

Virtual Team Dynamics

Mehnaz Ladha, MBA Candidate, Pace University, and Kate Richardson, Associate Professor, Pace University



INTRODUCTION

- Virtual teams are growing in popularity as a means to diversify talent, increase cost savings, and achieve greater work-life balance.
- This exploratory study examines how virtual team interaction, operationalized as frequency and duration, affects several variables that shape team dynamics, including: job satisfaction, affective commitment, and workplace telepressure.
- This study also seeks to understand how training received by virtual team members moderates the relationship between these variables.
- As virtual teams become an integral part of the global workplace, it becomes important to understand how these types of groups can overcome challenges inherent in virtual environments and the best practices for optimizing team dynamics.

Keywords: virtual teams, communication, training

LITERATURE

Earlier research suggests that virtual teams are challenged differently than their conventionally co-located counterparts.

Communication

- Intensified frequency of communication in virtual team environments leads to information overload and decreased efficiency (DeSanctis & Monge, 2006; Marlow, Lacerenza, & Salas, 2017).
- Frequent communication in virtual team environments creates more opportunities for individuals to develop trust, enhance their ability to solve problems, and contribute to the team's collective understanding (Monge & Contractor, 2003; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 2006).

Job Satisfaction

- Literature suggests that virtual teams, in contrast with conventionally co-located teams, experience lower levels of job satisfaction that lead to higher rates of turnover (Serban et al., 2015).

Affective Commitment

- The isolated nature of virtual teams limits informal interactions from occurring more frequently and naturally than in the conventional workspace, which hinders the development of affective commitment (Fisher & Fisher, 2001).

Workplace Telepressure

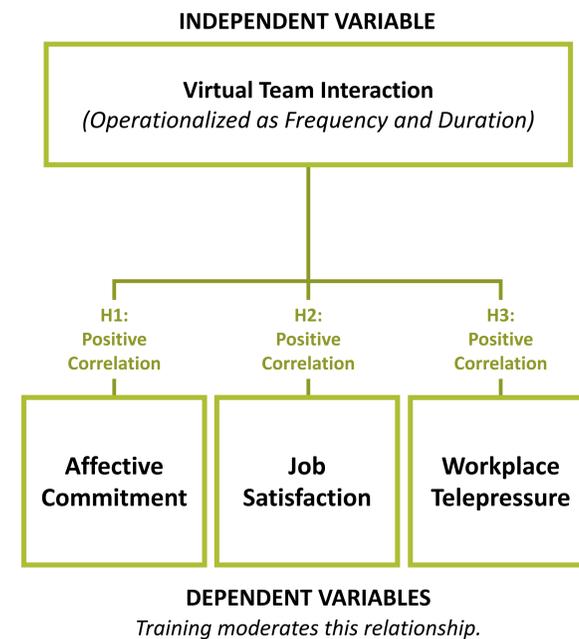
- Information communication technology blurs the line between work and recovery time such that even when individuals are not working, they feel the need to respond immediately to work-related messages (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015).

Diversity

- Diversity through computer screens can increase friction between team members and ultimately affect team performance (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999).

HYPOTHESIS

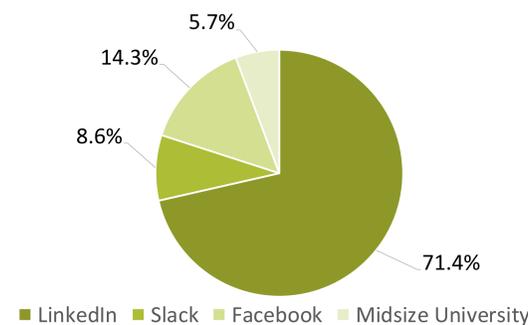
Figure 1
Hypothesized Model of Virtual Team Interaction



METHODOLOGY

- This study was conducted over a three-month period with 85 participants and included a 60+ questionnaire with a 41.1% completion rate.
- The questionnaire was distributed on several online platforms, including LinkedIn, Slack, Facebook, and the internal network of a mid-sized university in a large northeastern city.

Graph 1
Questionnaire Distribution

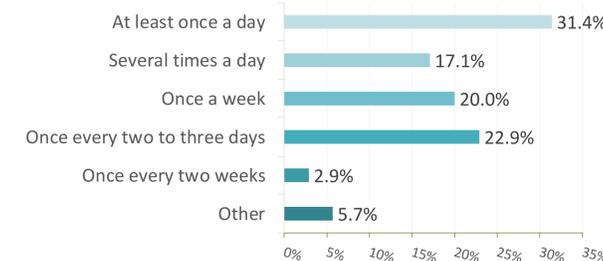


- Questions related to job satisfaction were adopted from Spector (1985) and participants responded based on a six-point Likert scale.
- Questions related to affective commitment were adopted from Meyer & Allen (1991) and participants responded based on a seven-point Likert scale.
- Questions related to workplace telepressure were adopted from Barber & Santuzzi (2015) and participants responded based on a five-point Likert scale.

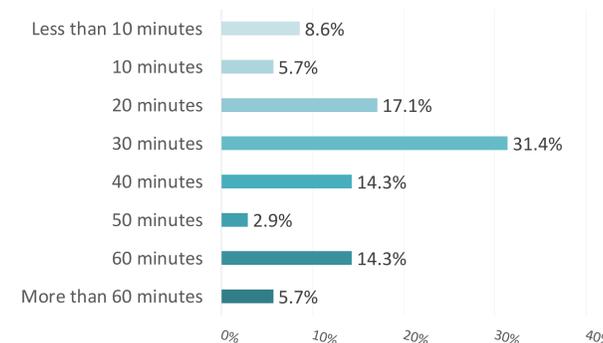
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYTICS

The majority of respondents reported communicating verbally with their team at least once a day (see Graph 2). Verbal communication, on average, lasted for 30 minutes for a high percent of participants (see Graph 3).

Graph 2
Verbal Communication Frequency Patterns in Virtual Teams

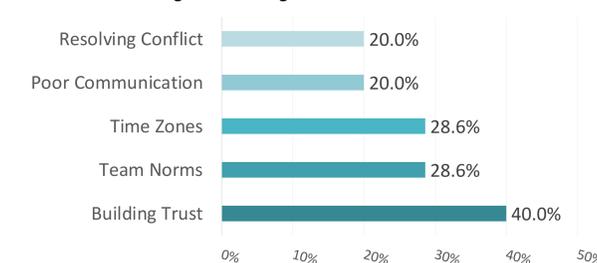


Graph 3
Verbal Communication Duration Patterns in Virtual Teams

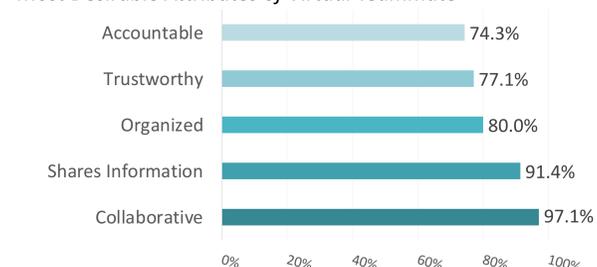


In the questionnaire, participants were asked to identify the greatest challenges of working in virtual teams (see Graph 4) and the most desirable attributes of a virtual teammate (see Graph 5).

Graph 4
Greatest Challenges Working in Virtual Teams



Graph 5
Most Desirable Attributes of Virtual Teammate



FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

- Individuals reported higher levels of job satisfaction on teams that had frequent verbal interaction.
- Extended periods of verbal communication may suppress an individual's job satisfaction.
- Training positively impacts work-life balance, contributions, and sense of belonging.
- Individuals who have more work experience in virtual settings frequently communicate through video conferences and experience lower workplace telepressure.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

- This exploratory study had a small, homogeneous sample size and did not clearly define the differences between telecommuting and virtual work.
- Future researchers might expand the study to include other types of trainings (cultural incompetence, leadership, etc.), explore methods of delivery, and measure what is most useful and impactful in virtual environments.

REFERENCES

- Barber, L. K., & Santuzzi, A. M. (2015). Please respond ASAP: Workplace telepressure and employee recovery. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 20*(2), 172-189. doi:10.1037/a0038278
- DeSanctis, G., & Monge, P. (2006). Communication Processes for Virtual Organizations. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 3*(4). doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.1998.tb00083.x
- Fisher, K., & Fisher, M. (2001). *The Distance Manager: A Hands On Guide to Managing Off-Site Employees and Virtual Teams*. NY: McGraw-Hill Professional.
- Jarvenpaa, S. L., & Leidner, D. E. (2006). Communication and Trust in Global Virtual Teams. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 3*(4). doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.1998.tb00080.x
- Marlow, S. L., Lacerenza, C. N., & Salas, E. (2017). Communication in virtual teams: a conceptual framework and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review, 27*(4). doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.12.005
- Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review, 1*(1), 61-89. doi:10.1016/1053-4822(91)90011-z
- Monge, P. R., & Contractor, N. S. (2003). *Theories of Communication Networks*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA.
- Pelled, L. H., Eisenhardt, K. M., & Xin, K. R. (1999). Exploring the black box: An analysis of work group diversity, conflict, and performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*(1), 1. doi:10.2307/2667029
- Serban, A., Yammarino, F. J., Dionne, S. D., Kahai, S. S., Hao, C., McHugh, K. A., ... Peterson, D. R. (2015). Leadership emergence in face-to-face and virtual teams: A multi-level model with agent-based simulations, quasi-experimental and experimental tests. *The Leadership Quarterly, 26*(3), 402-418. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.02.006
- Spector, P. E. (1985). Measurement of human service staff satisfaction: Development of the job satisfaction survey. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 13*(6), 693-713. doi:10.1007/bf00929796