy is associated with responsibility

**Proposition 2c**: Bureaucracy offers consistency in a frequently changing environment.

**Proposition 2d**: Bureaucracy is a factor that neutralises diversity.

It is also suggested that the Human Resource Management should be adapted for a team and group based structure.

The Human Resource Management of the United Nations Organisations studied is depicted by three salient factors: firstly, there exists a variety of different contracts for staff that are categorised in the same band and fulfil similar tasks. This triggers inequality and resentment between individuals. A streamlining of these contracts would not only facilitate bureaucracy but also reduce inequalities. Secondly, another distinctive aspect of the Human Resource system is the performance appraisal system which is solely based on individual evaluation and not on group evaluation. A change towards a group based performance evalua-
tion would be highly recommended to improve group spirit and effort. Thirdly, job rotation involves a regular change of positions and locations of individuals. Rotation negatively influences the identification of individuals with a group. The rotation principle may not be changed. However, rotating staff should make sure to build up on existing group structures and norms rather than to change them and reduce the identification of individuals as a group.

Hence, the following three propositions can be deduced from the findings:

**Proposition 3:** In a hierarchical context, the Human Resource Management needs to be adapted for team and group work.

Proposition 3a: A streamline of contracts among staff with same functions and responsibilities reduces inequalities.

Proposition 3b: A performance appraisal system which is based on collective performance evaluation encourages group and team efforts.

Proposition 3c: The rotation process needs to respect group and team structures to keep the identification of individuals as a group and team.

Another aspect of HRM, the personnel development system, has been described as being very competitive with regards to job promotions. The latter ones are dependent on available plan positions which themselves are subject to geographical filling. Furthermore, a promotion within the hierarchy depends on seniority and not merit. It is strongly suggested that an adapted personnel system should also consider skills which enhance and support group and team work as a factor for promotion.

To overcome hierarchic and bureaucratic barriers, the organisation and individuals break down boundaries and span new ones. On an organisational level breaking down of boundaries is being done by raising the awareness of the importance of group and team work and by holding respective training. Individual boundary activities create networks beyond hierarchical structures as well as parallel systems to the official system. Boundary activities should be encouraged as they increase communication and effectiveness. Boundary spanning activities may be seen as new structures for cooperation between individuals which form the ground for team and group structures.

**Proposition 4:** Boundary breaking and boundary spanning activities positively enhance work on an organisational and on an individual level.
Proposition 4a: Boundary breaking on an organisational level is a system improving strategy.

Proposition 4b: Organisational boundary spanning creates an awareness of the importance of team and group work and sets the formal steps which enable group and team work

Proposition 4c: Boundary breaking on an individual level is a supportive practice to deal with the system.

Proposition 4d: Individual boundary spanning creates a parallel system to the formal structure which is based on cooperation and communication.

5.3.2. Employee - Management Relationship

The relationship between management and employees has been identified as being crucial for group work. Management can be seen as the major link between employees and the organisation as the manager is the most immediate and tangible representation of the organisation in the eyes of the individual employee. The quality of the exchange relationship between an employee and his/her manager is pivotal in determining the employees fate within the organisation (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997).

To improve the quality of the relationship between managers and individuals, it is important to place skilled managers in these crucial positions. Therefore, it is vital to appoint managers, who ideally possess of political, economical and social knowledge and skills. The ‘right’ managers are task- and relationship orientated and in a position to induce changes on an organisational as well as on an individual level. Subsequently, they are also in a position of power to set the grounds for team work. Moreover, social skills will help to establish team and group awareness. For instance, the quality of management with regards to trust and motivation directly influences the propensity of individual employees to engage in group and team work. A symptom of low trust can be seen in the norms of communications that group members establish to protect themselves. An example of this behaviour is reflected in the use of emails: the sender copies a wide range of recipients on the message to make sure that all people up and down of the hierarchy are aware of the content. Moreover, the sender also passes on responsibility by acting this way.

Proposition 5: The role of management is a crucial link between the organisation and individuals.
Proposition 5a: Management is in a position of power to raise team and group awareness on an organisational level as well as amongst subordinates.

Proposition 5b: Successful teams and groups need task- and relationship orientated management.

Proposition 5c: Intergovernmental organisations require managers who possess skills to integrate political, economical and social requirements.

5.3.3. Employee - Co-worker Relationship

The employee-co-worker relationship is characterised by a variety of factors which influence the individual's behaviour with regards to group and team work. Diversity is the most salient factor of influence. Ely & Thomas (2001) suggest that diversity is more likely to yield positive outcomes when the organisational context views diversity as an opportunity for learning and integration. This is true for the United Nations Organisations under investigation where diversity manifests one of the major fundamentals. Diversity is seen as source of knowledge. Nonetheless, diversity as a major contextual aspect of group and team work triggers several implications. The most salient ones will be discussed in the following.

Overall, the structure of the United Nations Organisations creates an environment in which national diversity is not salient. This means that the work forces' ethical diversity is so high that a dominance of one nationality in daily work life is not possible. This phenomenon was reported by interviewees working in the locations in Geneva, Vienna and New York. However, people who work in the field, which means that they work in foreign countries outside the headquarters, reported that national diversity became salient.

One decisive barrier for group and team work which results from diversity is the influence of the use of a second language (which predominately is English) as a major means of communication. The proficiency of English determines the degree of mutual understanding among individuals. It is a source of misunderstandings, misinterpretations and in the worst case results in conflict. Hence, it is suggested to reinforce language trainings to reduce this source of misunderstanding. At the same time, it lies in the hands of management to create an environment which knows how to deal with the language barrier and how to overcome it.

Despite the fact that diversity is regarded as a source of enrichment, it is at the same time a trigger for the creation of faultlines. On one hand it is suggested to
take advantage of the formation of subgroups as they may also be seen as knowledge creating source. On the other hand, flattened team and group structures might reduce the propensity to form subgroups and encourage acting as one entity.

**Proposition 6:** Diversity in its various facets is the major influence on the relationship between individuals.

Proposition 6a: The culture of intergovernmental organisations creates an environment in which diversity is not salient.

Proposition 6b: National and cultural diversity become especially salient when working outside of the headquarters.

Proposition 6c: Communication in a second language is a major reason for misunderstandings between individual group members.

Proposition 6d: Faultlines are a source of knowledge.

Proposition 6f: Flattened team structures reduce the formation of subgroups.

**5.3.4. Individual**

To understand an organisation it is vital to examine the individuals in the group and their interaction. Data analysis showed that (apart from the organisational structure) interviewees ascribe the success of group and team work to the individual.

In the course of data analysis it was revealed that the organisation tries to select individuals who share common characteristics with regards to their educational background and their international experience. Hence, staff of the United Nations Organisations can be characterised as being experienced in international and multicultural work and as being used to diversity at the work place.

The individual’s motivation has been found to be a huge factor of influence on work. The feeling of contributing to something that has a positive impact on the whole society motivates individuals. This motivation is of relevance for cooperation and group work. Analysis suggests that most people who have lost this feeling over the years are more reluctant to engage in group work.

Lastly, the personality of each individual in the group affects group behaviour and performance. The unique characteristics of individuals determine whether or not two or more individuals are able to constructively work together or not. A fit of individuals was reported to be highly important. Both motivation and person-
ality are factors which are not visible but become salient throughout the process of collective work.

**Proposition 7:** The individual and his/her personal background, personality and motivation are factors of influence on group and team work.

Proposition 7a: Internationally experienced staff are more proficient in dealing with diversity.

Proposition 7b: The personal characteristics of individuals have a stronger influence on group and team work than nationality.

Proposition 7c: In an intergovernmental organisation, group and team work as a source of individual motivation increases performance.