Virtual International Leadership Within Organizations Overcoming Cultural, Language, and Physical Barriers

Jaye Mendros Goulet
University of Southern Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/etd

Part of the Leadership Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/etd/368

This Open Access Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.
VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS
OVERCOMING CULTURAL, LANGUAGE, AND PHYSICAL BARRIERS
A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE
BY
Jaye Mendros Goulet
Under the Supervision of Professor Elizabeth Goryunova, Ph.D.
2019
We hereby recommend that the thesis of Jaye Mendros Goulet entitled *Virtual International Leadership Within Organizations: Overcoming Cultural, Language, and Physical Barriers* be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Leadership Studies.

_______________________________________ Advisor
Elizabeth Goryunova, Ph.D.

_______________________________________ Second Reader
Julianna Acheson, Ph.D.

Accepted

_______________________________________
Daniel Jenkins, Ph.D.

Director, Leadership Studies Program
ABSTRACT

Advances in technology are allowing members of a team to collaborate while being geographically and spatially apart. These new teams, known as virtual teams, have benefits for both the organizations to which they belong and to the individual members. Organizations are able to utilize highly-skilled experts without the associated relocation costs. Team members are able to contribute to projects in their field of expertise without having to leave their homeland. These teams require a leader whose interactions build trust and loyalty without the benefit of face-to-face contact with other team members. Although virtual teams are rapidly growing, research is lacking in how these team can communicate effectively to build interpersonal relationships which will lead to trust within the team and loyalty to the organization. As with face-to-face teams, the leader’s style will affect the team’s response to loyalty and trust. This phenomenological, qualitative study explored the effect that Authentic Leadership had on a virtual team and participation by virtual team members. Remote interviews were conducted, where the participants were asked to reflect up whether certain styles of leadership and communication, as well as expressions of empathy, either by a leader to the team members or between team members, significantly impacted their performance and feeling of belonging. Results of the interview revealed that the attitude and style of the leader appeared to have the biggest impact on team dynamics. When the leader is perceived as being open, honest, positive, and approachable, the whole team is closer.

Keywords: Virtual team, virtual communication, virtual leadership, virtual team building
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to first of all thank my parents, Dr. John and Florentia Mendros, and my godmother, Dr. Mary Lekas, for instilling in me the desire to never stop learning. My godmother’s words, “Education is a golden bracelet that no one can ever steal from you,” continuously resounded in my mind, as I progressed through the Master’s Program. Equally valuable was the inspiration and encouragement that I received from my sons, Raymond, John, and Jason. They were always there to help with technological problems and offer words of encouragement, “If you expect me to do it, you can do it, Mom.”

I would also like to thank, Joan Macri, who helped and encouraged me to enter into the Master’s Program. As well as Dr. Daniel Jenkins and Dr. Elizabeth Goryunova, if it had not been for their empathy and encouragement through the obstacles that life presented during this time, I would not have been able to complete my program.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my second reader, Dr. Julianna Acheson, for her time, advise, and suggestions. As well as to my classmates who shared their experiences and input during the past two semesters. And last, but certainly not least, my loving husband who has lost his wife yet continued being my editor and proof-reader throughout my graduate studies.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Review of Literature</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Studies</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of Virtual Teams</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of Virtual Teams</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1. Advantages &amp; Disadvantages</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Methodology</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Results</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2. Work Life Balance</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3. Preferred Communication</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4. Meeting Preferences</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5. Best Leadership Qualities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6. Worst Leadership Qualities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Discussion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus for future research</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 6: Conclusion</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Problem

With advances in technology and telecommunications, a new type of workforce has been created, one which is not constrained by geography. Although employees may be located in different geographic locations and come from different cultural and social backgrounds, all work on the same team. Many of these virtual team members are “well-educated young adults, also referred to as knowledge workers, who often choose to stay in their home country while working for major corporations headquartered abroad” (Walumbwa, Christensen, & Hailey, 2011, p. 110). The ability to live in one place, while working remotely brings new challenges for leaders, teams, and organizations.

Virtual teams are defined as groups of geographically and/or organizationally dispersed coworkers that are assembled using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish an organizational task” (Townsend, 1998, p.17). Advances in technology, particularly the internet, have made communication within virtual teams instantaneous. These virtual teams have created strains on interpersonal relationships which can arise when multinational companies attempt “to apply local values to a global workspace” (Savu, Popa, & Cotet, 2017, p. 737). The researcher believes that overcoming language, cultural, and geographic barriers will be a challenge for an organization, as it attempts to remain competitive, as well as for creating a feeling of inclusion and building trust within the team.

It has been suggested that diversity fosters innovation and with virtual global teams, organizations are able to harness ideas that were not imaginable a few decades ago (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Puccios, Murdock, & Mance, 2007). Virtual teams may allow
for easier access to knowledgeable team members, who would be able to bring a new perspective to the team. Krumm, Kanthak, Hartman, and Hertel (2016) stated that research on virtual teams suggests that there are challenges to virtual teams and the individual team members. Arguably, individuals who possess skills in technology, communication, and self-management appear to be better suited to the virtual team.

Krumm, Kanthak, Hartmann, and Hertel (2016) argued “identifying KSAOs (knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics) that are needed for effective performance in virtual teamwork is of core interest for HR professionals around the globe when selecting and developing members of such teams” (pp. 123-124). In order to build a trusting relationship among team members, leaders of virtual teams may need to express acknowledgement and respect of individual team members’ uniqueness and differences in the many cultures and languages within the team. In an attempt to understand the mechanics of virtual team collaboration and to prepare students for the new virtual workforce, Zaugg, Davies, Parkinson, and Magleby (2015) studied engineering students. Their focus, “how the technology-enabled global interactions affect the critical role of cultural influences on collaborative exchanges” (p. 88), applies to global virtual work teams. This acceptance of differences may help to foster collaboration amongst the team members.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the interactions of team members working virtually. For the proposed study, virtual team members may be located in various geographic locations, and may be of different cultural and social backgrounds, although all work on the same team.
These interactions are generally defined as virtual, since team members are mainly using electronic communication for their interactions (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). By gaining an understanding of how team members interact through electronic communication and what factors influence these interactions, the author aspired to identify qualities which make virtual teams become efficient in producing the desired results of the organization.

**Research Questions**

- How does geographical separation impact the team? Would varying times and days for meetings help to increase participation and provide a feeling of inclusion or exclusion for team members? When meetings are held at different times, team members may feel that consideration is given to their location. According to Zaccaro and Bader (2003), since each member of the team contributes differently, full participation would contribute to the efficiency of the team.

  Additionally, active and accurate participation requires accurate comprehension of the primary language the team uses in communication. It is interesting to note how differences in educational requirements in different countries contribute to the understanding of tasks. Would possible differences in interpretation be due to educational differences or be caused by language barriers?

- How does the leader’s style of leadership affect the team in bonding and resolving conflict? The leader’s ability to empathize and assist team members in their areas of deficiency may help in creating feelings of trust among team members. Also, a leader, who is willing to acknowledge his lack of knowledge may make her more approachable.
Conclusion

The researcher sought to provide insight to virtual team leaders, as well as virtual team members. Through respect and acceptance of differences, team members may have formed a feeling of inclusion and worked in a manner which allowed for open exchange of information and effective management of time and resources. Interpersonal relationships between team members may have formed through electronic communication, as individual team members increasingly interacted with each other and become more comfortable with technology. With respect and acceptance of each other’s differences, any language barriers would be resolved through communication and an increased comfort level within the team members to ask for clarification. Finally, due to more diversity within the virtual team, there may have been a greater likelihood for new processes to emerge producing more effective and efficient results.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

A new and emerging work force has become apparent in the past decade which allows for knowledge workers to be spatially separate and utilize telecommunication to provide cohesion and trust to the team. These new teams are referred to as virtual teams (Walumbwa, Christensen, & Hailey, 2011). Most researchers agree that a virtual team consists of at least one member who is not physically present with the other members. Virtual members are separated by either time, geographic location, or both and are required to use technological or electronic means of communication (Huysman, Steinfield, Jan, David, Veld, Poot, & Mulder, 2003; Malhotra, Majchrzak, & Rosen, 2007; Krumm, Kanthak, Hartmann, & Hertel, 2016; Purvanova, 2014).
Virtual teams offer unique benefits to both the organization and to team members. These benefits include cost savings and increased flexibility to both the organizations and workers. Organizations are able to recruit highly qualified workers, while allowing them the ability to remain in their homeland, thus, eliminating relocation costs (Walumbwa, Christensen, & Hailey, 2011). On the other hand, these benefits come with unique challenges: slower communication within the team, isolation of members, motivational obstacles for leaders, and difficulty building trust amongst members.

Although the virtual work force is rapidly growing, research on virtual teams has been slow and inconsistent. Leadership styles, communication, team bonding, and trust are areas that exist in traditional face-to-face teams, yet their approach needs to be adapted in virtual teams (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). Research comparing the two types of teams has also been inconsistent, perhaps due to researchers attempting to simulate conditions that are not necessarily representative of actual virtual work teams (Purvanova, 2014). Current theories, such as “technology-deterministic or cues-filtered-out” (Purvanova, 2014, p. 4) are based on those formulated for face-to-face teams and do not take into consideration the new, more technologically oriented workers and students.

**Definitions.**

*Virtual teams:* “groups of geographically and/or organizationally dispersed coworkers that are assembled using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish an organizational task” (Townsend, 1998, p.17). For the purpose of the proposed study, at least one member of the team will not be in face-to-face contact with the team and use telecommunication for information and communicating with the team.
Virtual team leader: an individual responsible for the cohesion, motivation, and performance of the team and its members, who does not share the same time and/or space as subordinates.

Telecommunication: Any communications conducted via electronic or technological means. These include synchronous and asynchronous communications, such as videoconferencing, chat rooms, instant messages, emails, and new methods of telecommunication as they become available.

Review of Studies.

Advances in technology and communication have created an environment which allows for organizations to recruit members from all parts of the world to work together on teams for a common goal. Purvanova (2014) argued there has been an increase of almost 50% in the use of technologies in the past decade for communication in the work force. The advances in technological communication have allowed for their expansion. Electronic communication is no longer just used within the confines of one building but has expanded to work space no longer being constrained to one physical location.

Benefits of Virtual Teams.

Virtual teams provide benefits to both organizations and team members. Organizations are able to access “experts from all over the world [who] may mutually work on the same project without physically being at the same location” (Krumm, Kanthak, Hartmann, & Hertel, 2016, p.124). This benefit to acquiring highly-skilled and knowledgeable members for teams comes without the costs associated with travel expenses. Thus, saving both team members and the organization valuable resources.
Besides the cost savings are the time savings in which information can be shared. “Organizations can react more quickly to changing business demands and adjust virtual teams accordingly” (p.124). Huysman et al (2003) argued “flexibility, adaptiveness, and speed in dynamic global situations” (p. 413), allows for decisions to be made and adjusted on the spur of the moment. This ability to quickly respond to ever changing global events, allows global organizations to be more efficient in their ability to respond appropriately.

Flexibility is another benefit of virtual teams. Walumbwa, Christensen, and Hailey (2011) found that “well-educated young adults, also referred to as knowledge workers, often choose to stay in their home country while working for major corporations headquartered abroad” (p. 110). These team members do not need to relocate in order to work in their area of knowledge and/or expertise. Allowing team members to remain in their current geographic location, may help to foster trust and loyalty to the organization. The team member has been given the opportunity to contribute from his field of expertise, without having to sacrifice his family and familiar surroundings.

**Challenges of Virtual Teams.**

The benefits of virtual teams are not without their share of unique challenges. These challenges range from technological problems to language and cultural differences. Huysman et al. (2003) argued that “past experiences, task division, time orientation, and institutional and organizational forms” (p. 414) determine which type of communication a virtual team prefers to use. Although there exist many types of virtual communication, teams sometimes struggle as to which type would be the most efficient form of communication.
In addition to communication challenges due to technology, global teams encounter time, language, and cultural differences. Problems can arise when local values are imposed on a virtual team or consideration is not given to differing holidays and time zones (Savu, Popa, & Cotet, 2017; Zaugg, Davies, Parkinson, & Magleby, 2015). Proactively, bringing these differences to the forefront when the team is formed, team members and leaders can take appropriate steps to create an environment of inclusion for all members.

Another challenge to virtual teams is the members’ qualifications. Identifying individuals, who are technologically capable as well as experts in their field should be considered when choosing virtual team members (Huysman et al., 2003; Krumm, Kanthak, Hartman, & Hertel, 2016). Arguably, individuals who are not comfortable using technology for communication and team building would not make good candidates for virtual team leaders or members.

Table 1 displays the benefits and challenges of virtual teams, as described by Savu, Popa, & Cotet (2017).
Table 1. Advantages & Disadvantages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost savings</strong></td>
<td><strong>Cost of Technology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations can optimize real estate costs by using virtual teams as well as utility or travel expenses. Most outsource operations in low-cost regions to also take advantage of lower wages of the employees.</td>
<td>One of the main costs in running virtual teams comes from the necessary technology required to run them. Without the use of multiple communication technologies it is either impossible or impractical to run such teams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global Talent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conflicts, Lack of Trust &amp; Collaboration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By leveraging human capital from around the world, organizations can bring in the fold greater understanding of local markets as well as benefit from specialist and experts that increase innovation and knowledge sharing.</td>
<td>One of the main reasons for conflict in virtual teams is the cultural divide as well as the different styles of communication which give rise to mistrust and difficulties in collaboration that are intrinsic to their success. Other challenges come from the lack of direct interaction as most communication is done through non-verbal interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increased Productivity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social Isolation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As opposed to local teams, virtual teams tend to have a greater focus on the objectives dealt with as they benefit from a flatter structure of organization. This translates into increased productivity and greater profits for the company.</td>
<td>Although collaboration in the virtual space has many advantages, on a personal level, the lack of direct contact with coworkers may lead to an adverse affect on the psychological welfare of team members and consequently on productivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decreased Time to Market</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual teams can leverage the different time zones that the members span and run the project continuously 24/7. This greatly speeds up development as well as response time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Opportunities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any tasks that do not require physical presence are now obtainable by candidates that formerly were restricted by availability thus opening the doors to new potential talent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Virtual teams benefit both the team members and the organization as a whole. However, the virtual team has its own unique problems. In addition to the task at hand, a primary challenge for the virtual team is that of communication. Other challenges include feelings of isolation among members. Individuals, who become part of a virtual team should possess knowledge and skills that are suited for the field in which they are working as well as technological skills to maneuver the virtual environment (Krumm, Kanthak, Hartmann, & Hertell, 2016).
It has been found that once a team becomes comfortable with a particular method of communication, it is difficult to change that method later in the team formation (Huysman et al., 2003; Purvanova, 2014; Zaugg, Davies, Parkinson, & Magleby, 2015). Once the team becomes comfortable communicating, they are ready to begin the common task. The virtual leader’s ability to instill confidence and trust in the team is challenged more in the virtual team, which is usually comprised of highly skilled individuals.

Authentic leaders, who display emotional intelligence, have been found to be more successful in creating a trusting environment within the virtual environment. These team members more easily share information and have been found to be more productive than face-to-face teams in actual field studies (Ambrose, Chenoweth, & Mao, 2009; Walumbwa, Christensen, & Hailey, 2011). Therefore, the leaders in virtual teams need to use their abilities to keep the team motivated, coherent, and resolve conflict without the ability to meet with team members in person, if the virtual team is to be more efficient and collaborative than a face-to-face team.

Virtual leaders were able to increase team performance and resolve conflict by creating a collaborative environment (Chang & Lee, 2013; Huysman et al., 2003; Zaugg et al., 2015). This collaborative environment is especially important with diverse teams. Diversity allows for greater innovation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In order to create an environment of inclusion, the leader should proactively make accommodations for time differences, holidays, and language barriers. The leader’s acknowledgement of individual and cultural differences will build a sense of acceptance and respect for individual differences. This in turn, helps in creating an environment where members feel valued and respected not only for their knowledge but for their individuality.
Asynchronous communication is usually preferred by diverse teams. Especially those of members in different time zones or whose primary language is not the language of the organization (Chang & Lee, 2013). This type of communication allows the members to follow the sequence of the conversation, as they have more time to comprehend the meaning. Thereby, allowing these team members to make meaningful contributions to the project.

As virtual teams become comfortable communicating, their efficiency as a work group increases and has, in specialized areas, surpassed that of face-to-face teams (Purvanova, 2014). Results of actual virtual teams appear to be inconsistent with theories on relationships and team efficiency. Social presence theory and other theories used to evaluate face-to-face teams may need to be revised in order to more accurately assess virtual communication and socialization.

**Conclusion and Further Study**

Communication has changed dramatically in the past century. Just as telephone communication replaced letter writing, instant messaging, group chats, and videoconferencing provide instantaneous communication which could, potentially, replace the need for face-to-face contact. As a new generation of people are entering the work force, those who are more accustomed to communicating virtually (Purvanova, 2014; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003), bonding and trust building within virtual team members will become more evident. The efficiency and information sharing between virtual teams has proved to be effective in global teams (McLeod, 2014; Purvanova, 2014; Zaccaro & Bader, 2002). Since this new generation of members are more comfortable in socializing in the virtual world, communicating in a virtual work environment will be natural.
The need for further research in this area is apparent, as there appear to be inconsistencies between theories, experimental virtual teams, and actual virtual teams. These may be attributed to methods used in selecting virtual team members and tasks for experimental virtual teams, as well as theoretical ideas that are intended for face-to-face relationships being applied to virtual relationships.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The advances in technology have made it possible for qualified individuals to work together on teams from different geographical locations. The cost saving and flexibility benefits to both the organization and the team may be responsible for the rapid growth of virtual teams. These teams have increased in popularity during the last decade. Although the growth of these types of work teams continues at a very rapid rate, research on how to effectively maintain efficiency, loyalty, and bonding in these teams has been lacking.

This phenomenological, qualitative study aspires to add knowledge to how communication with the leader and fellow team mates can increase the efficiency and bonding within the virtual team. The researcher evaluated as to whether qualities of an emotionally intelligent authentic leader will assist in team bonding.

Research Design

Context. For the purpose of this qualitative study, the virtual team members consisted of members, who currently or in the past two years have worked on virtual teams. Both leaders and followers were included and at least one team member needed to be spatially separated from the other members of the team.
Seven participants were interviewed. Of the seven participants, four identified as male and three female; two lead teams; two had team members or clients across the global; four work virtually with others in different states within the United States; and three work for the same company within the same state, but have never worked together in same physical location, and one was a recent retiree.

**Method.** A recruitment flyer (See Appendix A) was posted on social media. Individuals wishing to participate were advised to contact the Principal Investigator. Participants, who were qualified, were sent a consent form (See Appendix B) electronically. Interviews were conducted virtually. Interviews lasted expected between 45 and 60 minutes. Participants did not receive any compensation or reimbursement for participating in the study. These interviews were recorded using OBS Studio, coded to protect the identity of the interviewee, then transcribed by the researcher. Upon completion of the research, the taped interviews have been destroyed and all data is being reported in an aggregate format.

An Excel Workbook was used to record the answers. Columns were set up to with headings for the questions asked during the interviews. Common themes, as well as differences, were observed by the researcher in this manner. The data was further analyzed to identify which types of communications where preferred and which leader qualities were perceived as having the most positive effects on the team and which were found to be the worst leader qualities. Graphs showing these results were produced via Microsoft Excel.

The researcher is a member of a virtual team. Every effort was made to not influence the answers given by participants. Data was recorded objectively, using key
words which participants used during the interviews. Since the research includes human subjects, CITI Certification has been completed (See Appendix C). IRB approval has been granted (See Appendix D), according to university regulations.

Chapter 4: Results

Findings

Spatial separation from the team did not appear to negatively impact the team (Table 2). All but one participant felt that it actually helped them in being able to make efficient use of their time and resources. One participant stated, “if I could not work virtually, I would not be able to work for this company in one state, while completing my graduate program in another state.” Participants, who worked with clients and team members in other parts of the world, also stated that working virtually allows them to be in contact and share valuable information without having to “fly around the world.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Life Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Work Life Balance

Virtual team members felt that working remotely allowed greater work-life balance by eliminating commute times and using breaks to complete life tasks that could not be done
when working onsite. “When I was given the opportunity to work remotely, I felt that I got a promotion with a raise. I was getting paid the same, but I save two hours of commuting time and money on commuting expenses. I felt so grateful that I was trusted to work on my own”, responded one interviewee. This feeling was shared by all of the participants.

Communication and bonding within the team did not appear to be an issue for any of the respondents. However, the type of communication was dependent on what needed to be communicated. Email (Table 3) was the most popular form of broad communication, especially when policies and procedures were involved. Email also allows team members to be involved and respond, when different time zones are a factor. Many felt that this was also a better way to communicate with those whose first language was not English (the primary language of all the participants and companies in this study).

![Count of Communication](image)

**Table 3. Preferred Communication**
Table 4 illustrates preferences for meetings. Most felt that there was no difference between face-to-face or virtual meeting. However, telephone or audiovisual meetings were preferred for one-to-one meetings with leaders. The only drawback to audiovisual meetings was connectivity problems, especially with off-shore team members.

![Meeting Preferences Chart]

**Table 4. Meeting Preferences**

The attitude of the leader is a common theme in team bonding and information sharing. However, the leadership style and attitude did not appear to be unique to virtual teams. All most all participants responded to the question of which leader qualities make for a strong team with the same qualities apply to whether the leader is virtual or face-to-face. The best leader quality was openness, followed by empowering others and availability (Table 5).
One the other hand, the leader quality identified as the worst is was lack of interaction. This made followers feel isolated and abandoned, whether working virtually or in the same physical location. This was followed by leaders who micromanage individuals and the team and who are arrogant and not open to discussions with team members (Table 6).

![Graph showing leadership qualities](image)

**Table 5. Best Leadership Qualities**

- openness
- honesty
- ensures have tools
- Empowers
- clearly communicates
- approachable

**Table 6. Worst Leadership Qualities**

- arrogance
- lack of diversity
- lack of trust
- limited growth
- Micromanages
- no interaction
- stressed
- stressed
Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative study attempts to assist virtual teams to achieve bonding among team members and loyalty to the organization to which they belong. As in traditional face-to-face teams, the leader’s style appeared to influence the team dynamics. Geographic distance does not negatively impact the morale of team members. In fact, it may serve to create a loyalty to the organizations, which has allowed the team member to be part of the team, yet not have to be physically present to make contributions.

Bonding within the team seems to be influenced by acceptance and respect from the leader and the other team members. Cultural differences are looked upon as an opportunity to learn new ideas along with different ways of life. Team members who are open and discuss their differences with the team, are respected and more easily trusted. Communication is important for team bonding.

When communication is flexible and can change in order to meet the specific demands of the situation at hand, virtual communication can be equally effective as face-to-face communication. Email was found to be the preferred mode of communication, when time differences were present and when input from team members was requested. Through an email thread, everyone has an awareness of the ideas of others. Team members, who may not be as fluent in the common language being used, have the opportunity to get clarification and make a constructive contribution to the discussion. It was also found as a way for team members to keep track of changes to existing procedures.

Most participants felt that there was no difference in team meetings being conducted virtually or face-to-face. Virtual team meetings were thought to be less
distracting than when being physically present with coworkers with whom they had not seen before or in a long time. Preference was given to audiovisual meeting, where the presenters can be seen and participants had the opportunity to ask questions. The only concern with audiovisual meetings had to do with connectivity problems. When the leader proactively takes steps to assist with these issues, virtual meetings were preferred.

The attitude and style of the leader appeared to have the biggest impact on team dynamics. When the leader is perceived as being open, honest, positive, and approachable, the whole team is closer. Authentic leaders are thought to be able to create an open and trusting environment by exhibiting “balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, self-awareness, and high levels of relational transparency” (Walumbwa, Christensen, & Halley, 2011, p. 111). The leader’s honesty and accountability to the followers will facilitate the followers in openly sharing information, practices, and follower self-development. Therefore, these team members appear to have a greater sense of loyalty and willingness to share information with the other members of the virtual team.

On the other hand, leaders possessing what was identified in the study as the worst leader qualities were no interactions, where team members were left feeling isolated and alone. Micromanaging was perceived by followers as not being trusted or allowing them to complete tasks independently. These feelings, in turn, had a negative impact on team dynamics and bonding of team members.

Limitations.

This study measured the reflection of virtual team members and their perception of team dynamics. The researcher acknowledges that the sample size was small with the
attempt to equally represent both genders, age differences, as well as positions on the team. The participants were almost equally divided by gender (4 males, 3 females) and age (ranging from 20 to 60), all but two were followers. The two, who were leaders, one was in middle management and the other in upper management. This helped in identifying if these demographics influenced the results.

Focus for future research.

Virtual teams are rapidly increasing globally. Organizations are extending beyond local and even national borders. Possibilities for future research could include a larger sample of virtual members. The research was based on reflection and perception of the leader by team members. It would be interesting to note, if how this compares as to how the leader perceives himself. Additional research on which communication tools help to create inclusion and bonding within the team, rather than the best ways to communicate work processes.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Communication is changing with the advances in technology and the internet is allowing individuals in different parts of the world to communicate not only verbally, but visually as well. These advances have created a new workforce, which does not need to be physically present in a specific location. Yet, these workers need to have a sense of inclusion and the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to their team and organization.

In order for virtual team members to form a bond and trusting relationship within the team, a leader needs to display open and empowering qualities. Followers need to believe that their leader is available and ready to provide them with the tools needed to
complete their jobs. The proximity of a leader to followers is not measured in physical units, but in his availability. This can be in an email stating, “Hey, how are you doing? Is there anything you need?” Or in a chat room, “It’s snowing in Maine, but I’m here for you. Give me a shout, if you need anything. What is the weather like at your house?” These small gestures are huge to virtual workers, who appreciate the reassurance that they are not alone.

This also opens a way for team members to get to know each other. In this way, sharing of information begins: best practices, knowledge, and new ideas begin to emerge. As team members begin to learn about each other, respect and acceptance also begin to form within the team. As communication and openness grow within the team, differences can more easily be resolved. With acceptance of diversity within the virtual team, there is the likelihood of new ideas and processes to emerge, which could benefit the team and the organization.
References


Krumm, S., Kanthak, J., Hartmann, K., & Hertel, G. (2016). What does it take to be a
virtual team player? The knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics required in virtual teams. *Human Performance, 29*(2), 123-142.
doi:10.1080/08959285.2016.1154061


doi:10.2507/28th.daaam.proceedings.104


Zaccaro, S.J., & (2002). E-leadership and the challenges of leading e-teams: Minimizing
the bad and maximizing the good. *Organizational Dynamics*, 31(4) 377-387.

Appendices

Appendix A.

Participants Needed for Research Study
Regarding Virtual Leadership

University of Southern Maine
Principal Investigator: Jaye Goulet

Purpose

- The purpose of this qualitative study is to gain knowledge regarding virtual teams and which leadership style allows for loyalty and bonding within the virtual team to be efficient.
- Benefits of this study will increase knowledge in best techniques for working in a virtual setting.

Eligibility

- Participants must be age 18 or older
- Participants must either be part of a work/school virtual team or must have been part of such a team within the past two years.
- Participants must have worked with at least one member of their team remotely.

What will you be asked to do?

- Interview for 45-90 minutes regarding your experiences regarding virtual leadership.
- The identities of all participants will be kept confidential.
- Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or are interested in participating, please contact:
Jaye Goulet
Phone: 207-956-8650
Email: jaye.goulet@maine.edu

All interested persons should contact Jaye Goulet by January 15, 2019.
Appendix B.

University of Southern Maine

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Virtual Leadership Within Organizations: Overcoming Cultural, Language, and Physical Barriers

Principal Investigator(s): Jaye Goulet, University of Southern Maine,

jaye.goulet@maine.edu

Faculty advisor: Elizabeth Goryunova, Ph.D., University of Southern Maine,

elizabeth.goryunova@maine.edu

Introduction:

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

- The purpose of this study is to add knowledge about the most effective leadership styles and communication practices in virtual teams.
- This study involves research via interviews with members of virtual teams.

Who will be in this study?

- Participants must either be part of a work/school virtual team or must have been part of such a team within the past two years
- Participants must be at least 18 years of age.
- Participants must have worked with at least one member of their team remotely.
Between 6 and 10 participants will be interviewed virtually.

**What will I be asked to do?**

- You will be interviewed remotely
- Interviews are expected to last between 45 and 90 minutes
- You will not receive any compensation or reimbursement for participating in the study

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be a benefit to individuals and organizations using virtual teams.

**What will it cost me?**

- You are not expected to incur any costs associated with participation in this study.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

- Interviews will be conducted via telephone or video chat, whichever you prefer
- Interviews will be recorded. Investigator will transcribe the interviews, any identifying information will be removed from all recordings and files to protect your privacy
- The data will be reported only in aggregate format.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

- No individually identifiable information will be collected.
- Recorded interviews will be kept on private desktop computer of the Principal Investigator, which will require password for access.
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the
research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.
• Audio and/or video recordings of interviews will only be accessed by the Principal Investigator, who will transcribe these recordings. After transcription these recordings will be deleted. Research data will be only reported in aggregate format.
• If you wish to receive a copy of the research findings, you may contact the Principal Investigator.

What are my rights as a research participant?

• Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University of Southern Maine.
• You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
• If you choose not to participate, there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

What other options do I have?

• You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

The researcher conducting this study is Jaye Goulet. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at 207-956-8650 or jaye.goulet@maine.edu
Faculty mentor: Elizabeth Goryunova, Ph.D., elizabeth.goryunova@maine.edu

• If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Elizabeth Goryunova, Ph.D. at elizabeth.goryunova@maine.edu

• If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call the USM Research Compliance Administrator at (207) 228-8434 and/or email usmorio@maine.edu.
Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

----------------------------------------

Participant’s Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

----------------------------------------

Participant’s signature or Date
Legally authorized representative

----------------------------------------

Printed name

Researcher’s Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

----------------------------------------

Researcher’s signature Date

Jaye Goulet
Printed name
Appendix C.

**Interview Questions**

1. How do you feel working virtual affects your lifestyle?
   a. What kind of life responsibilities do you have
   b. Does working virtually allow you to remain in your home environment?
   c. How do you respond to cultural differences with other members of your team?

2. What leader qualities impact your ability to work virtually?
   a. What qualities did the best leader you had possess?
      i. empathy
      ii. knowledge
      iii. openness
      iv. empowerment
   b. What qualities did the worst leader you had possess?

3. Which types of virtual communication do you prefer? Why?
   a. Virtual meeting vs. face-to-face meetings with team
   b. Meetings with leader
   c. Contact with peers
   d. Language barriers, insecurity, communication skills

*** sub questions are only intended to be used to probe for additional information in the subject.
Appendix D.

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Jaye Mendros Goulet (ID: 733531)
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of Maine System (ID: 1441)
- **Institution Email:** jaye.goulet@maine.edu
- **Curriculum Group:** Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course
- **Record ID:** 28107253
- **Completion Date:** 13-Oct-2018
- **Expiration Date:** 12-Oct-2022
- **Minimum Passing:** 80
- **Reported Score:** 97

**REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module Description</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belmont Report and Its Principles - SBE</td>
<td>04-Oct-2018</td>
<td>3/3 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Ethical Principles - SBE</td>
<td>06-Oct-2018</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE-</td>
<td>06-Oct-2018</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Federal Regulations - SBE</td>
<td>08-Oct-2018</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing Risk - SBE</td>
<td>09-Oct-2018</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed Consent - SBE</td>
<td>09-Oct-2018</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE</td>
<td>09-Oct-2018</td>
<td>5/5 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet-Based Research - SBE</td>
<td>13-Oct-2018</td>
<td>4/5 (80%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.


Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
Email: support@citiprogram.org
Phone: 888.529-5929
Web: [https://www.citiprogram.org](https://www.citiprogram.org)
Appendix E.

NOTICE OF EVALUATION-EXEMPT

DATE: December 05, 2018
TO: Jaye Goulet, Leadership Studies
    Elizabeth Goryunova, Leadership Studies
FROM: Casey Webster, Human Protections Administrator, USM IRB
PROTOCOL TITLE: Virtual Leadership Within Organizations: Overcoming Cultural, Language, and Physical Barriers
FUNDING SOURCE: 18-12-1217
PROTOCOL NUMBER: Approval Date: December 05, 2018

The Office of Research Integrity and Outreach (ORIO) has evaluated the project named above. This study has been granted an exemption from USM IRB review per Title 45 CFR Part 46. This designation is based on the assumption that the materials that you submitted to the IRB contain a complete and accurate description of all the ways in which human subjects are involved in your research.

This exemption is given with the following terms:
1. You will conduct the project according to the plans and protocol you submitted.
2. No further contact with the ORIO is necessary unless you make changes to your project or adverse events or injuries to subjects occur.
3. If you propose to make any changes to the project, you must submit the changes to the ORIO for review; you will not initiate any changes until they have been reviewed and approved by the ORIO;
4. If any adverse events or injuries to subjects occur, you will report these immediately to the ORIO;
5. As applicable, you will comply with the University of Maine Information Security Policy and Standards and/or the Muskie School of Public Service Securing Protected Information Policies and Procedures and any other applicable USM policies or procedures; and
6. You will close the project upon completion (or discontinuation).

The University appreciates your efforts to conduct research in compliance with the federal regulations that have been established to ensure the protection of human subjects in research.

Sincerely,

Casey Webster
About the Author

Jaye Mendros Goulet resides in Lewiston, Maine with her husband and three sons. She works virtually for a retail corporation based in Maine. Her undergraduate degree is from Boston University, where she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Classical Civilization with concentrations in Biology and Modern Greek Language. She is fluent in English and Greek and is proficient in French. When her children left for college, she entered the Leadership Master’s degree program at the University of Southern Maine. Jaye is an active member of her local church, past president of her local Parent-Teacher Organization, Boston University Hellenic Association, as well as Greek Language and Cultural Instruction. She loves entertaining and the company of family and friends. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, gardening, knitting, sewing, and cooking, especially Greek pastries.