

UNDERSTANDING THE TEAM DYNAMICS OF AN EXECUTIVE VIRTUAL TEAM

A Dissertation

by

RAMONA LEONARD RILEY

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the Team Dynamics of an Executive Virtual Team.

(August 2011)

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Organizations of all types are now able to operate in virtual capacities through time, space, and distance across multinational boundaries; therefore, geography no longer limits business functioning. In fact, many corporate executives and boards employ virtuality in their work regimen. Therefore, organizations employ virtual executives to work teams with ideal skill sets to effectively persevere and complete tasks through distance, space, and time. The purpose of this study was to identify and yet understand the experiences of executive multinational, virtual board members working as a team in a virtual environment. Through this research the virtual dynamics of the virtual team have been studied, prodded, purposely mismatched, and weaved together to understand the culture of the virtual environment in which the team members interact and perform duties. With this particular board, there has been a history of previous work experience or exposure in some capacity; however, it has no great impact on their interaction and work with the entire board.

In this study, an exploratory look at the experiences, perceived team dynamics, and strategies used to successfully function as a virtual team are highlighted from a

qualitative perspective. The purpose is to describe the individual perspectives of how a multinational executive virtual team best works.

The findings of this study reveal that there are many ways to communicate utilizing technology, but the objective for this virtual team is to be multidimensional in use. That means that honest communication is necessary for the board to perform at their optimal level. Therefore, the theoretical framework is based on team performance as a teamwork process-based construct which depends on communication, relationship, and trust to add success for virtual teams. The framework results in three step process for team flow and success i.e., the importance of face-to-face meetings; advantages of virtual teaming; and challenges of virtual teaming to result in virtual team performance dependent on the team having communication, relationship, and trust present.

DEDICATION

Thank you Lord for not giving up on me. There were times when I wanted to give up but you allowed the Holy Spirit in me to press forward. I am grateful.

Thank you Kevin and Jack. I hope that I can reflect the same loving-kindness through patience as you have both shown me. This is for our Riley family clan – we boldly take hold of the promises of our purposed walk through life.

Thank you Monica White for all you do. Words cannot describe the gratitude I have for you. You are the best Edit Dr. ever!

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To recognize the people who were and continue to be instrumental to the completion of this process and future success, I sincerely offer thanks. Your encouragement and inspiration carries on in my heart and my passion to help others in need. Thank you one and all for bearing with me through this process. This experience has been very challenging and yet absolutely WONDERFUL! I would not trade it for anything, but I would not choose to ever repeat this process! Kindest regards to you all.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Organizations of all types are now able to operate in virtual capacities through time, space, and distance across multinational boundaries; therefore, geography no longer limits business functioning. In fact, many corporate executives and boards employ virtuality in their work regimen. We now live in a globalized society where anything can be obtained or communicated by the mere touch of a button within our technological networks and infrastructures. Technological advancements have made it possible to immediately communicate with the world with a push of the enter key. The rise of international operations has increased because of the decreased cost for maintenance and upkeep (Malecki, 2002). Business and industry utilizing these virtual environments are challenged to develop strategically flexible teams to respond to the increasingly competitive marketplaces (Townsend, DeMarie, & Hendrickson, 1998). Therefore, organizations employ virtual executives to work teams with ideal skill sets to effectively persevere and complete tasks through distance, space, and time constraints (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000).

The nimbleness of virtual work is especially prevalent in executive teams where board members are multinational – working from different countries. Organizations have the capacity to be multinational and multidimensional utilizing technology. Technology can be utilized to align organizational vision, people, and processes. Executives are able

The dissertation follows the style of *Human Resource Development Quarterly*.

to conduct meetings virtually, oversee projects, and collaborate using technology to their advantage (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Boule, 2008; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). This researcher will take an exploratory look at the experiences, perceived team dynamics, and strategies used to successfully function as a virtual team. The purpose is to describe the individual perspectives of how a multinational executive virtual team best works.

The use of virtual teams provides new opportunities for nonprofit executive leadership boards to better function in global networks through synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (delayed) virtual communication. Not all teams have technologically advanced resources at their disposal; therefore, understanding virtual teaming in information technology environments, where communication is in real-time as well as delayed, can inform researchers and practitioners regarding multiple team strategies for goal accomplishment. Taulbert (1999) stated that during this century, individual time and actions are increasingly driven by the presence of new technologies in our workplace.

Although establishing increasing importance to organizational leadership and functioning, virtual teams are a relatively new phenomenon. Townsend, DeMarie, and Hendrickson (1998) defined virtual teams 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” (p. 18). Virtual teams are becoming predominant forces in organizational settings (Hornett, 2004; O’Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). The use of virtual teams allows organizations to deploy the best, most creative, innovative, and qualified individuals to

perform in a synergistic fashion (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Grenier & Metes, 1995; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). Virtual teams enhance organizational capacities to become more flexible by providing team-based action and problem solving in situations where teamwork would have once been impossible (Townsend, et al., 1998). Such situations include multinational nonprofit organizations whose geographically dispersed leaders must team with others to ensure organizational success, but who cannot afford the cost and time associated with regular face-to-face meetings.

When organizing a virtual team, it is necessary to ensure role clarity and proficiency regarding related tasks. Not only are task related elements an important consideration, effective relationships are essential for team success, even in virtual environments. Relationship building, however, can be challenging for virtual team members. Taulbert (1999) stated, "because of the efficiency, speed, and accuracy that are achievable with these new technologies, the people in our workplaces are having to pause and refocus on the role of building community – a set of emotionally satisfying relationships" (p. 245). An exploratory single case study of virtual executive team dynamics of a non-profit board will assist human resource development (HRD) professionals in bridging the existing gap to understanding virtual team functioning in a transitioning global market economy.

Background

There has been little research conducted on virtual teams. It is becoming clear that not all assumptions about traditional face-to-face teams can be true of leadership teams functioning predominantly in virtual environments (Bordia, 1997; Boule, 2008;

Fjermestad & Hiltz, 1998; Massey, Montoya-Weiss, & Hung, 2003; Pauleen & Yoong, 2001; Powell, Piccoli, & Ives, 2004). Virtual teams come in many different organizational structures and have members from a variety of locations throughout the world. In addition, individuals comprising a team bring their own beliefs, goals, standards, understanding, talents, protocols, ethics, morals, and values regarding how teamwork should be undertaken. It is likely that these elements contribute to team member perceptions in shaping the manner in which the team functions.

It is necessary to gain a better understanding of how to work in a virtual setting and the strategies for functioning in them. More specifically, exploring the conditions under which persons working within an executive virtual team interact and actualize, as well as align individuals, teams, groups, and organizational goals and objectives is needed. Understanding the conditions under which persons working within a virtual environment contribute to team success may benefit HRD professionals in the definition, development, and refinement of virtual teamwork skills, in addition to assisting in building a culture of sharing (Ardichvili, 2002).

Executive Virtual Team Features for This Research

For purposes of this research, the specific executive virtual team discussed throughout this dissertation has the following features.

- It is an executive board.
- It is a non-profit board.
- It is a non-governmental organization.
- It is a multinational European virtual team.
- It will attempt to complete a specific project during the time frame under study.

Characteristics of Executive Virtual Teams

Executive virtual teams serve several purposes; however, before distinguishing their purposes, it is necessary to define a few terms e.g., executive, executive team, and executive virtual team. First, *executive* is defined as “one having administrative or managerial authority” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2002). Second, *executive team* is defined as “a set of people who collectively take on the role of providing strategic, operational, and institutional leadership for the organization” (Kline, 2003, p.145). Finally, *executive virtual team* is defined as a group of geographically dispersed people who equally share the responsibility of providing strategic, operational, and institutional leadership for the organization (Kline, 2003; Townsend et al., 1998). To adequately provide the organization with the essentials for task performance, a certain type of individual commits to taking on the task of working virtually. The primary purpose of the executive virtual team is to execute one or more organizational tasks (DeSanctis & Monge, 1999; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Powell, et al., 2004).

Some of the distinctive features of virtual teams are the reliance on information technology as the primary form of communication (Powell, et al., 2004). Virtual teams are most often constructed in response to specific needs and are often short-lived (Chase, 1999; Powell, et al., 2004). More often than not, the virtual team that has received the most attention for research is the global virtual team (e.g., Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Powell et al., 2004) due to the fact that such teams include members working and living in different countries and are typically culturally diverse (Powell, et al., 2004). Research revealed that the term

“global virtual teams” was also used interchangeably with “multinational virtual teams” (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Powell, et al., 2004; Townsend, et al., 1998).

Statement of the Problem

Gaining deeper insight regarding member experiences on a multinational, virtual executive board could be achieved through a study of individual perceptions regarding interdependency, teamwork, reciprocal interaction, and feedback in the completion of projects (Oakley, 1998; Pauleen, 2004). Particularly when tasks are large in scope or complexity, high degrees of interdependency may be necessary not only among team members, but between virtual teams as well (Oakley, 1998; Pauleen, 2004; Zaccaro & Horn, 2003). To date, no core HRD studies, frameworks, or theories concerning executive virtual teams have been identified; therefore, elaboration regarding executive virtual team dynamics is paramount to the field for today’s e-workplaces (Kirkman, Rosen, Gibson, Tesluk, & McPherson, 2002; Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004; Peters & Manz, 2007; Sleezer, Wentling, & Cude, 2002).

In order to provide elaboration for practitioners and scholars, research is needed to describe and classify the changes that have recently occurred regarding virtual teams. Further elaboration by researchers could contribute to the enhancement of individual, team, and organizational outcomes (Kirkman et al., 2004; Martins et al., 2004; Peters & Manz, 2007; Sleezer et al., 2002). The objective of the current study was to understand an executive virtual team’s individual perceptions of team dynamics focusing primarily

on their relationships and their virtual communication milieus. This objective was satisfied by answering three basic research questions:

1. What is the experience of being a member of a multinational, virtual executive board?
2. What are the executive board dynamics as perceived by board members working in a multinational, virtual environment?
3. What conditions are perceived necessary by board members for executive virtual team members to best foster optimum virtual team performance?

Methodology

For purposes of this research, a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) was conducted to specifically focus on the virtual team dynamics created and constructed by a nonprofit executive board. Team dynamics encompasses multiple dimensions of the persons participating within this study on the nonprofit executive board. Each virtual team member brings their beliefs, values and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of the virtual board members (Spradley, 1980). The qualitative case study takes into consideration each board member and her/his cultural context (Spradley, 1980). “In these studies the major data-gathering technique is participant observation (supplemented with formal and informal interviews and review of documents) and the focus of the study is on a particular organization (school and rehabilitation center) or some aspect of the organization” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 55). Two strategies for data collection and gathering were used, e.g. interviews in multiple forms i.e., face-to-face, telephone, and through email correspondence as well as observations of email

correspondence between board members, conference calls over the internet, and interactions during the face-to-face meetings. Utilizing the two strategies was important for collecting information necessary to observe participants, listen to them, and make inferences of what was known (Spradley, 1979).

Participants

The executive virtual board was comprised of eight members representing countries across Europe. The eight board members represented Austria, France, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The board members were male and female multinationals and their ages ranged from 25-65 years of age. They were elected officials within a non-government organization association. Each served a two-year term. The virtual board members represented local chapters of the non-governmental organization within each board member's county. Most board members spoke several languages including English. All conversations with board members were conducted in English. The written correspondence communicated by the board was also in English. The virtual board agreed to observations to be held over a six month period of time. During the six months the virtual board's project included their National Conference as well as follow-up after the conference. The participants worked to close out everything pertaining to the National Conference from payment for resources to getting conference speaker evaluations, amendments, and modifications to counsel procedures for receiving news of changes that board members make on policies and procedures as well as voting and classifying the evaluation of the National Conference.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected and gathered by a qualitative method (Merriam, 1998). Face-to-face, telephone, and email interviews were conducted to gather and collect information from each participant. The interview objective was to gather and collect data based on their experiences as virtual board members working as a virtual team. For each interview conducted, e.g. face-to-face, telephone, or email, each board member was asked to review and sign an informed consent form explaining their rights as a human subject in this study.

The interview process consisted of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions with follow-up questions and checks for clarity of understanding. The interviews were taped recorded and then transcribed into written text by a professional transcriber. Transcripts were provided to each participant to review and check for validation. Responses to member checks were followed-up with more email questions submitted to participants requesting additional explanations to clearly communicate the ideas previously communicated. The purpose for following up was to ensure understanding of each virtual board member's point of view in order to express what was important to each of them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Analysis

Several methods of analysis were involved in the data collection process. First, participant observation was used to gather and collect data pertaining to board interactions amongst themselves within a face-to-face setting, through email correspondence, as well as telephone conference calls (Merriam, 1998). Field notes were

generated from participant observations to assist in bridging whatever gaps existed for those board members who were very active as well as those who were not very active (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Second, non-participant observations of their collaborations over the internet telephone by listening in to telephone conference calls as well as reading their email correspondence amongst board members, and observing them during their face-to-face meetings were transcribed and catalogued. Lastly, multiple forms of interviews took place. For example, face-to-face interviews were conducted, telephone interviews were conducted, and email interviews and follow up email interviews were conducted. Email interviews were also employed to clarify and check the validity of statements as well as understanding of intent (Merriam, 1998). Member checks were verified using email as the tool to provide clarity of understanding.

Thematic analysis relied on the data collected and gathered as described above. Working with the information gleaned during the collection process, themes were established, re-established, refined, reworked, and solidified for presentation (Spradley, 1980). Contrasts and similarities were examined and re-examined to determine the overlapping of themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Board member statement meanings were considered, compared and grouped together to form and reform themes.

Procedures Used

Organizing the collected data involved inputting the information and compiling it into the NVivo qualitative research program. Email, interview text, telephone transcripts were all transcribed and compiled into the NVivo software program. The information was read and reread to identify and determine various coding themes throughout the

study. Then, the information was studied to inquire of deeper meanings. The data was coded and classified. Follow-up email questions were submitted for clarity and telephone conversations were conducted to talk through the meaning of unclear passages. Board interactions by email as well as conference calls were observed. Anecdotal records were created to maintain detail to participants, voice inflections, joking, and laughing, as well as reaction and rapid responses to situations. The information was compiled into a rich description and details pertaining to written text. The text was provided to board members to check for accuracy of ideas and expression. Themes were then recorded using the NVivo software program in order to build themes. Protocols were checked and rechecked to ensure validation of themes. Lastly, a description was compiled to consolidate all the information.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand the experiences of executive multinational, virtual board members working as a team in a virtual environment. To accomplish the purpose of this study, it was necessary to explore virtual team dynamics as perceived by executive board members within a multinational organization. Leaders use their competence, knowledge, and skill in various work situations to explain and understand the circumstances that foster best virtual team performance (Ardichvili, 2002). The intended outcome of this study was to uncover the individual perspectives associated with how this executive virtual team functions.

Significance of the Study

In general, HRD researchers and practitioners seek to utilize insights from research and practice to enhance learning and performance for individuals, groups, organizations and large systems (Swanson & Holton, 2009). Virtual teams have been identified as an important consideration for HRD (Githens, Dirani, Gitonga & Teng, 2008; Sleezer et al., 2002). The current state of HRD related research on both virtual teams and executive virtual teams is minimal. For the purpose of HRD, an in-depth exploratory general qualitative single case study of multinational, virtual executive board member experiences is essential. Given the lack of systematic exploration of virtual teaming, additional time and attention need be given to research on virtual executives working within virtual environments.

Although a few studies have been conducted pertaining to executive virtual team dynamics and prevalent conditions, which foster their performance, an in-depth investigation of an executive virtual team was warranted. Elaborating upon the experiences of these executive virtual team members may provide insight into the relevant elements and patterns that will better inform practitioners and scholars about virtual teaming in the aforementioned context (Githens et al., 2008; Godar & Ferris, 2004; Pauleen, 2004; Sleezer, Wentling, & Cude, 2002). This exploratory case study contributed several key elements, which included the virtual team performance framework, the importance of establishing communication, relationship, and trust among members of the organization; as well as the three components necessary for executive virtual teams to excel. This study contributes to the idea that no matter where teammates

are in the world, organizations are able to thrive because of the buy-in of each virtual team member and executive virtual team member because they all believe that when communication, relationship, and trust are present their entire organization thrives.

Framing the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to describe how a multinational, virtual executive team works from the perspectives of its individual members. “Team performance has been addressed in the team literature as a generalized framework that includes inputs (i.e. resources), processes (i.e. collective effort), and outcomes (i.e. specific performance indicators) (Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Hackman, 1992)” (as cited in Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater & Spangler, 2004, p. 179). For purposes of this research, team performance is presented as a process-type performance theoretical framework (Dionne, et al., 2004). The theoretical framework will be based on team performance as a teamwork process-based construct which depends on communication, relationship, and trust to add success for virtual teams (Dionne, et al., 2004). Through this research, the virtual dynamics of the virtual team have been examined, dissected, and weaved together to understand the culture of the virtual environment in which the team members interact and perform duties. With this particular board, there has been a history of previous work experience or exposure in some capacity; however, no dramatic impact was detected in their interaction individually or with their work with each other.

When I first met this board in February 2005, they informed me that they met face-to-face four times per year; however, after spending a longer period of time with them in September 2005, those face-to-face meetings were reduced to twice per year.

Board members believed they were well able to condense the meeting times because they had built relationships that could be further developed through technology. In some respects, they adhered to the correct ethic for working virtually because virtual work requires more frequent communication to check on things, assist, encourage, listen, and/or provide direction (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Sarker & Sahay, 2003b).

On the other hand, eliminating face-to-face meetings decreased the effects of the communication richness that added to understanding and comprehension of information. “Face-to-face is the richest medium because it provides immediate feedback so that interpretation can be checked. Face-to-face also provides multiple cues via body language and tone of voice, and message content is expressed in natural language” (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Orlikowski, 2000). Leaner mediums of communication, e.g., telephone, personal documents such as letter or memos, interpersonal written documents, and numeric documents, lack the capability for immediate feedback (Lee, 1994; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Powell et al., 2004). Leaner mediums tend to use single channels for communication, filter out significant cues, are more impersonal, and request a reduction in language variety (Lee, 1994; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Powell et al., 2004).

The findings of this study reveal that there are many ways to communicate utilizing technology, but the objectives for members of this virtual team were multidimensional. That means that honest communication is necessary for the board to perform at their optimal level. For instance, Fernando was the only board member who admitted being computer illiterate. Concurrently, Jacques was aware that board members

suffered from technophobia; however, the two sides were never able to address these intersecting issues.

Unfortunately, partially due to the communication breakdowns neither virtual board member received what they were supposed to receive from each other. Each had the capacity to communicate their frustrations; however, not being able or feeling comfortable to voice those frustrations to one another, Fernando resigned because he was unable to successfully join the virtual discussions as a contributing member. Had Fernando expressed to board members that he did not fully understand the technology use, they would have assisted him and gone out of their way to help as they did with me. However, Fernando's silence to email as well as Skype was misinterpreted as lack of interest and/or lack of commitment. "Decisional behaviors involve team members critically examining others' contributions with the goal of converging to a common understanding such that a decision can be reached or problem solved" (Massey, et al., 2003, p. 131). Therefore, the honest communication may help the team to achieve rather than become stagnate.

According to Maznevski and Chudoba (2001), being able to fully and completely utilize various technologies that are matched to the communication requirements of the task at hand affects the effectiveness of the virtual board. The more technology resources are at hand, the better the virtual board is equipped to adapt, adjust, and accomplish tasks (Kayworth & Leidner, 2000; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2001). Additional time and attention to learn the technological operating system may be necessary (Chidambaram, 1996; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2001). Individual virtual team member adaptation to the

technology speaks to the virtual team's environment and structure because all members can be attentive simultaneously (Chidambaram, 1996; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2001). Basic adaptations to technology assists with communication to fit the team's structure (Majchrzak, Rice, Malhotra, King, & Ba, 2000) and it empowers the virtual team member to exist in the fullness of the team (Sleezer, et al., 2002).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this exploratory case study. First, according to Ahuja and Galvin (2003), the generalizability of this study is limited to the specific type of executive virtual team studied here, e.g., one that is multinational, inter-organizational, and voluntary in nature. Thus, this executive virtual board may not mirror other virtual work groups and/or virtual teams in corporate settings (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Second, the lack of virtual team experience of some of the virtual board members. The majority of virtual board members were comfortable working with technology in a virtual environment. Those virtual board members were able to consistently communicate as a team through multiple methods using technology. Other virtual board members were unclear of the concept of utilizing technology as a vehicle for communicating with board members. This limitation may have skewed the amount of responses to email and telephone conference availability.

Third, not all virtual board members were available for interview in person or otherwise. Initial interviews were conducted in a face-to-face environment. Interviews and general conversations with each board member began in a face-to-face setting but further interviews were non-existent with three of the virtual board members thereby

limiting the access of interviewee perspectives. Fourth, the attrition of multiple board members during the duration of the study again limited the access of interviewee perspective. Three virtual board members resigned and were replaced by substitutes from their local chapters. One substitute elected not to participate in this research study; another substitute was appointed after the data collection phase of the research; and the third substitute was unresponsive to requests for interview availability. In spite of these limitations, the researcher continued moving forward with the virtual board members willing to add their perspectives to the research and data collection process.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding the study and my approach to the study:

- Executive virtual teams are organized like traditional teams.
- Communication in a multinational virtual team is more difficult to achieve because of distance and time.
- Leadership is non-existent because no one is appointed leader on the team.
- Communication, trust, and relationship are not the primary focus of the virtual team.
- Projects are the primary focus of the virtual team.

Operational Definitions

Computer-mediated technology is defined as the communicating through multiple technologies to team members across political boundaries and nations may be uninhibited because of the fewer social context cues provided (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986).

E-mail is also known as *electronic mail*. “Computer text processing and communication tools to provide a high-speed information exchange service enables people to contact one another at e-mail addresses via LANS [local area networks] or WANS [wide area networks]” (Lumsden & Lumsden, 1997, p. 154).

E-workplace, also known as *electronic workplace*. A new form of mobile and wireless technologies where groups work in a virtual environment across distance, time, and space (Sleezer, et al., 2002).

Executive is defined as “one having administrative or managerial authority” (Webster’s Dictionary, 2002, p. 240).

Executive team is defined as “a set of people who collectively take on the role of providing strategic, operational, and institutional leadership for the organization” (Kline, 2003, p. 145).

Executive virtual team is defined as a group of geographically dispersed people who equally share the responsibility of providing strategic, operational, and institutional leadership for the organization (Kline, 2003; Townsend et al., 1998).

Group communication is defined as a group of individuals whom have formed a social group of two or more people influencing one another over time through direct communication among group members (Finholt & Sproull, 1990).

Multinational is defined as someone having been immersed in more than one country where they have been able to actualize all cultural distinctions of the other countries.

Multinational team also known as *cross cultural team* and *global team* defined as “a collection of two or more individuals from different countries interacting directly or indirectly for the accomplishment of a common goal” (Earley & Gibson, 2002).

Multinational executive virtual team is a group of organizational leaders in management located in more than one country who comprise a noncollocated team and communicate through a variety of collaborative technologies (Neece, 2004).

Nonprofit executive board exists to render a public service to an organization by evaluating the organizational performance in relation to the chief professional officers that direct its functioning (Green, Madjidi, Dudley, & Gehlen, 2001).

Telecommuter defined as, “Working away from the traditional office using computers and telecommunication facilities to maintain a link to the office” (Belanger, 1999, p. 139).

Team is defined as, “Teams are distinguishable sets of two or more individuals who interact interdependently and adaptively to achieve specified, shared, and valued objectives” (Guzzo, Salas, & Associates, 1995, p. 15).

Virtual is defined, according to Lipnack and Stamps (2000), to have three contemporary meanings:

- “Not real but appears to exist, something that appears real to the senses but is not in fact,
- Not the same in actual fact but in essence, almost like,
- Virtual as in virtual reality, a recent meaning invented for an emerging capability” (p. 16).

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, et al., 1998, p. 18).

Contents of Dissertation

This dissertation is assembled into five chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction and purpose for the topic studied. In Chapter II, literature is provided to offer the reader a background of the type of research that has already been conducted and possible opportunities for new discoveries. In Chapter III, the methodology of this study is streamlined. The parameters are laid out to specifically provide details on how the analysis was performed, concluded, and presented. Next, in Chapter IV the theme pattern is recorded, explored, and three components for creating and sustaining an effective virtual team are presented. Finally, Chapter V is concluded with recommendations of the research study to open the discussion for future explorations.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Martins, Gilson, and Maynard (2004), “Virtual teams are increasingly prevalent in organizations and, with rare exceptions all organizational teams are virtual to some extent” (p. 823). However, for purposes of this writing, an exploratory case study was implemented to determine and identify a qualitative perspective of multinational executives working virtually as a team and the effects. During the literature investigation, no published studies were identified containing information and research. Nor were there published studies conducted on functioning virtual teams with members elected to volunteer their time and expertise to a multinational executive board for a larger organization of approximately 3,000 members in and throughout Europe. Thus, searches were conducted to find literature on various alternative topics to lay the foundation for the type of exploratory study conducted.

Search engines were used to determine a plethora of topics that would lead to closely linked or related literature on *nonprofit, executive, leadership, boards, virtual, teams, executive virtual teams, multinational virtual teams, global virtual teams, leaders, groups, communication, relationships, trust, system dynamics, culture, and behavior*. Finding numerous articles, the search engine keywords were refined and grouped to locate specific articles that would assist in supporting the theoretical framework to inform, shape, and influence future studies, namely understanding the dynamics of virtual teams.

Articles were investigated, pulled, read, and grouped together according to topic. In addition, articles pulled and retrieved were reviewed for additional articles that would assist in exploration of the topic under review. A theoretical foundation is first highlighted; then, I have compiled the literature reviewed based on the narrowed topics of *nonprofit executive/leadership boards, virtual teams, group communication, group relationships, and trust*. Grouping the articles in this format and presenting literature on what was currently available on the particular topic provided a link to the framework to inform, shape, and influence this study.

Team Performance Theoretical Framework

Since the early 1980s reliance on teams has increased drastically and research surrounding team development has not been able to keep pace with the growing need for understanding how teams can achieve more effective performance (Stout, Salas, & Fowlkes, 1997; Tannenbaum, Beard, & Salas, 1991 as cited in Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, & Spangler, 2004). Achievement of higher levels of team performance has not been as widely researched (Dionne et al., 2004). Nonetheless, DeGroot, Kiker, and Cross (2000, p. 363) found in their meta-analysis that when leadership and performance were examined “results show an effect size at the group level of analysis that is double in magnitude relative to the effect size at the individual level.” Therefore, the focus of this study is aimed at identifying the constructs to foster best practices for *team* performance and success based on individual contributions to teamwork within a virtual environment.

According to Kirkman, Rosen, Tesluk, and Gibson (2004, p. 2) “Both the existing literature on collocated teams and the emerging theoretical work on virtual

teams contain many potential predictors of virtual team performance.” Team performance has generally been thought about as an input-process-output model (Guzzo & Shea, 1992). Historically, this thought has dominated team research and theorizing and it also dominates today (Dionne, et al., 2004; Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Kirkman, et al., 2004). Guzzo and Shea (1992) elaborated on the team performance model,

In this model, *input* typically refers to the things group members bring to the group, including expertise, status, personality attributes. *Process* refers to the interaction among group members, typically including the social exchange of information, influence attempts, leadership efforts, and expressions of approval or disapproval of fellow group members. *Output*, of course, refers to the products yielded by groups. These might include ideas, decisions, plans, artistic creations, and widgets (p. 280).

Performance indicators, resource accessibility, and individual experience vary from team to team; therefore, team performance is represented as a teamwork process-based construct because it depends on communication, relationship, and trust to establish the components of virtual team success (Dionne, et al., 2004; Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Kirkman, et al., 2004). To represent team performance as a teamwork process-based construct allows theoretical connections to interpersonally based processes that are likely present in all teams e.g., communication, relationship, and trust (Guzzo & Shea, 1992). Team performance is represented to be the quality of interpersonal relationships, or in other words, team performance is represented as a teamwork process-based construct (Guzzo & Shea, 1992).

In a study conducted by Cacioppe and Stace (2008), a psychometric evaluation of a survey instrument was used in a quasi-experiment to identify whether an objective measure of team performance could be predicted from the instrument and whether multi-level modeling was also incorporated. The Integral Team Effectiveness Measure (ITEM) was the instrument completed by team members to assess strengths and weaknesses based on a review of research and models of effective teams (Cacioppe & Stace, 2008). Based on a holistic framework, the ability of the instrument to capture a latent factor relevant to team success is tested (Cacioppe & Stace, 2008). Cacioppe and Stace found that although many elements were necessary for good teamwork, there was an underlying common theme. In a sample result of 45 teams, predictions of successful team performance were generated and measured with a self-report instrument (Cacioppe & Stace, 2008).

Another team performance study conducted by Kim, Lee, Lee, Huang, and Makany (2010, p. 41), “sought to identify a varying range of individual and collective intellectual behaviors in a series of communicative intents particularly expressed with multimodal interaction methods.” The authors presented “a new construct (i.e., collective intelligence ratio (CIR)) which refers to a numeric indicator representing the degree of intelligence of a team in which each team member demonstrates an individual intelligence ratio (IR) specific to a team goal” (p. 41). Multimodal team interaction was linked and analyzed with a Poisson-hierarchical generalized linear model (HGLM) (Kim, et al., 2010). Although the study found evidence of a distinctive IR for each team member for certain tasks which led to varying degrees of team CIR (Kim, et al., 2010).

Kirkman, Rosen, Tesluk, and Gibson (2004), studied the impact of team empowerment on virtual team performance through face-to-face interaction. Thirty-five sales and service virtual teams in a high-technology organization were evaluated (Kirkman, et al., 2004). This was the only study conducted which examined team performance within a virtual team. A field study was conducted “to test the direct effects of team empowerment on virtual team process improvement and customer satisfaction and moderating effects of face-to-face interaction on the relationships between team empowerment and both process improvement and customer satisfaction” (p. 6). It was found that the number of face-to-face meetings moderated the relationship between team empowerment and process improvement: team empowerment was a stronger predictor for teams meeting face-to-face less rather than more frequently (Kirkman, et al., 2004).

Finally, the study conducted by Dionne et al. (2004), investigated transformational leadership theory and team performance. Transformational leadership theory was used to provide a framework to investigate a leader’s impact on team performance (Dionne, et al., 2004). “[I]ntegration of leadership and team performance on developing our limited understanding of the link between transformation leadership and various teamwork processes, especially interpersonally based processes, and their subsequent relationship with the team performance” (p. 178-179). Dionne et al. represented team performance as a process-type performance construct characterizing cohesion, communication, and conflict management. The researchers found that transformational leadership theory provided only one way to enhance the understanding of team performance but there were many ways in which transformation learning

promoted performance (2004). Further research and investigation is provided in the next sections which highlight the fundamental topics relevant to the current study of virtual team dynamics.

Nonprofit Executive/Leadership Boards

Defining and measuring nonprofit leadership effectiveness has yet to become a major focus of nonprofit research (Shepeard, 2007). Academic researchers on boards have predominately focused on issues of board structure, control over management behavior, and strategic decision-making (Morrison & Salipante, 2007; Shepeard, 2007). Studies on nonprofit/NGO boards have been conducted in a number of disciplines, (e.g., strategic management, financial economics, accounting, and organization theory) to determine whether specific changes in board structure influence specific outcomes of the organization (Morrison & Salipante, 2007; Shepeard, 2007). Although the underlying mechanisms appear not to have been clearly articulated in the research identified, the functioning or the missions of boards often play a primary role in the effectiveness of a nonprofit organization.

According to Green, Madjidi, Dudley, and Gehlen (2001), “the concept of effectiveness in nonprofit organizations has been controversial and confusing; there has been little progress on the theoretical front” (p. 460). Green et al. found that there were negative correlations between the board and CPO effectiveness in terms of goal attainment and fiscal measures. Andrica (2000) emphasized that strong board leadership and a firm partnership between board and staff members promotes organizational commitment and success. Siebart (2005) stated, “The board is responsible for defining

the organization's mission, establishing policies and overseeing programs, and using performance standards to assess financial and program achievements" (p. 858-859).

Most board members are elected for their leadership qualities as well as for their professional skills in different areas; and they usually represent different stakeholders of the organization (Siebart, 2005). Instead of viewing the board role as an objective entity comprised primarily of fiduciary and legal considerations, its role is defined as essential to and inseparable from the shared meanings held by organizational members, e.g., employees, donors, and activists elected to the board (Cornelissen, Haslam, & Balmer, 2007; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). "Organizational identity—the shared beliefs of members about the central, enduring and distinctive characteristics of the organization—constitutes part of the shared meanings held by members" (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997, p. 594). From a social constructionist perspective, identity becomes an important and collectively held frame invoked by members to both interpret and to take action that is to make sense of their world (Cornelissen, et al., 2007; Gephart, 1993; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Weick, 1995). The association of organizational identity influences how members define themselves as well as their interpretation of issues and roles, responses to problems, and feelings about outcomes (Cornelissen, et al., 2007; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997).

Brudney and Murray (1998) conducted a study concluding that organizational performance and board characteristics interacted significantly (p. 335; as cited in Green, et al., 2001, p. 463). With recent concerns regarding private sector board performance, as exemplified by the collapse of Enron and WorldCom, many have begun to focus on

board member roles in monitoring and evaluating organizational performance as well as determining how board members can act in a most effective manner (Epstein & Roy, 2004). Additionally, vigilant monitoring of organizational processes is essential due to the organization's human capital being diminished when a breakdown of internal control and an activation of the costly takeover market occurs (Cornelissen, et al., 2007; Fama & Jensen, 1983; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). Finkle (1998) indicated that the size and composition of the board had a direct affect on performance, which positively affected the public offerings in the biotechnology industry (Shapiro, Glinvow, & Cheng, 2005). Numerous codes and best governance practices have been developed and deployed in many organizations; however, there is room for significant advances regarding the measurement and improvement of executive board performance (Epstein & Roy, 2004).

Although I was able to locate numerous (68) studies investigating various aspects of nonprofit executive leadership boards, there were none which directly pertained to virtual teams. The studies identified for nonprofit/NGO executive boards used various methodological approaches. The research and study of the literature revealed that there was great variation in size, structure, composition, accountability, and approaches taken by nonprofit executive leadership boards. Given this explicit variation, researchers and practitioners must recognize the diversity of nonprofit executive boards as well as identify strategies and include contextual perspectives regarding research results and planned action (Pauleen, 2004). In this study, the virtual team board did not have one Chief Executive Officer (CEO) which it oversaw, as a matter of fact, the board members represented the various country or local chapters of their resident domicile. Therefore,

the literature pertaining to nonprofit executive leadership boards, although numerous and varied, could only inform and establish a frame of reference for my research study because it was not directly related in methodology, theory, or application.

Virtual Teams

A search of the on-line *Digital Dissertations* database contained 128 dissertations focusing on virtual teams. Dating as far back as 1997, nine dissertations specifically examined the role of leadership within a virtual team setting. The references from the aforementioned dissertations and articles were reviewed in order to identify additional sources of related research. The literature investigation opened the door to multiple layers of exploration presented in various forms of methodology; however, necessary focus was given to studies conducted with individuals representing existing companies and functions rather than classrooms.

Virtual teams, as they are presently described, have been in existence since the mid-1990s (Pauleen, 2004). Practitioners were the first to publish literature regarding the new phenomenon, as it is presently known (Grenier & Metes, 1995; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). In many cases, researchers have been examining student populations (Jarvenpaa, Knoll, & Leidner, 1998; Sarker, Lau, & Sahay, 2001; Warkenten & Beranek, 1999). Research on virtual teams within organizations has emerged only recently (Pauleen, 2004). Virtual team research has been conducted specifically in the areas of facilitating virtual team relationships via conventional communication channels (e.g., Pauleen & Yoong, 2001), communication and trust (e.g., Brown, Poole, & Rodgers, 2004; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999),

communication in a virtual team (e.g., Massey, Montoya-Weiss, & Hung, 2003; Roebuck, Brock, & Moodie, 2004; Sarker, et al., 2001; Warkentin & Beranek, 1999), conflict management in virtual teams (e.g., Montoya-Weiss, Massey, & Song, 2001), decision making (e.g., Schmidt, Montoya-Weiss, & Massey, 2001), virtual team dynamics and effectiveness (e.g., Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000), and finally, challenges to virtual team success (e.g., Kirkman, Rosen, Gibson, Tesluk, & McPherson, 2002).

Since a more holistic view is necessary to inform researchers and practitioners on virtual teaming, researchers are now undertaking a number of research agendas (Godar & Ferris, 2004; Pauleen, 2004). Specifically, researchers have recently been exploring effective team dynamics and performance as well as the influence of organizational policies, technology, and boundary spanning on virtual team effectiveness (Majchrzak, Rice, Malhotra, King, & Ba, 2000; Malhotra, Majchrzak, Carman, & Lott, 2001; Pauleen, 2004). Virtual team dynamics that successfully enable the functionality of virtual team members is an area yet to be explored in-depth (Sarker & Sahay, 2003b); therefore, research on the team dynamics of an executive virtual team board is an important next step (Townsend, et al., 1998).

According to a study conducted by Kirkman et al. (2002), virtual teams build trust by encouraging reliability, consistency, and responsiveness among members. The tasks of planning, operating, delegating, controlling, and holding individuals accountable for their performance are the responsibilities of virtual team members individually. This is because individual actions within or on a project may influence strategic and

operational aspects of infrastructure development and growth (Maughan, 2001). Support within virtual teams, according to a study by Fjermestad and Hiltz (1998), is an important variable that influences the effectiveness of small group decisions. Due to the limited number of studies available, further examination of executive virtual teams to understand the interaction and dynamics that encourage cooperation and collaboration is explored to inform and frame future studies.

Trust is established with each virtual team member as integrity and competency are demonstrated by performance of tasks (Dani, Burns, Backhouse, & Kochhar, 2006; Morris, Marshall, & Rainer, 2002). Trust is essential from all members of the virtual team. “Successful teams are composed of individuals who empower one another to do great work. Team members can encourage each other by giving positive feedback, creating a supportive space for discussion, and being accountable to their group's goals and deadlines” (Boule, 2008, p. 30).

Virtual teams require a great deal of interdependence, reciprocal communication, and feedback to complete projects assigned (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Lipnack and Stamps (2000) stated that when organizational teams go global, language and cultural issues become paramount. Such issues are in need of more investigation, particularly in virtual contexts (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Oakley, 1998). Lipnack and Stamps also identified that when individuals recognize that they are already at a distance from others – culturally and linguistically as well as spatially – they are more conscious of the need to be more explicit and intentional about communication.

Bell and Kozlowski (2002) indicated, that “it is difficult to ascertain how the unique characteristics of virtual teams affect critical leadership functions, including performance management and team development” (p. 15). The authors stated further that there is little current theory that effectively guides research on the leadership and management functions of virtual teams. Bell and Kozlowski further examined leadership roles in a traditional environment and compared them to leadership roles in a virtual environment. The two major leadership functions on which Bell and Kozlowski base their research on are performance management and team development. The researchers determined that the tasks, aims, or missions are very similar to face-to-face leadership; however, the processes undertaken to accomplish tasks and the constraints faced differ because of the spatial distance and communication (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Bordia, 1997).

The ability of virtual teams to monitor performance and implement solutions to work problems is severely restricted by the lack of face-to-face contact within virtual communities; therefore, self-managed teams are necessary to distribute leadership functions that enhance team member self-regulation (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Based on the researchers’ findings and recommendations, future studies are needed to explore the operational issues surrounding leadership in virtual environments. Research pertaining to task complexity and infrastructures that facilitate information sharing, work planning, assignment allocation, feedback, review, information processing, decision making as well as dispute adjudication are of particular importance (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002).

DeSanctis and Monge (1999) found that interactions within virtual teams are tenuous because the configuration of boundaries and relationships are the results of contracts rather than products of developing team member relationships. Kiesler and Sproull (1992) defined the critical differences between computer-mediated communication (CMC) and face-to-face communication to be an absence of social context cues to eliminate codes and misinterpretation of messages. These findings suggest face-to-face communication is an important element to team cohesion in a virtual environment (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000).

Grosse (2002), in her study of virtual team culture and communication, indicated that using technology as a means to establishing relationships across geographical and cultural boundaries is difficult at best. The first and foremost responsibility involves understanding the limitations and advantages in order to adequately utilize technology to the fullest (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000; Grosse, 2002; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). Global virtual teams cross the traditional work boundaries in terms of space, time, geography, and discipline, while depending largely, if not exclusively, on electronically mediated communication (Malhotra et al., 2001; Townsend et al., 1998; Workman 2007). Cultural values and norms must also be taken into consideration (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994; Workman, 2007).

Communication is the heart of the virtual team. Effective communication in a cross-cultural virtual team occurs when team members perceive what was intended to be communicated (Grosse, 2002). The foundation of a working cross-cultural virtual team requires consistent feedback, ongoing communication, active listening, and attention to

what individuals and the group find acceptable and unacceptable (Grosse, 2002). Grosse (2002) advocated the necessity of several communication strategies to result in cross cultural virtual team success. The communication strategies include continuous communication, active listening, simple and clear dialect, incorporate the use of different technologies to advantage, build relationships and trust, reciprocal respect relationship, sensitive to cultural differences, make sure understanding is there, and ask for clarity (Grosse, 2002).

Pauleen (2004) stated, “in virtual teams, leaders are often the nexus of the team, facilitating communications, establishing team processes, and taking responsibility for task completion” (p. 228). Pauleen noted further that leaders cannot control the work processes of virtual teams using traditional leadership strategies; therefore, a new approach is needed to develop a different set of coordination and control mechanisms. A better understanding of the roles of virtual team members is achieved through communication and collaboration of both, the virtual team leader and member (Pauleen, 2004; Zaccarro & Horn, 2003).

In their multiple methods study, Kayworth and Leidner (2001) found that work groups are unique in their locations and that those individuals working in virtual team environments face many challenges. Although virtual teams pose significant challenges for the organizations that deploy them, the same challenges are present in traditional team settings (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001). One significant challenge pertains to virtual team leadership and the structuring of the group processes that link team members across

time, space, and organizational boundaries (Fjermestad & Hiltz, 1998; Hiltz & Turoff, 1985; Kayworth & Leidner, 2001).

Effectively, attention and focus has been give to virtual teams; however, there is no literature which specifically deals with a single virtual team over the course of a six month time frame. The literature reviewed provides ample information to lead the focus, reference and framework for future exploratory studies. This writing is actualized as an exploratory case study focus because it begins with information contained in previous studies to inform, shape, and influence future studies with similar or modified group settings.

Group Communication

Computer mediated communication systems (CMCS), videoconferencing, telephone conferences, email, and other sorts of technologically efficient tools permit organizations to employ the best talented individuals, consultants, or subject matter experts irrespective of each person's location (Duarte & Snyder, 2006). The result is a collective talent of team members that rarely, if ever, meet. A competitive global economy makes it crucial for companies to be able to utilize the benefits of teams and navigate around the complexity of the virtual environment in which so many teams now work (Duarte & Snyder, 2006). The literature pertaining to group communication contained 176 articles; however, the number of these articles that investigated virtual teams was 69. From the number 69, several articles were reviewed to provide a foundation for which to explore group communication elements pertaining to virtual teams. From those articles, additional articles citing the articles found and with similar

topics were explored to gather information; however, the major focus of group communication within virtual teams pertained to technology.

Because computer networks link people through machines, the networks are considered social networks also known as computer-supported social networks (CSSNs) (Howard, 2002; Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996). According to Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, and Haythornthwaite (1996), “the relative lack of social presence on-line fosters relationships with Net members who have more diverse social characteristics than are normally encountered face-to-face” (as cited in Howard, 2002, p. 224). Participants are also given more control over the timing and content of their self-disclosures (Martins, et al., 2004; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000); however, organizational CSSNs are maintained by system administrators who may support management goals by monitoring on-line activities and devising procedures that affect specific social outcomes (Howard, 2002; Wellman, et al., 1996). Individuals communicating through multiple technologies across cultural, political, and geographic boundaries may unwittingly interpret communications in unanticipated ways. Miscommunication, and related unintended consequences, may be due, in part, to fewer social context cues provided as compared to face-to-face interactions (Orlikowski, 2000).

Yoo and Alavi (2001) concluded, “when constrained to lean communication media, managers can focus on improving group cohesion to improve the group’s task outcomes” (p. 385). Kayworth and Leidner (2001) conducted an empirical study and found that project outcomes are more successful based on combining face-to-face and

computer mediated modes of communication among groups. Ocker, et al., (1998), indicated further that “working together in a room but being allowed to communicate only via electronic means appeared to be a frustrating experience for subjects in that condition” (p. 119; as cited in Kayworth & Leidner, 2001, p. 36).

Finholt and Sproull (1990) conducted an empirical study and found that groups communicating through e-mail created a new social phenomenon in organizations by creating a more flexible structure to utilize expertise of employees wherever needed. Given an appropriate mail system and social context, these groups cut across conventional geographic and work unit boundaries to provide a way to tap and pool the expertise of individual employees regardless of location (Finholt & Sproull, 1990; Majchrzak, Malhotra & John, 2005). If given the impression that otherwise inaccessible group members are now accessible through technology, the result may lead to increased commitment to the organization as a whole (Finholt & Sproull, 1990; Majchrzak, et al., 2005).

Belanger, Collins, and Cheney (2001) investigated the perceived productivity, performance, and satisfaction of telecommuters. Belanger et al., “indicated that the level of information systems technologies available to telecommuters impact their performance, and level of communication technologies available impacts productivity, performance, and satisfaction, either directly or through interaction” (p. 170).

Communication is one of the processes most influenced by telecommuting, and yet it is central to the existence of virtual organization and distributed work (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001). Orlikowski (2000) concluded that “the use of new computer mediated

communication technologies should consider additional levels of structuring, for the intervention of others in technology use to exert a significant influence on the nature and effectiveness of organizational communication via new electronic media” (p. 441).

Active knowledge and understanding of computer mediated communication technologies enables teams to more progressively solicit the support and involvement of team members.

Group communications provide a means to obtain an in depth view of the technological means by which teams accomplish tasks for job performance. The referenced articles provide some indication of the means by which communication is extended; however, more information is needed to offer insight to how virtual teams work together not having distance, space, and time as with traditional teams. Conducting a study on a virtual team executive board, a part of a nonprofit organization, will bridge the gaps for team dynamics for executive leadership teams as well as executives who volunteer in a leadership role. The study will broaden the group communication horizon as well as open the door for future studies and research. Reviewing literature for group communication influenced the search for literature on relationships and how teams interact and grow or develop their relationships, especially relationships in a virtual setting.

Relationships

Specific literature pertaining to *group relationships*, *team relationships*, *work and/or professional relationships*, and *virtual team relationships* were substantial. Over 500,000 articles were found on Google Scholar; so it was necessary to refine the scope

of the study to a more refined search criterion. Therefore, articles were searched and references were reviewed further to acquire specific articles that would be beneficial to this study. One article in particular was very similar to the process of building relationships but in a traditional setting. House and Rizzo (1972) conducted a study detailing relationships that were established in organizations by leaders of departmental teams. Their relationship study was of particular interest and significance to this study because it measured the leadership role and the various roles of the members of the team in the structure and weight of the constructed relationships. Basically, House and Rizzo explored the roles of leaders and how they were perceived by other members of the group.

Interestingly enough, House and Rizzo (1972) found that there was a close correlation with leader behavior and organizational effectiveness. Leadership behavior, which affects the team, is like a prism with two congruent parallel sides. From a hierarchal perspective, the leader is housed at the top angle and the congruent parallel sides hold the other members who make up the team. The leaders' attitude, behavior, disposition, and outlook has a direct effect on the team which, in essence, result in both positive and negative consequences.

Mohr and Nevin (1990) conducted a similar relationship study on communication strategies and the power conditions present within asymmetrical versus symmetrical relationships. Mohr and Nevin advocated that open lines of communication have a direct effect on relationships within groups. It is through miscommunication or a lack of communication where relationships are not cultivated and prospered (Mohr &

Nevin, 1990). Although collaborative communication costs much more in terms of time, effort, and money, it is best fostered under conditions where symmetrical power structures exist (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Relationship exchanges involve joint planning between parties where there is a long-term orientation and interdependence is high (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). On the other hand, discrete exchanges usually happen on an ad hoc basis where the relationship between parties has a short-term itinerary and interdependence is superficial (Mohr & Nevin, 1990).

Since most researchers studying virtual teams incorporate the technological view of interaction and exchange, there is minimal research pertaining to the social relationships that are present through virtual work. Egea (2006) conducted a study in an academic setting utilizing email and chat technology for off campus students participating in the study. Synchronous technology was used for introductions, weekly meetings, and brainstorming (Egea, 2006). Her study focused on the social relationships that were developed, nurtured, and encouraged through conversation, awareness, and coordination. The students were asked to compare their virtual interactions and exchanges with traditional methods while developing understanding and strategies for flow of talk, sharing of ideas, and breakdowns (Egea, 2006). Egea's study gave the students the opportunity to think about their interactions from a different frame of reference because it required them to be aware of what was going on in the conversations as well as ways in which to fix the communication strategy. In other words, this method allowed for the students to decipher a root cause analysis and to determine a method of correction.

Thinking in terms of what went wrong and the way in which to achieve the intended purpose of communication expanded the idea of communication being something that just happens. Rather communication became viewed as something that makes things happen whether good or bad. The significance of the conversation underpinned the interaction dynamic for successful team engagement and the building of positive relationships and trust (Egea, 2006). “Critical to the flow of talk, whether by chat or email, was the importance of positively worded discussions and encouraging statements” (Egea, 2006, p. 88). Speaking with awareness of the audience as a guide attributed to the respect factor that underlies conversation exchanges.

Trust

Henttonen and Blomqvist (2005) defined trust as “an actor’s expectation of the other actors’ capability, goodwill and self-reference visible in mutual beneficial behavior enabling cooperation under risk” (p. 108). When trust is an issue, virtual team members have more difficulty working together (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). According to O’Hara-Devereaux and Johansen (1994), trust is the only means by which virtual team members are able to work across distance, space, and time (as cited in Earley & Mosakowski, 2000, p. 36). Psychological distances are erected when there is a lack of intent to proceed through the barricade of personal phobias, idiosyncrasies, and differences. To encourage trust, relationship, and communication, all three are necessary in higher levels or degrees of pursuit. Psychological distances are present with only surface level pursuits. Once the barrier is trampled, there is room for pursuit of other areas of interest. This description is much like war in that troops are

gathered together, they are fighting the opponent to the death. Death encompasses an idea, a stronghold, a belief, an experience, a generalization, and defeat. Standing firm in greater trust of ourselves allows us to yield more trust to others, but it requires more communication, understanding, and reflection to ourselves of what is right, what we want, and who we believe ourselves to be.

In Javenpaa and Leidner's (1999) study, they specifically looked at four virtual teams without previous history working together, located in different countries, and only interacting through computer-mediated technology (Powell, et al., 2004). The result of their study indicated several meaningful interpretations as highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1 Trust-Facilitating Communication Behaviors and Member Actions

Communication behaviors that facilitated trust early in a group's life	Communication behaviors that helped maintain trust later in life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Communication - Communication of Enthusiasm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predictable Communication - Substantial and Timely Responses
Member actions that facilitated trust and maintained trust early in a Group's life	Member actions that helped later in a Group's life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coping with technical uncertainty - Individual initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Successful transition from social to procedural to task focus - Positive leadership - Phlegmatic response to crises

Source: Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999, p. 807.

According to Javenpaa and Leidner (1999), a virtual team is able to begin its venture with trust and ending with trust (as cited in Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000, p. 481). Certain characteristics and most importantly, the desire of the individual as well as the buy-in and support of the group to commit to the idea of working in a virtual capacity is necessary. To accomplish trust initially, a virtual team member needs to be open to the idea of social communication that is reciprocated and without overly much

delay. An individual is responsible for the initiation and is responsive to communication, which is reinforced through reciprocation. The communication piece is continuous throughout the virtual team's existence opening up to show each team member who a particular virtual team member is, e.g., characteristics, likes, beliefs, what's important to them.

Working virtually is what I attribute as being close to being blind or deaf. For either of the two situations, they are not able to fully rely on one of their senses but rely on other senses to understand perspectives of others. With virtual team members, it is very similar because they may be working in a situation where there is no video, no face-to-face meetings, or no internet telephone to talk to or accomplish tasks. Therefore, more dependence on the individual and their interpretation and sense-making regarding what others communicate is important. In other words, just as Javenpaa and Leidner's 1999 research concluded, the successful accomplishment of tasks requires leadership to be encouraged within each virtual team member through the calm accomplishment of goals and objectives (as cited by Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000, p. 481).

Summary of Literature Reviewed

Virtual teams allow organizations to be more fluid, flexible, adaptive, and responsive to changing circumstances because of the cross boundaries of space (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Oakley, 1998; Pauleen, 2003, 2004; Pauleen & Yoong, 2001; Townsend, et al., 1998). Further investigation is needed to explore the contexts surrounding the restrictions of traditional communication and CMC that connect team members (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Because of the amount of time it

takes to decode social cues and to develop interpersonal relationships through CMC, over physical distance, and through other mediating technologies, performance management and team development may be impeded (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; DeSanctis & Monge, 1999; Kiesler & Sproull, 1992; Majchrzak, et al., 2005; Walther, 1995). In an effort to elaborate upon and more effectively address key unanswered questions identified regarding executive virtual team performance, an in-depth exploration of a virtual executive leadership team is warranted.

Bell and Kozlowski (2002) emphasized, “as virtual teams perform more complex tasks, they will need to adopt more synchronous communication media that provide greater information richness” (p. 27). Exploration toward that end is just beginning. Today’s virtual executive teams are able to engage in many of the same functions as traditional face-to-face teams. They launch multi-national goods and services, negotiate mergers and acquisitions, and manage strategic alliances (Pauleen, 2003). Flexibility is a feature of virtual teams because organizational responses are substantially more dynamic than in traditional settings (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Townsend, et al., 1998). Geographical location of team members is no longer as significant a barrier to organizational success (Majchrzak, et al., 2005; Townsend, et al., 1998); however, more information is needed on the social innuendoes involved with building trust in the professional relationships. Accomplishment of tasks is priority for the organization, social interaction, stability, and predictability is priority for the individuals working virtually.

Available research indicates that leadership characteristics are similar within virtual and face-to-face settings, more information is needed on the specifics concerning executive virtual team functions (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Pauleen, 2004). Investigating the individual perspectives of virtual team members will supply the needed information to inform research on the reasons individuals choose to work virtually as well as how team members are able to successfully construct virtual relationships in the completion of projects.

The topics of investigation included nonprofit executive/leadership boards, virtual teams, group communication, relationships, and trust. Multiple topics were investigated to gather literary information in order to identify studies, methods, and recommendations to assist with researching the team dynamics of an executive virtual board. Some of the same literature previously identified will be used to support the methodology explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is a set of interpretive activities that are difficult to clearly define (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Researchers employ multiple theoretical paradigms claiming use of qualitative research methods and strategies because it is applicable across various disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Therefore, it requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data (Merriam, 1998). Individuals are best suited for this task because to adequately perform qualitative research through interviews, observations, and analysis of behavior they are able to provide insight and detail into research tasks as well as interviewee tasks performed (Merriam, 1998).

For purposes of this research, a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) was conducted to specifically focus on the virtual team dynamics created and constructed by a particular nonprofit executive board. Team dynamics encompass multiple dimensions of the persons participating with this study because their perspectives involve their experiences. Virtual team members bring his/her beliefs, values and attitudes that structure the behavior patterns of this particular board (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Spradley, 1980). The researcher's use of a qualitative case study method takes into consideration the virtual board member and his/her cultural context (Spradley, 1980). In other words, a qualitative case study was conducted to provide a detailed examination of one single group and their setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). “

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) further state,

In these studies the major data-gathering technique is participant observation (supplemented with formal and informal interviews and review of documents) and the focus of the study is on a particular organization (school, rehabilitation center) or some aspect of the organization (p. 55).

The participant observations provided descriptive explanations of the setting, where the meetings were held, the board members present, what was discussed, the characteristics of each member, and his/her respective role. Observations focused on the details surrounding each virtual board member. Attention was specifically given to the way in which conversations moved and transitioned, how decisions were made, and expressions and responses to conversations during board meetings. As a result, questions were created to the focus of these observations (Spradley, 1980).

Two particular strategies of a qualitative case study were used to gather and collect data. (1) Interviews in multiple forms, which included face-to-face, telephone, and email were used to gather information and (2) participant observations were used i.e., observations of email correspondence to board members and conference calls over the internet as well as interactions when they were together in the same setting. Although the two identified strategies were important for collecting information, it was also necessary to observe participants, listen to them, and make inferences from data collected (Spradley, 1979). To provide a detailed account of the relationships that were constructed by this board, a look at each board member was necessary to fit the pieces together to result in a whole.

Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand and elaborate upon executive virtual team member's individual perceptions of team dynamics. Focus was placed on their relationships and their virtual communication milieus utilizing a qualitative case study approach (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research allows the researcher to describe and elaborate upon the experiences of virtual board members. Therefore, a look at a particular virtual board's social practices for interactions through the use of technology and face-to-face interactions was necessary to understand experiences in-depth.

Three primary questions were used:

1. What is the experience of being a member of a multinational, virtual executive board?
2. What are the executive board dynamics as perceived by board members working in a multinational, virtual environment?
3. What conditions are perceived necessary by board members for executive virtual team members to best foster optimum virtual team performance?

Study Design

This researcher will use this study to contribute to the current literature highlighting the characteristics of virtual teams and provide new insights regarding virtual boards. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) stated that the goal of qualitative research is to

better understand human behavior and experience in order to more fully understand the meanings that individual subjects construct. The primary reason for selecting this design was to study a virtual team in its natural setting without taking away from the meanings and interpretations described by participants (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research conceptualizes the process used to describe and analyze the meaning interpreted by the investigator (Merriam, 1998).

Initial Meeting of Participants and Making Introductions

In order to begin research on this particular topic, I spent a weekend with the executive virtual team in France, which was to be the setting for the annual conference that year. The initial introductory meeting lasted for one and one half days. Board members refined and amended their goals and objectives for the upcoming national conference of 2005. This introductory meeting also gave me the opportunity to candidly express my intentions and request permission to study and observe the virtual board. Individual conversations and group conversations were had with the present board members identifying and discovering more about the type of technology they used, the frequency of meetings, and agenda for completion of the board's project (which entailed a conference for the at-large organization during the month of September 2005).

Participant Details

The board consisted of eight members. All eight of the board members met the criteria for the study. During the course of the study, seven of the eight board members were interviewed face-to-face. Through the course of the study, one of the board members responded to interview questions through email and four were responsive to

both email and telephone interview follow-up questions. During the course of this study three board members were unresponsive to email and telephone interview follow-up questions. Through the course of the study, three board members resigned allocating their role to each of their designated substitutes. Although efforts were made to identify and contact board members as well as their substitutes, however, neither were unavailable for additional conversation. Four of the participants for this board were female and four of the participants were male. All participants resided on the continent of Europe representing the United Kingdom, Austria, the Netherlands, Turkey, Ireland, France, and Germany, which accurately represents current global virtual team populations as well as the comprehensive organization for which the board members represent. Some of the board members were born in different countries (e.g., Russia, the United States, Bulgaria, and Poland) but resided in the countries referenced for organization representation. For example, one board member was born and raised in the United States; however, spent the last 25 years in Europe. The board members are appointed and elected by the general membership of the organization to work and represent the organization to the public at large and internationally for their local chapters.

Interviewing Participants

During my second visit to France, I attended the national conference that was discussed at my first visit. The conference lasted five days where board members and general members honed their skills on interculturalism, training, and communication. They were also informed about advancements and/or changes in board policies,

procedures, and goals for 2005-2006. Lastly, board members had the rare opportunity to conduct face-to-face meetings as a board as well as conduct meetings with general members of the organization.

Prior to this second meeting of board members, permission was granted by Texas A & M University to study the virtual board through the Institutional Review Board. During this visit, I conducted one-on-one face-to-face interviews with seven board members. Then weeks later, several follow up interviews were requested with all eight board members; however, further interactions were conducted with five board members. One member responded to further follow-up email questions only. Four board members were responsive to both email and telephone questions. The board members were male and female, of varying nationalities and their ages ranged from 25-65 years of age. The board members volunteered their time and membership on the board and work, own, or are employed in interculturalist training organizations in the represented countries. All board members were all educated with at least a bachelor's degree, and had familial support of their professional interest. Most of the board members were in relationships with wives, husbands, or partners and most had children.

A qualitative method of interviewing was used to collect the data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The aim of the interview was to collect data related to virtual team dynamics, i.e., culture, relationships, and communication. The interviews were, on average, one and one half hours in duration. The interview process consisted of primarily open-ended questions and was semi-structured. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed into written text by a

professional transcriber. Transcripts were provided to the participants for review and validation. Individuals had access only to their own individual interviews. Standard practices regarding the maintenance of participants' confidentiality and anonymity were utilized (Merriam, 1998).

In addition, further information was gathered through telephone conversations as well as personal emails. It was sometimes necessary to inquire about the meaning of content contained in interview texts or to discuss additional points for clarity. Therefore, additional conversations were had by phone or through email correspondence and/or both so that information gathered was fully understood.

Informed Consent from Participants

The interview process as outlined by Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, (1993) established more of a dialogue or interaction to exchange information. "Participants usually enjoy sharing their expertise with an interested and sympathetic listener. For some, it is also an opportunity to clarify their own thoughts and experience" (Merriam, 1998, p.85). Throughout the interviews, observations of the personal characteristics of the board members were made; their interactions with the organizational environment and their interactions with the interviewer, helped to inform my understanding of the board members and their experiences. Each board member was asked to review and sign an informed consent form explaining his/her rights as a human subject in this study for the face-to-face interview.

Informed consent forms were also presented prior to telephone interviews and email interviews. During these interactions, I noted the length of time to respond to

questions, their method of explaining their points through email, the need for tangible conversations over the internet telephone rather than through email, and their lack of responses to further questions. Additionally, I observed their email correspondence to each other and the way in which they exchanged and interacted to move information forward. For example, the board members who most often responded to email, those who did not respond, and those who responded days or weeks later and what specifically they responded. It was also entertaining to listen to conversations over the phone where three to four members were gathered to discuss tasks to be performed for and by the board. Over the internet phone, they exhibited a more playful side but were also serious about resolving board business.

Member Checks and Follow-up

The second phase included member checks in order to clarify and confirm the data provided by the board members. Member checks were used to verify that the data gathered was what the participants intended (Erlandson et al., 1993). The realities that were constructed from the interviews are designed to provide thick description essential for the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, follow-up email questions were submitted to clarify and follow-up on transcribed text responses from the original face-to-face interview. Of the eight board members only five were consistently responsive. One of the eight responded to email correspondence on occasion and two of the eight did not respond to telephone nor email requests. The telephone interviews that were conducted were approximately fifteen minutes in length. Telephone interviews were conducted when board members had time

and wanted to converse over the internet telephone to the additional questions presented. The primary intent of the additional forms of interviewing was to better understand the board member's experiences and what next steps could be taken to enhance the interaction, cohesion, and performance of the board members in their dialogue, relationships, and individual cultural cues.

Data Analysis

Although there is no one methodological technique that ensures accuracy in the focus of everyday routines, a mixture of methods were involved in the data collection process, i.e., participant observation, non-participant observation, and various forms of interviewing that typically are less formal and more conversational than in the case of survey research (Snow, 1999). Regardless of the specific technique, the primary objective was to secure an up-close, first-hand, intimate understanding of the social worlds, issues, and/or processes of interest, particularly as they were experienced and understood by the individuals studied (Snow, 1999).

Organizing the collected data involved inputting the information and compiling it into the NVivo qualitative research program. Email, interview text, telephone transcripts were all transcribed and compiled into the NVivo software program.

Welsh (2002) noted the following:

Thus, whilst the searching facilities in NVivo can add rigor to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to carry out quick and accurate searches of a particular type (the researcher may be reluctant to carry out these searches manually, especially if the data set is large), and can add to

the validity of the results by ensuring that all instances of a particular usage are found, this searching needs to be married with manual scrutiny techniques so that the data are in fact thoroughly interrogated (p. 5).

The information was then read and reread to identify and determine various coding themes throughout the study. The steps of the data analysis have been outlined to provide a clear understanding of how the conclusions were made.

The fundamental steps of the analysis included:

1. Upon completing the seven face-to-face person interviews, interview tapes were transcribed. One by one, the transcriptions were carefully read along with the field notes of the interviews as well as compared with the recorded interviews. Necessary corrections were recorded and saved to additional versions of the original documents. The transcriptions (also known as protocols) were reviewed in order to delve deeper into the meanings acquired (Colaizzi, 1969). The corrected versions of the compiled data were put into the NVivo system where coding and classification of collected data were initiated.
2. Follow up email questions for clarity and telephone conversations were conducted to gather thorough information as well as refine thoughts and ideas gleaned from information. The follow up conversations helped to reconstruct the individual interviews as well as explain the responses from their individual perspectives. This information was also then compiled into the NVivo system for analysis, interpretation, coding, and classification.

3. Participant observations of board interactions amongst themselves by email and/or telephone were also gathered to witness the exchanges in their own established settings. It was important not to take away from the participant environment that was previously established because they were already familiar with their interaction and exchange styles (Merriam, 1998). The field notes were incorporated into the protocol to help establish an overall understanding of the board member's experience as it was shared. Each protocol provided a significant element of the position and thinking of each individual board member. The protocol revealed a code of conduct or behavior for handling information that went out and entered into the dynamics of the group.
4. Participant observations were necessary to generate field notes among those board members who were not interviewed face-to-person, by telephone, or through email communications. Observations were made of the general email and telephone conversations among board members where those board members were present. It was necessary to collect and gather data to make anecdotal records from the observations of those board members who were unavailable for individual interviews but who communicated with other board members through email or by the internet telephone system. "In this approach, both data collection and the ultimate interpretation are guided by emergent design, in which the researcher builds an understanding of the phenomenon as it exists in its natural environment" (Hill, 1991, p. 300).

5. After being re-familiarized with the interviews and the experiences each board member shared, individual summaries were typed and created with rich description and detail pertaining to conversations, fieldnotes, underlying meanings and feelings and emotions that were witnessed through each form of communication to gather and collect data. Information was chosen that was relevant to understanding the board dynamics present for cultivating relationships through their cultural exchanges. Relevancy was identified and connected through a collage of participant responses where clarity was significant. In a qualitative case study, it is important to paint a picture of what was said and how participants acted as the thoughts flowed from their mouths and to their fingertips (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The stories are told through descriptions of events segmented as they occurred over an extended period of six months (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). First person accounts of descriptions of experiences in formal and informal conversations and interviews (Spradley, 1980) were essential to tying the whole experience together.
6. In order to complete the member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), all board members were sent a copy of the transcribed texts from our discussions and were asked to review and confirm the accuracy of the identified statements and related interpretations. Although all responding to the request were in agreement with their original statements, a few expanded on some of their comments providing more information for clarity.

7. Once the descriptive details for each participant's interaction were written and typed, the themes were recorded using NVivo. Coding within the NVivo system required building nodes. The nodes were coded initially as free nodes due to the abundance of data. The nodes were assigned to a line, sentence, or paragraph of all text sources. Once all the information was appropriately coded, tree nodes were constructed to piece all the information together. Three major themes were identified for the study. The themes included communication, relationships, and trust. The starting point began with the thoughts, ideas, and perceptions of board members. These thoughts, ideas, and perceptions were recorded and classified according to each theme (Moustakas, 1994). The data were then formed into a graphic display using the MindManager system to graphically display the themes, subthemes, and sub-subthemes.
8. The strategy used for making a theme analysis was a closer examination of the board. An in-depth analysis provided a bridge from the communication, the relationships, and trust of the individuals who comprised the virtual team (Spradley, 1980). The component parts of the data for each participant highlighted in a table were used to generate a large domain for the executive virtual board in relation to each major theme. A list of thematic domains was used to compare against the larger domain to form taxonomy, thus, grouping some together as subthemes (Spradley, 1980). These domains were highlighted to focus on the wholeness of experiences rather than solely on its objects or parts (Moustakas, 1994). At this point, according to Colaizzi (1969), the researcher is

involved in that indescribable thing known as creative insights where the researcher must leap from what his/her participants say to what they mean (Colaizzi, 1969). This involves the human capacity to move from a statement to its referent point (Moustakas, 1994) and involves portraying someone's experience from a different perspective. To identify the three theme functions as general relationships among thematic domains, it was necessary to locate similarities as well as contrasts (Spradley, 1980). The domains were distinguished by contrasting for levels of similarities and differences to examine all other domains with the dimensions of contrast in mind (Spradley, 1980). The aim is to determine conflicts between behaviors, values, and ideals and how those conflicts are resolved (Spradley, 1980). A componential analysis of all known domains within a theme focuses your attention on the theme as a whole (Spradley, 1980).

9. The predicted meanings for all board members were considered, and comparable or similarly related statements were bunched together to form themes. The difficulty was patiently questioning the evolving themes that were common to all of the subjects' protocols (Colaizzi, 1969). The challenge was in shifting from predicted meanings to the themes found within them. This step allowed growth of the crucial requisites of the board member's experience with cultivating relationships, working as a virtual team and successful completion of tasks. Many statements were aligned with these three topics and clustered accordingly. However, after a closer analysis, a third set of statements were identified to be a

theme representing relationship, communication, and trust representing the elements necessary for virtual teamwork.

10. In order to validate the themes, the original protocols were reviewed to ensure there was nothing in the protocols that could not be accounted for in the themes. External reviewers were petitioned to validate the identified themes and provide suggestions to best accomplish the presentation of the analysis.
11. Although independent themes appeared, it was important to portray the virtual board member themes through their expressed experiences. The themes permeated all the experience of the board members, which were observed during the six-month period. The themes co-existed and supported the entire experience as described by each board member.
12. Lastly, I wrote out a description of all the data collected from fieldnotes, interviews, emails, telephone notes, NVivo notes, and MindMapping into a comprehensive analysis for each participant and each theme, subtheme, and sub-subtheme.

Implications for Research Design

Although the steps for data analysis are referenced above, it was important to note the implications for research design because a large part of the data collection process was over the internet. For purposes of the online collection of data, Lankshear and Leander's (2005) suggestions were followed.

1. The age, space, and durability of the internet and its accessibility was considered prior to, during, and at the close of collecting data (Lankshear & Leander, 2005).

Consideration and reflection was given to the communication tool in case of offline breaks, or breakdowns in the system. Fortunately, there were no breakdowns online through email; however, breakdowns were experienced over Skype (internet telephone system). On those occasions, communication was typed on screen to make arrangements for another proposed contact method or time.

2. So as not to be identified as a lurker, notice was given to board members of my research purposes and intent. “Researchers should be especially alert and sensitive to the ease with which it is possible to participate fully within virtual worlds without alerting others to one’s research status and intentions (Leander and McKim, 2003)” (as cited in Lankshear & Leander, 2005, p. 327). Face-to-face discussions were held with the board on February 26-27, 2005. At that time, they were able to meet me and vote on whether I would be allowed to observe their interactions. Credibility was established by my flying half way across the world with two weeks’ notice. My flying to meet them in their own environment to present my desire to observe their interactions for research purposes was a new experience to some of them and a pleasant surprise. Official observations began on September 20, 2005 through March 3, 2006. As part of the approval process, the board members agreed to include me on all email correspondence, and I was welcomed to join Skype phone calls.
3. “The radically dispersed, distributed, yet ‘placeless’ nature of the ‘field’ entails different ways of thinking about participant observation and the thinking about

participant observation and the bounding of sites from traditional conceptions associated with ethnographic and other forms of fieldwork” (Lankshear & Leander, 2005, p. 327). Consideration and reflection was taken for each communication. The intent of the sender as well as the comprehension of the reader were applied to each inference drawn based on the particular participant’s role, history, background, culture, and priority.

4. Consideration given for online and offline environments that followed moving and traveling practices of participants to clarify relations between practice, context, and identity (Lankshear & Leander, 2005). Only two trips were made abroad for face-to-face interaction and interviews. Consequently, there were numerous email correspondences. The virtual board kept me abreast of their schedules with meetings and internet phone conversations.
5. For validation purposes, participant identity and authenticity are observed in an offline in-person setting for full context interpretation (Lankshear & Leander, 2005). Offline visits with board members were on two different occasions. An informal meeting and observation was cast on February 26-27, 2005. Additionally, an extended formal observation was conducted on September 20-26, 2005. For the extended stay, I was able to observe board members in their natural environment. The board members conducted board meetings on both occasions, of which I was able to participate, and they also held meetings with their general membership who had elected them for service to the virtual board. During these observations, I was able to observe their interactions with general

members formally during the meetings and assemblies as well as casually during meals.

In summary, the research design was built on the methods of communicating online, face-to-face, and with various forms of interviews and observations. This research study was built based on the data collection described above with checks and rechecks for clarity. In spite of limited interactions, the objective was to build an exploratory research study providing accurate information and collection of data from the participants to efficiently portray the perspectives of the virtual board.

Credibility

Research's purpose is to produce valid and confirmable knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998). "Being able to trust research results is especially important to professionals in applied fields, such as education, in which practitioners intervene in people's lives" (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). It is vitally important to the research to have conducted the investigation in an ethical manner to ensure dependability and credibility (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Yin, 2003).

Research involving participants across different countries, time zones, and various first tongues involved face-to-face meetings, telephone meetings, and numerous email correspondences over the internet. Interpreting the observations in a social context required taking each participant's perspectives to completely understand the reactions, feelings, and emotions shared by participants. Going into and conducting this study, I assumed that reality was holistic, multidimensional, and ever changing, rather than a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured

as in quantitative research (Merriam, 1998). My primary objective was to seek out the world where the participants resided and how they existed, acted, and interpreted it and everything contained therein. Merriam (1998) stated, “Since there are many interpretations of what is happening, there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish credibility in the traditional sense” (p. 205).

To ensure credibility, several strategies were incorporated into the research process:

1. Time was used to reflect and identify personal biases (Yin, 1979; Yin, 1980).

Identification of personal biases opened the door to recognize the dominant voice of the opinions and interpretations of the participants from my own. I could then tell the story of each participant without my own distortions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rather than reflecting on me, I could then spend time reflecting on each participant and remove myself from the observation and interpretation.

2. It was decided that the qualitative research for the study would be considered as a blank slate with myself as the artist transforming the blank slate into a masterpiece of aesthetic artistry through philosophy. I followed Taylor and Bogdan’s (1998) concept that “Qualitative research is a craft” (p. 10). I took on the idea that my research presented more questions, which provided answers emphasizing the reality that virtual board members were unique individuals.
3. The phenomenological perspective was identified and set up as the focus of the study, interpretation, analysis, and findings (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The focus of the study on dynamics of a virtual team was always

placed at the center of diagrams, drawings, and field notes to reflect the foundation of the study.

4. I did not think of myself as the expert holding all answers. Rather, it was more important for me to take on the role as participant observer as a sponge learning to adapt and adjust to get the best possible solutions. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), all aspects of research, even silence, is a time for trust, learning, and growth. The participant trusts you in their silence because as the researcher you must be listening with ears, eyes, mouth, hands, legs, toes, and posture to get them to talk, feel comfortable, and reveal their perspectives honestly (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).
5. Member checks were conducted following interviews. Typed transcripts were sent electronically to each participant for their checking, modification, or revision. Member checks were conducted to speak to the validity of the conversations with each participant as well offer credibility for the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
6. Finally, I employed the technique of triangulation to improve credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Analysis, interpretation, and theory was triangulated through colleagues, methods, and theories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). These steps were incorporated into my own research agenda in order to provide quality research.

Erlandson, et al., (1993) stated the following:

If intellectual inquiry is to have an impact on human knowledge, either by adding to an overall body of knowledge or by solving a particular problem, it must guarantee some measure of credibility about what it has inquired, must communicate in a manner that will enable application by its intended audience, and must enable its audience to check on its findings and the inquiry process by which the findings were obtained (p. 28).

Summary of Research Methodology

The executive virtual team represented a multinational population willing to participate in this research study in order to advance and develop as a team. A virtual board of elected officers held terms for a minimum of two years. They were elected by the general membership consisting of various countries in and throughout Europe. The process included fifteen minutes to one and a half hour face-to-face semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interview questions were focused on perspectives and experiences with building relationships while working virtually. Additional interviews and conversations were conducted over the internet telephone as well as through email correspondence. During the initial face-to-face interviews at the board members' designated location, seven face-to-face interviews were conducted. One board member was not interviewed. One board member responded to email follow-up questions and four board members responded to phone and email follow-up interviews. Three of the eight board members were nonresponsive to email or telephone follow-up interviews. Through each method of communication, the board members were ensured of the

anonymity of the study as well as the discretion that would be given to identifying characteristics.

The research analysis involved taking the statements from various forms of communication, which spoke to their personal experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of working virtually. From those statements, the data was analyzed to fully actualize the individual perspectives leading to the most effective team dynamic for the particular group. Member checks were used continuously to provide a most appropriate and honest reflection of the ideas and words expressed. This researcher chunked and coded the ideas into teams that were relevant to this research study so that a valid interpretation of ideas would be conveyed to the reading audience. Full immersion of the data allowed me to comprehend and interpret the perspectives of each participant openly and candidly. Thus, the next chapter I describe the findings of these open and candid revelations uncovered by the data.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Several methodologies of observation were used to collect and gather data for this research study. Observation was employed during face-to-face meetings and interviews. Listening and observing word emphasis and voice elevation was observed during conference calls and telephone interviews. Finally, questioning and re-questioning for clarity was employed during email interviews to explore a deeper understanding of what was expressed during the face-to-face, group conference call, and paired telephone interviews. Direct observation was the primary form of data collection. Through direct observation, I was able to compile field notes from which I noted specifics pertaining to details of interactions between board members. Identifying and determining the themes for an exploratory research study was largely the result of categorizing the information through the NVivo and Mind Manager software. The data collected electronically was compiled into the NVivo software and from there coded and classified. The data included email, attachments, face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, and email interviews, and correspondence with board members. The data consisted of approximately 791 documents collected and compiled into the NVivo system from September 2005 until February 2006. Originally, during the first level coding, the primary topics searched included leadership, teamwork, and communication. Using the NVivo software, nodes (subheadings) for each topic were designated as the data were read and separated. Incorporated into each topic were subheadings, which totaled 34 nodes.

Second level coding prompted a more thorough breakdown on the conclusions drawn from the first level coding conducted to determine the 34 nodes. This researcher uses Table 2 to detail the specifics of how the nodes were characterized under the specific headings of the first level coding. The second level coding actually consisted of a reprocessing of all the data compiled in the original 34 nodes to regroup and condense for deeper understanding and themes. The common themes were placed with topics which specifically defined and elaborated on the examples found. The 34 nodes were then condensed and categorized by major themes. Serious reflection of the regrouped and re-categorized nodes required a meaningful perspective and point of view of the individual, e.g., the way they looked, their mannerisms, the pitch of their voice when making the comments, the points made, and listening to their perspectives. A precise focus on each individual allowed the words to come alive and breathe life. The topics were shifted and reorganized, shifted again and reorganized, and finalized into topics that best characterized the participants of this virtual team. With each shift and reorganization, the nodes were condensed, added and/or eliminated as nodes best representing the themes. The final node count included nine nodes with three representing each major theme.

Table 2 First Level Coding Nodes

<u>Leadership</u>	<u>Teamwork</u>	<u>Communication</u>
Acknowledgement	Time	Communication
Emotion	Common Ground	Email
Individual goals for Organization	Common goals & objectives	Individual recognition-satisfaction
Cultural Issues	Building Relationships	Skype (internet telephone)
Leadership	Competitive goals	Structure
Loving Culture	Teams	Common goals & objectives
Moving forward	Working virtually	Personality
Personality		Relationship
Politics		Roles
Purpose		Virtual communication
Reflection		Cultural Issues
Relationship		
Roles		
Structure		
Support		
Universal value system		

Complete focus and attention was necessary to determine the specific pieces that correctly and accurately adjoined to the other pieces to create a visual composition of the findings. The process of putting the data together with this exploratory case study was different in that it required creating a picture of team dynamics through input from all board members. Therefore, a determination of the primary themes, subthemes, and a framework which reiterates the findings in this study throughout the discussion was identified.

In this chapter, the themes are introduced individually and then summarized at the close. First, an analysis of communication is presented as voiced by the board members (with checks and clarity provided by virtual board members). Originally, the hypothesis was that communication would be presented from a technological perspective; however, after further investigation and exploration, it was concluded that communication for virtual team members was much larger than the technology through which it was transmitted. Communication became a major topic of study because it was

vital to all aspects of the team's existence. Second, relationship is presented to offer greater insight into this executive virtual team. Specifically, data were coded and classified based on board member input for what they needed or did to foster the manifestation of working relationships as part of the larger organization. Finally, trust is reviewed and analyzed. It was determined that trust played a significant role in the communication and relationships that board members formed. Although 'trust' was not the term of choice used to voice their perspectives, board members spoke of the characteristics of trust as the component most fundamental to their team; in other words, the larger organization for which the board governed and acted on behalf of the European general membership. The board members dedicated their volunteered time and commitment to the organization through the general membership. The general members had entrusted the board members to satisfactorily represent general members and act on their behalf, the expectation was that the board would in return trust each other.

Further, from the dominant themes evolved several subthemes. Basically, the subthemes, helped to support the themes. The subthemes are presented from a holistic framework established within the primary themes and structured in a way that each primary theme is reflected through virtual team culture. Each board member represented a certain leadership role in the team, which commended and sometimes reproved the assemblage of the group. Ultimately, the immediate goal of the executive virtual team was to communicate in and through their leadership roles to elevate relationships so that trust would ensue. According to Earley and Mosakowski (2000), when virtual team members perceive shared understandings with other members, it results in a higher

propensity to trust one another. Therefore, although the predominant themes included communication and relationships, it was essential to expand the virtual team dynamics of leadership and trust. To most effectively present the virtual team performance framework, it is necessary to provide specific details on how the data collection and gathering of information of the findings were deciphered and analyzed. In the next section, elaborate description is provided to highlight the way in which virtual team performance as a process-based construct was used to build a virtual team performance framework.

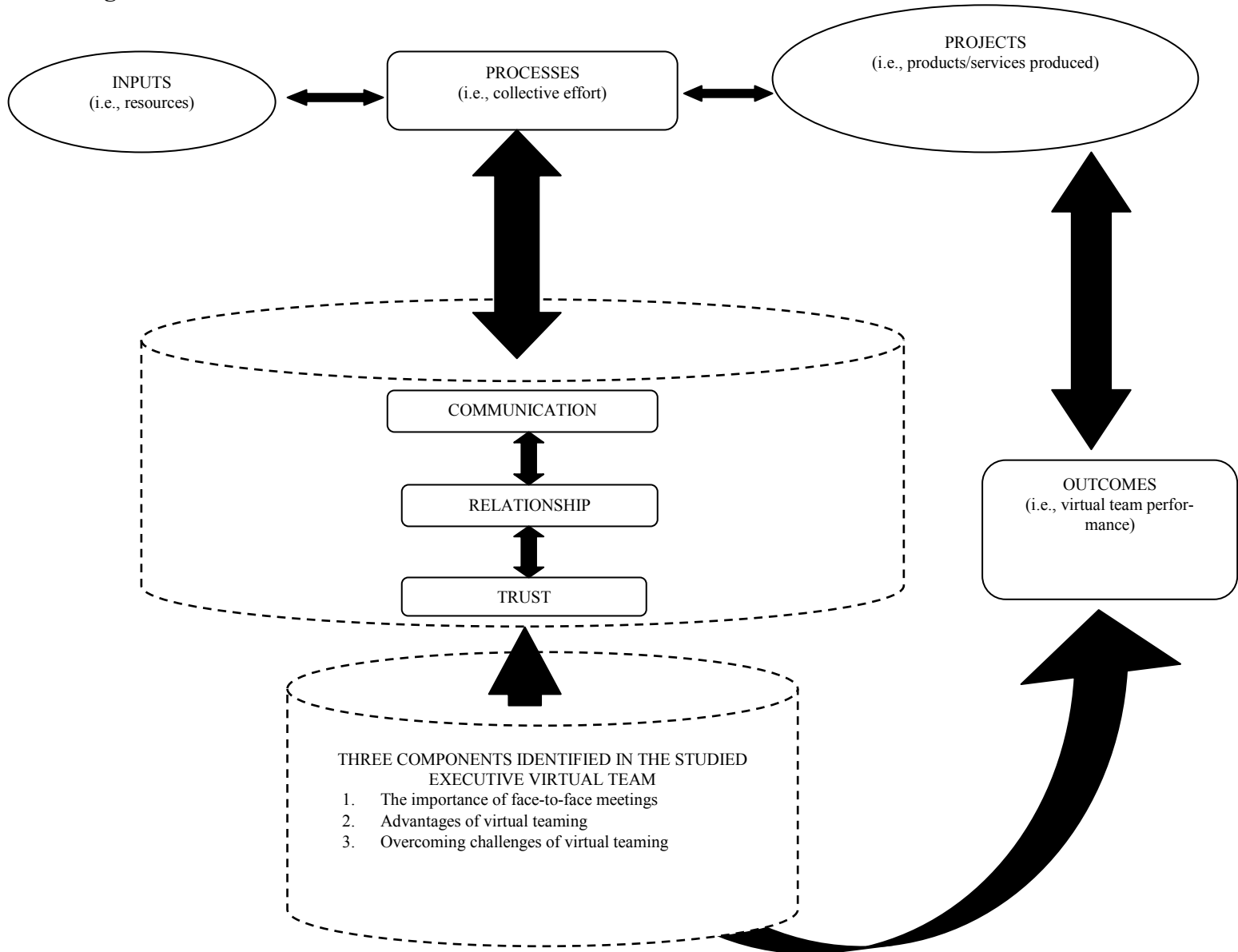
Theoretical Framework

If we had a robust set of generalizations that enabled us to predict, on the basis of prior studies of virtual team input and process variables, how well a virtual team would perform, then we would be able to translate these generalizations into prescriptions for the design and management of teamwork (Hackman, 1992). According to Hackman (1992), “This is exactly what some scholars and practitioners mean by *applied social science*: collecting the products of basic research and theory and using them as action guides in the world of practice” (p. 318). Generalizations about virtual team performance are neither strong enough or stable enough to serve as guidelines for action (Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Hackman, 1992; Kirkman, et al., 2004; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). “Although there are infinite potential structure-process configurations, the number associated with effective interaction seems to be limited” (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000, p. 483). Hence we introduce the theoretical framework of virtual team performance as a process-based construct dependant on communication, relationship, and trust to be

present to lead to the three step process for successful virtual team performance. This framework is a post hoc theory based on the study findings and review of theories. This post hoc theoretical framework was identified and determined after developing the themes for this study.

The display of a holistic framework that is used to adequately describe the theme presentation for this exploratory case study of a single executive virtual team is detailed in Figure 1. Team performance theory supports the paradigm of the input-process-output model (Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Hackman, 1992). Inputs (i.e. resources), processes (i.e. collective effort), projects (i.e. goods/services produced), and outcomes (i.e. specific performance indicators) are highlighted in Figure 1 to reflect the virtual team performance framework. Rather than focus on the historical aspects of team performance theory, Figure 1 reflects the process-based construct of communication, relationship, and trust. The idea of Figure 1 is to provide a visual of the primary themes of communication, relationship and trust being present in a virtual team to instigate a three step process of components identified in the studied executive virtual team which lead to virtual team performance. In other words, communication, relationship, and trust must be present to foster the three step process for virtual team performance as noted in the identified executive virtual team. It is important to reiterate that the post hoc theoretical framework was used in an initial attempt to link the teamwork processes of communication, relationship and trust with the three components identified in the studied executive virtual team which impacted performance.

Figure 1 Virtual Team Performance Framework



Displaying the figure in this manner ultimately results in the three components identified in the studied executive virtual team to result in virtual team performance which continues the process again and again. This framework originates from team performance theory with inputs-processes-projects-outcomes (Dionne, et al., 2004; Guzzo & Shea, 1992). The objective is to examine the role that various teamwork processes may play in impacting an executive virtual team's performance (Dionne, et al., 2004; Guzzo & Shea, 1992). The interchange flows into the three components identified in the studied executive virtual team. The components identified included the importance of face-to-face meetings, advantages of virtual teaming, and overcoming challenges of virtual teaming which positively affect virtual team performance (Dionne, et al., 2004; Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Hackman, 1992; Kirkman, et al., 2004).

The discussion begins with the establishment of teamwork processes, such as communication, relationship, and trust. Then, the three components identified in the studied executive virtual team which are present because of the process of communication, relationship, and trust. Face-to-face meetings are first presented and discussed on how those meetings foster team unity. Next, discussion of the advantages of virtual teaming as well as the challenges through the eyes of virtual team members is highlighted. Finally, recommendations on creating effective virtual team performance are communicated. The value of virtual teams cannot be denied; however, the objective of this study is to better understand the team dynamics of a virtual team. Therefore, the three components identified are the outcomes for having communication, relationship, and trust present within the virtual environment.

Rather than employing team performance in a generalized framework of inputs, processes, and outcomes, other elements are included in a modified framework specific to this research study (Dionne, et al., 2004; Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Hackman, 1992).

Team performance is framed as a virtual team process-based construct. Factors prevalent in most teams (e.g., communication, relationship, and trust) are relied upon as present to result in three components for executive virtual teams (e.g., face-to-face meetings, advantages of virtual teaming and challenges associated with virtual teaming). Having communication, relationship, and trust present allows for executive virtual teams to direct performance to best benefit the team (Dionne, et al., 2004; Guzzo & Shea, 1992; Kirkman, et al., 2004).

Virtual Board Member Participants

Presented in Table 3 is a summary of the participants who participated in this study. Provided in Table 3 is a composite summary of all participants involved with the board from the initial meeting in February 2005 and throughout the course of the data collection. Participant details (e.g., the names, country of origination, country represented as board member, age, gender, board position, and the most important lesson conveyed) are highlighted within Table 3. The first six columns represent approximate information as projected at the time of the initial meeting of each board member. The column representing the most important lesson conveyed is a summation of all the conversations through email, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, scripted texts and observations. These lessons were the points that board members circled back to when communicating their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions.

Table 3 Details of Participants Within This Study

NAME	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	COUNTRY REPRESENTED AS A BOARD MEMBER	AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEWS	GENDER	BOARD POSITION	MOST IMPORTANT LESSON CONVEYED
Ming	Bulgaria	United Kingdom	47	Female	Board President	In an effort to communicate with virtualboardmembers, Ming consistently took the lead to direct and offer support by initiating conversations, discussions and decisions from the board members.
Arthur	Germany	Germany	43	Male	Board Vice President	The most important thing to Arthurwas to be heard and understood; therefore, he was purposely attentive to others because he wanted the same.
Felicia	Turkey	Turkey	29	Female	Treasurer	Felicia was disconnected from the board and therefore unable to fully utilize her strengths in the capacity for which she was elected to serve. Her lack of presence generated more frustration than relief, which was detrimental to the team because it deprived the board of benefitting from Felicia’s talents to be shared with the board.
Abbi	Russia	Austria	26	Female	Secretary	The most important lesson that Abbi brought to the virtual board experience was that she was able to fully participate in the whole situation by communicating through email, phone, and face-to-face. Her participation allowed her to witness and brag on other virtual board members and their abilities to complete tasks. Board members were so appreciative, they did everything to live up to the things she said about them and their work.
Jacques	United State of America	France	65	Male	Historian	The most important lesson learned from Jacques was that we should not complain or go into detail about why something cannot be completed but to look at the idea as accomplishable and just do it.

Table 3 continued

NAME	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	COUNTRY REPRESENTED AS A BOARD MEMBER	AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEWS	GENDER	BOARD POSITION	MOST IMPORTANT LESSON CONVEYED
Irene	Hungary	Poland	46	Female	Board Member	The essence of the lesson conveyed by Irene was that leadership required providing followers with a clearly define purpose; however, if the goals and objectives were unclear, everyone involved was simply wondering aimlessly not sure or with any idea of where they were headed. Therefore, from Irene's perspective, the board's purpose was to provide leadership.
Donnovan	Ireland	Ireland	46	Male	Board Member	Technology and all its short cuts was a way to gain more ground as board members leveraging opportunities to be on the same page and most importantly, break down the barriers of distance.
Phyllis	The Netherlands	The Netherlands	56	Female	Outgoing Treasurer (February 2005)	Phyllis had a long history with the board because she was elected board President for two terms and offered to provide me with information concerning past experiences as a board member but informed me that technology was much more radical and innovating since her service term. During her tenure, there was only access to email. Phyllis was not interviewed for this study; however, I did converse with her at my initial face-to-face meeting with the board members in February 2005.
Fernando	The Netherlands	The Netherlands	70	Male	Replacement for Phyllis (March 2005)	Fernando's most important lesson conveyed was that adapting and adjusting to new technologies and methods of communication was not easy but takes practice and comitment.
Makenzy	The Netherlands	The Netherlands	56	Female	Replacement for Fernando (January 2006)	I requested an interview from Makenzy in November 2005; however, she went on vacation and was not able to be interviewed before or afterward.
Iris	Austria	Austria	30	Female	Replacement for Abbi (April 2006)	Never met or spoke to Iris.

Major characteristics of each virtual board member participating in this study is detailed. The most common message communicated throughout the data collection phase of the study was the need for belonging or being a part of something and having the ability to contribute to it. The initial meeting with the virtual board members was seven months prior to the extended meeting and interviewing. In that time, board members left and new board members joined the group. All participants who participated are referenced in Table 3.

Communication

Along with relationship building and trust, communication was identified by study participants as having a significant role for a virtual team. Through and by the communication samples presented from face-to-face interviews, email correspondences, and telephone interviews, the objective was to show the dynamics of communication and its effects on virtual team performance. Consequently, demonstrating the type of communication that the virtual board needed to exercise team uniformity and cohesion added to the bigger picture of forming a virtual structure of communication, which produced relationships as well as trust (Orlikowski, 2000). According to Giddens (1982), communication structures only exist in and through the social activities of humans practicing them.

History of Virtual Team Communication

This executive virtual team volunteered a considerable amount of time and attention to the organization. The organization consisted of many national chapters within countries on the continent of Europe. Communication was the most important

frame of reference for the team because everything pertaining to European and national affairs had to be dealt with through optimal methods of technology. The luxury of meeting face-to-face at a moment's notice was impossible because each board member represented a different geographic national charter. Therefore, communication was essential for this board because they had to utilize technology to deliver the content of the messages they sent in the most effective way. The objectives of messages sent across time and space was shared understanding and meaning due to an environment which was established. According to Earley and Mosakowski (2000), a strong team is one with a shared team culture, which permeates team performance and communication. In other words, *shared* vision can only be communicated through the interaction and exchange within the team, otherwise each individual acts or reacts for the benefit of themselves rather than the team. "Members will attempt to create and establish a new shared understanding of team member status, team processes, role expectations, communication methods, and so forth" (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000, p. 29). This was definitely a tall order because this team did not share an office building or even have the ability to meet in a neutral area often because of geographical location; however, through technology and the vision, goal, and commitment of the members, all worked to create relationships built on communication and trust. As a result, this virtual team identified multiple forms of technology to utilize in order to effectively communicate. Below is an excerpt of an email interview with Ming, one of the board members, taken from the text compiled, classified, and coded using the NVivo software system. Ming's statement provides an analysis from her perspective of the people who were a part of the board and the

technology used to overcome some of the obstacles associated with virtual team communication. Ming stated,

I have worked with most of them [board members] for more than three years and people have come and gone, changing the profile of the team. As a whole, it has been positive – energizing, and challenging. There were many frustrating moments as well, because we cannot see each other, when we have problems or conflicts. Skype [internet telephone] has improved the quality of our communication dramatically (Ming, 2006).

Comfort and familiarity with Skype (internet telephone) added to the team communication because it altered the dynamics of the relationships, which had been established by talking and hearing each other's voices, thereby creating a space for open dialogue and honesty from board members (Earley & Mosakowski, 2000). The team members are the most vital component of the virtual team yet the characteristics of the team include distance, space and time (Martins, et al., 2004). Working virtually, requires creativity to open the doors of communication so that the barriers of distance and space are removed in order to facilitate unity and trust.

Virtual Structure of Communication

The virtual structure of communication is influenced by the internal environment of the team members based on their need and comfort (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997, Wong & Burton, 2000). The gestures that result from virtual structures are the responses through technology, i.e., voice through the internet telephone or email correspondence containing responses to thoughts and ideas (Kim, 2004; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). The

virtual board's communication had already evolved on so many levels that they were completely relaxed and at ease with the virtual communication structure that was built through the internal cultural exchange. Communication is the heart of a virtual team (Grenier & Metes, 1995; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). Interestingly, the board did not have an established day, time, and format for communication. Rather, they communicated weekly and checked schedules to determine a convenient meeting time. Additionally, agendas of communiqués arose during email correspondence. The date, time, and topics of discussion were offered to board members through email to invoke as much participation and buy-in as possible. Therefore, although meetings were not determined with the day, time, and method predetermined; the consensus for a meeting and time was most effective through short notice or weekly suggestions of conversations. Although the meeting method had the appearance of random cohesion, it was actually expected and predictable. Weekly communication as a whole added to the virtual structure because the decisions were agreed upon laterally rather than unilaterally or hierarchal (Wong & Burton, 2000). The virtual environment was structured by a constant flow of communication and contact. Continuous communication through technology usage assisted in structuring virtual performance and accomplishment (Moran, 2005) as well as their existence in an environment that supported them and their communication styles (Fulk, Monge, & Hollingshead, 2005; Giddens, 1976) so that input could be open to reception and optimally exchanged.

In another example, Abbi, a board member representing the country of Austria, also provided an analysis of the board's communication. Her statement was taken from interview text collected in the NVivo software. She stated,

Like there are phases when something happens very interesting or very troubling or very fascinating or whatever, then there is a wave of emails and everybody asking over the emails and answering the emails and all of that. Then there is a change of plans, and then kind of, you reply and it is kind of a wave.

Thus, the structure of the board's communication is established as a type of culture. Constant and continuous communication promotes harmonious structures for the virtual team members to operate in an environment where they are able to perform functionally (Wong & Burton, 2000). The responsibility of the board to communicate and govern the larger organization that elected the board members, was a tumultuous task which involved restraining the board members at a comfortable place to be themselves in their interpretations, analyses, and responses to other board members who utilized technology.

The environment of the virtual team was one that the virtual board had established over a long period of time and that although their team profile was changed and altered over time by various people, the structure for communication had been established in order to make communication through technology a user friendly process. The atmosphere produced by the board members was one of comfort and flexibility. Just as they communicated weekly through email to establish Skype (internet telephone) times for members to talk, most were committed and open to sitting in front of their

computers talking to board members concerning organizational events. Therefore, the atmosphere of discussing organizational and board business through Skype (internet telephone) was an atmosphere where comfort and accomplishment resulted in outcome.

Board members also utilized communication to their benefit individually and collectively by way of face-to-face meetings. The face-to-face meetings were fundamental in providing social context cues for board members because it presented an opportunity to confirm the visual cues, gestures, and mannerisms of the persons communicated with utilizing technology to the fullest. Virtual team interaction requires understanding the communication culture of the virtual board member sending the message so there was no misinterpretation. To build history, experiences, and expose board members to the communication styles of fellow board members it was necessary to have face-to-face meetings from time to time because communication was more than the environment in which a message was packaged (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). The large nonverbal percent of greeting styles, gestures, postures, and so on had certain culturally based meanings to the participants (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). Although face-to-face meetings were voiced as a necessary means of building and constructing relationships, there is also a need for context in the communication between team members. Thus, the meaning and the message dwell in conjunction to one another.

Ultimately, communication has a significant impact on board member communication responses, questions, suggestions, and ideas, which opened the door to the way in which the board viewed themselves as board members and team members.

The trust that was exhibited by the board members through communication opened them to vulnerability in terms of goods or things one values, and whose care impartially entrusts to someone else, who had discretion over him/her (Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996).

Collaborative Communication

Interaction between virtual teams is best cultivated through communication (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Mohr, Fisher, & Nevin, 1996; Sarkar, Echambadi, Cavusgil, & Aulakh, 2001). Communication is described as the glue that holds relationships together through collaboration and alliance (Majchrzak, Malhotra, & John, 2005; Mohr & Nevin, 1990; Mohr, et al., 1996; Sarkar, et al., 2001). Collaborative communication is defined as the voluntary alliance between team members that involves exchange, sharing, and relationship to build virtual teams into what they are today (Kandemir, Yaprak, & Cavusgil, 2006; Sarkar, et al., 2001). Collaborative communication required the board to be nimble in their interactions because the necessity to rely on the team's focus rather than the individualism (Freer, Movando, & Schroder, 2002). The facets of collaborative communication necessary to assist in building relationships include: frequency, bi-directionality, formality, and content of influence (Majchrzak, et al., 2005; Mohr & Nevin, 1990; Mohr, et al., 1996; Sarkar, et al., 2001). "Increased levels of these dimensions of communication have been found to be associated with commitment (Anderson and Weitz 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994), satisfaction (Keith, Jackson, and Crosby 1990), and coordination (Guiltinan, Rejab, and Rodgers 1980)" (as cited in Mohr, et al., 1996, p. 103). For a virtual team, collaboration

speaks to agreement which speaks to team cohesion in order to promulgate the developing relations.

An example of collaborative communication is described by Abbi, a board member representing Austria. She described the relationships established by board members. An excerpt from her interview was taken from the data compiled and coded using the NVivo software system. Abbi stated,

We meet four times a year but now we only meet two times a year because the relationships have been established already. And even I believe you need to meet the person once, and that is enough. You build up a long time relationship but you do it immediately.

Jacques, a board member representing France, communicated his revelation of a strategic way to create experiences to further develop relationships. Relationships resulted from interactions which empowered and influenced others to connect, collaborate, and effectively implement positive experiences to carry into personal and professional lives. An excerpt of his interview was taken from the data compiled and coded using the NVivo software system. Jacques stated,

The board should be thinking strategically about: What do our members need? What do newcomers to the field need? How are these people going to be received, encouraged, involved? I recommend the buddy system to be involved...you know, "I have heard of a couple people that have just joined and they are in your area, I can recommend that they should contact you..." Then you become involved with the members, and they get a response from you.

Proper implementation of the described strategy would most effectively tap into the professional lives of those entering the membership of the organization. History, experience, collaboration, and relationship result from opening the lines of communication, which was exactly what the board aimed to achieve. Coordination of work toward a common professional goal may also increase dispersion (Ahuja & Galvan, 2003; DeSanctis & Monge, 1999). Therefore, a person is more likely to collaboratively build relationships through communication when a person believes that the team consistently makes every effort to perform whether explicitly or implicitly implied, is ethical, and is focused on the collective goal rather than an opportunistic goal for one (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Communication is the source that opens the door through which relationships are constructed upon which to build.

Relationship

Tom and Herbert (2002) stated, “Qualitative research demands painstaking attention to learning about how other people live, experience, and interpret their lives” (p. 591). Development is fed from consideration and reflection of perceptions of others, i.e., other’s perceptions of their knowledge of their world (epistemology), other’s perceptions of their existence in their world (ontology), and other’s perceptions of their value to their world (axiology). The depths of relationships are inferred by the specific parties involved. Although there may be agreement as to the mutual depth, the construction of the relationship is ongoing and ever changing. In addition, because of the culture of the board, the way that each board member defines relationship really has a lot

to do with the behavior implemented in communicating the structure of the relationship that is desired.

Relationships for virtual team members have many influences, e.g. the environment, the social context, and the roles and behaviors exhibited by board members. Communication and trust are considered the glue that holds the relationship structure together; each is the enzyme that allows the virtual team to properly function (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Relationships are greatly influenced and changed by virtual team members' interpretations which instigate the construction of a shared meaning system separate from each board member's own constructed meaning (Hart & McLeod, 2003). The constructed meanings of conversations between virtual board members manifest a common understanding of their relationships which are constructed through conversations with each other (Hart & McLeod, 2003). Most importantly, relationship is viewed as trust between two or more virtual team members in which one perceives that others involved are competent, will take responsibility for their work, will take the work seriously, and will strive to meet deadlines for the good of the team (Furumo, de Pillis, & Green, 2009).

O'Hara-Devereaux and Johansen (1994) wrote that virtual environments are created by individuals who join with other individuals to create modified virtual environments making adaptations and adjustments continuously. In virtual teams, each team member views the world and the roles of their teammate through its own unique lens of language, tradition, myth, and behavior patterns (O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). Therefore, differences and experiences are unique from one board member to the

next stretched across time and space. “The many facets of the leadership challenge – cultural competence, technical knowledge, workforce support, and all the rest – come together in the ability to facilitate team-based processes: coordinating and collaborating across geographical and cultural boundaries via technology and with a minimum of centralization and a maximum degree of autonomy” (O’Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994, p. 121).

Leadership in Relationships

Relationship is actualized through leadership of communication and trust which assist with agreed-upon objectives in a way that encourages universal participation and productivity (O’Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). A trusting environment reflects a leadership trait that is as significant as cultural and technical skills which virtually creates and sustains the team through facilitation and implementation (O’ Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). In other words, the relationships that have been established directly affect the work environment in a virtual capacity by way of the communication and trust that is extended within the virtual environment.

In essence, leadership was who they exhibited themselves to be because of the weight of the responsibility of their work, their voice, and their actions as representative for the larger organization. Abbi, a board member representing Austria, spoke of leadership. Her comments are taken from the text that was compiled, coded, and classified using the NVivo system. She stated,

You can really help people somewhere to suggest their ideas. To suggest topics, to show the way, to fulfill the mission of the leader, but to me it is more of a

leadership. I don't feel being a servant in this I mean you are serving in the way that you lead people.

According to Boule (2008), strong leadership gives positive feedback and acts as a cheerleader which in turn results in greater positive feedback, efficiency, and more fruitful team endeavors. Giving and receiving positive feedback was a common language for all board members to positively affect team support beyond the limits of space (Boule, 2008). Board members had the responsibility of support and encouragement (Boule, 2008) for the members of the board as well as local and general members to whom they reported. Essentially, organizations are the locally organized interactions between board members rather than the organizational charts, hallways, and conference rooms independent of their human element (Clifton, 2006). Organizations require a better understanding of the everyday practices of talk that constitute leadership and a deeper knowledge of how leaders use language to craft reality out of the hustle and bustle of events that surround them (Clifton, 2006). In other words, although the virtual environment is significantly influenced by board members, their relationships are fermented and encouraged to grow as well as develop fruitfully.

Ming, a board member representing the United Kingdom, described the supportive relationships of the leadership team and how she actually perceived the relationships to affect one another. The email text was written to a former board member. The excerpt was taken from the data compiled, classified, and coded in the NVivo software. She commented.

Now after things have settled down a bit, I started thinking, yes, in circles, but the boat is still on the surface, it hasn't sunk, it has grown bigger, we have local boats, it is a fleet. We are happily tied together and moving in the same direction. We have even identified the people who will find the compass and identify the direction.

The email excerpt was a response to a former board member who identified the board as rowing in circles because it appeared they were in a state of chaos during the national conference of 2005. Consequently, the appearance of chaos rather than organization is true with geese when they are taking off for flight. At take off, many geese are scattered in clusters on the ground. Some lift off the ground simultaneously, while others delay lift off. At first glance it appears that the geese are too close and will affect the lift off as well as flight of others; however, there is a process to the system of take off that the naked eye would not understand. The geese are clustered in smaller groups making up the larger group (very similar to an organization). When airborne, each goose flies a certain distance before leaving the leadership role to the next goose taking the once leading goose's position. The team of geese sacrifice themselves to play a part in ensuring that they arrive at their destination. Who takes them there is not as important as the environment of teamwork created because the seamlessness of shared leadership and/or service leadership presents selfless dedication. Through leadership the geese work on a universal or everybody wins cause. Sometimes with organizations and teams, tunnel vision often delays the team goal. In other words, rather than focus placed

on the team goal and objective, it is overshadowed by individual goals, i.e., what do *I* stand to lose?

The perspective of immediate response and attention to detail was necessary to develop and build the encompassing environment of leadership (Boule, 2008; Clifton, 2006; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Virtual teams require better understanding of the everyday practices of communication which constitute leadership and deeper knowledge of how leaders use communication to craft reality out of the hustle and bustle of events that surround them (Clifton, 2006). Leadership relationships are shaped by the freedom that board members have as they are able to support and express themselves. In other words, having a voice with the ability to command an audience to listen and discern the sender's message goes a long way with the conversations that result amongst the group of individuals. The analysis of the leadership perspective of the board was real. Leadership in a virtual environment requires even more attention to detail rather than assumption (Speechley, 2005). Basically, the virtual team environment may be more nimble due to the leadership and relationships established because time is of the essence (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2003).

Relationships make everything within the team necessary for establishing a vision, mission, purpose, and team goals (Majchrzak, et al., 2005). Otherwise people are a part of something they are unable to build upon personally and professionally. For example, Arthur, a board member representing Germany, was asked his method of establishing a need for a relationship, building it and developing it. His response is taken

from an interview excerpt from data compiled in the NVivo software program. Arthur stated,

I do it [establish, build, and develop relationships] individually. I will get into conversation with somebody and finding an issue and a common theme that one can relate to, very often, I mean, it can be business. It starts very often as business, but then it has to proceed to personal things to what the whole person is about and what is important to that person.

Relationship provides the foundation for purposeful interaction and exchange of ideas between virtual team members in order to affectively influence team work for the same goal (Majchrzak, et al., 2005). The common boundaries between virtual team members and their personal space broaden the relationship for views at different angles of reference (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Malhotra, et al., 2001). The levels of collaboration are then multidimensional in the areas of commonality, e.g., family, profession, aim, focus, and relationship. Therefore, building leadership in relationships begins with a context which provides an internal/external view of the circumference for which the viewer seeks to bond.

Theoretically, the idea of leadership as processed by board members is a basic premise that all leadership is totally dependent on the team. In other words, a leader would have no function without a team of virtual team members to lead. Consequently, in a virtual environment because the board members are dispersed across geographical boundaries, their commitment and allegiance to taking the necessary performance steps to benefit the team are independent acts of leadership in responsibility and

accountability. In order for the board members to understand who and what expertise each person brought to the virtual team, relationships had to be established whether face-to-face or virtually. To conceptualize leadership from a servant's perspective through support for other board members spoke volumes through time and space because trust hovered in the black depths of distance.

Now that communication and relationship have been discussed, it is necessary to discuss trust in a virtual team setting. Trust is reviewed, discussed, and organized in a way that will demonstrate the dependence and balance of each contribution as explained in the thematic findings. The theme of communication was highlighted to emphasize examples of the necessary elements for relationship and trust. Likewise, the theme of relationship was used to explain the facets of leadership, confidence, and the bond created. Finally, trust will be reviewed to stress the importance of both communication and relationship which results in trust. In the next segment, I provide specific details concerning trust through a virtual team perspective fully detailing the necessary components for trust through virtual work.

Trust

When thinking in terms of virtual teams and differentiating them from traditional teams, trust is a significant piece of the pie. Trust is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary (2001) as the "firm reliance on the integrity or ability of a person or thing" (p.873). According to Kipnis (2002), "Research in such diverse areas as marriage, interpersonal relations, and in organizations report that trust between people, and/or between people and organizations, is a necessary precondition for the establishment of

harmonious social relations and the elimination of destructive conflicts (Deutsch, 1962; Gamson, 1968)” (p.39). For purposes of this research, the definition of trust is the reciprocal power and/or control relationship shared amongst team members (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Kipnis, 2002; Kramer & Tyler, 1996). Essentially, the trust relationship is built through mutual respect, work, and initiative to accomplish and accelerate the support system between team members. Trust is the characteristic of a team as well as an individual who wishes to receive from and bestow upon others.

Dani, Burns, Backhouse, and Kochhar (2006) stated,

First, communication via the earliest keystrokes begins to establish trust. Task communication maintains trust while social communications (explicit statements of commitment, excitement, and optimism) strengthen trust. Finally, the members’ initial actions as well as their responses to one another are critical to trust development (952).

On the contrary, “A trusting climate within a team, it is claimed, enables the building of commitment and cohesion, as well as the development of new ideas and new creative ways of thinking despite diversity, differences in opinion or engagement conflict” (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). Trust is at the core of a team’s foundation (e.g. Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005; Jarvenpaa, et al., 1998). The subjective value of commitment, input, output, and performance bear no weight without trust at the core (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005; Jarvenpaa, et al., 1998).

The Role of Trust

For the virtual team, trust had a significant role in building the foundation for the team's uniformity, cohesiveness, and bond. Trust was the constant characteristic during the observation of this study. It was observed time and again through communication and relationships. During the data collection stage of the research, I witnessed the significance of the board members wanting and needing to be trusted, entrusted, and to trust others with responsibility, accountability, and collaboration.

Open environments begin with open conversations (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005; Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Arthur, the board member who represented Germany, provided his perception of the virtual team. He commented on where exactly he saw the board at that particular moment and where he hoped it would go. He defined communication as a reciprocal process of speaking, listening, and openly conversing with others. Arthur's comments were taken from the text contained within the NVivo software system. He stated.

I think, well, I have not yet reached that state where I...that unconditional love, you know, giving and not criticizing and not needing to gain something and just being so wise, and I would hope that at some time I would reach that, but I don't know if that will happen. So I still depend on acknowledgement, and I admit that.

Virtual teams are often established to acquire knowledge, skill, and abilities that are elite to the norm (Jarvenpaa, et al., 1998; Morris, et al., 2002). Collaborative organizations that foster trust in virtual teams are few and far between (O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). Virtual team members taking a more vested approach in

trusting teamwork and the functionality can be effective team-based organizations (Moran, 2005). Trust is the key to good communication, team success, loyalty, and dependability (Levi, 2007). It is the result of shared interests, values, attitudes, and emotions that are built on existentially (Levi, 2007). Trust in teamwork has a direct effect on interpersonal communication between virtual team members because it acts as a bridge to connect the relationships based on dependability and trustworthiness (Levi, 2007; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994).

Virtual team members have strong feelings of inclusion, commitment, pride, and trust in their teams (Levi, 2007). The open feelings are nurtured through a communication climate that is accommodating, all-encompassing, and gratifying (Levi, 2007). Fernando, a board member representing the Netherlands, spoke of the relationship he perceived to have established with the board members. The comments made resulted several months after a face-to-face meeting held in London. The meeting was Fernando's first experience with the board members. The excerpt of his interview text is taken from the information classified and coded using the NVivo software system. He commented,

After the London meeting, I suppose that we got on at a slightly better personal level. I think so, because it was a lovely weekend, but also, because Ming was a very good host, and also because Ming is a very sweet lady to be in company with and also because we went to the theater.

Trust Culture Communicated in Virtual Teams

Communicating a trust culture was a direct reflection of the team and what they represented. Soliciting and reciprocating a culture of trust was significantly affected by the interactions and exchanges during the face-to-face meetings. Throughout those meetings as well as during volunteer time, the work was greatly influenced by the mutual understanding, identification, and desire to cooperatively continue in team efforts. Experiencing trust and supportiveness encouraged a sense of shared identity with the board (Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Having a shared feeling of identity served as a consensual paradigm to structure information acquisition and decision for board members (Martin, 2002; Mohr & Nevin, 1990). Another example of shared identity happens when board members disclose personal information about themselves to others. The act of self-disclosing brings to light the vulnerability of individuals through a virtual world where communication is the main connector to everything surrounding the team (Joinson, 2001; Martin, 2002). “Often the decision to trust someone is based primarily on feelings, rather than on concrete behaviors” (Levi, 2007, p. 99). Trust directly affects the connection to relationships and interpersonal communication (Levi, 2007). Social context plays an important role in the mechanisms which establish trusting cooperative behavior amongst virtual team members (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; Levi, 2007; Martin, 2002).

Three Step Process

Based on the themes identified, three components were identified and documented in the studied executive virtual team. These three components support the

premise that communication, relationship and trust were necessary for a virtual team to successfully perform on projects. These three components support in fostering virtual team performance because each component establishes the necessity and the significance of face-to-face meetings, the advantages of virtual teaming as well as overcoming challenges. Each component is presented with foundations and examples which speak to the essence of the virtual team performance framework, e.g. successful teamwork. Each component is alive because it adds to the communication, relationship, and trust that has already been established. Each will be presented as a step in the process of virtual team performance.

The Importance of Face-to-face Meetings

The first step of the virtual team performance framework is the importance of face-to-face meetings. Throughout my research and conversations through email and taped interviews, I discovered that the importance of face-to-face meetings was paramount. Many other researchers covering topics to virtual teams unanimously expressed the importance of face-to-face meetings (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Grenier & Metes, 1995; Jarvenpaa, Knoll, & Leidner, 1998; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Martins, et al., 2004; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Montoya-Weiss, et al., 2001; Pauleen, 2004; Townsend, et al., 1998).

Not only does written research support the researcher's ascription to the idea of the necessity of face-to-face meetings, but the data collected and responses that I compiled speaking with real people further support this notion. For example, Abbi, one

of the participants in the study believed that getting to know board members through face-to-face meetings helped to build trust. In an interview, she stated,

We meet four times a year, but now we only meet two times a year, because the relationships have been established already. And even I believe you need to meet the person once, and this is enough at least for me as a Russian. We do it in our culture like, you build up a long time relationship but you do it immediately.

Therefore, face-to-face meetings for individuals to observe and learn each board member's social cues, gestures, mannerisms, and styles of expression significantly helped with distance. Having a referential point of observation of communication styles allowed board members to understand the precepts concerning each individual board member's communication. As Abbi stated, the relationships were already there which allowed the board to meet face-to-face fewer times. Thinking in terms of having a purpose and agenda for each face-to-face meeting, relationships become purposeful with the intent of developing quickly to grow.

Donnovan, another participant in the study, concurred with the belief that face-to-face opportunities were important in developing working relationships. Donovan specifically described how he visualized and processed the information from the sender based on what he knew from face-to-face interactions to understand the perspective and thought process. He responded,

Because I had a relationship with Ingrid, I mean I know her style, so when I'm reading her emails, I can feel that [style of communication and history]. I can

sense that [style of communication and history]. I know that is the way she does business. Joseph is very direct at saying things.

Prior knowledge, history, and experience with virtual peers play an important role in bridging relationship gaps. There was deeper insight and understanding, which was a result of open communication that gave board members more familiarity with another board member's communication style. Donovan gives credence to his ability to understand the emails or to "read between the lines" to the power of face-to-face. He would have misinterpreted emails if he had not been afforded opportunities for face-to-face interactions with his virtual team members. However, the more personal interaction they had from each other during their face-to-face meetings, the more they were able to identify personal attributes and characteristics from far away which assisted in each of their perceptions of board member comments and statements received by email correspondence. In other words, when a message was spoken and/or written, the board members received the message with the sender in mind based on their personal experiences, observations, interactions, and exchanges. Therefore, board member responses and interpretations were influenced by history with the message sender. This interaction with team members gave Donovan this revelation taken from an excerpt from his interview,

People's styles begin to appear [during interactions and exchanges] and they are such individual styles. Influenced styles begin to appear and an understanding that the way people operate could positively or negatively influence my approach because of these perceptions.

Thus, building and constructing relationships with and amongst virtual board members involves observation, interaction, and verbal/nonverbal communication in order to evolve; however, it is significant to note that all the information gleaned from group and personal exchanges go into a mental repository to be further developed (Sarker, Valacich, & Sarker, 2003a).

Donnovan continued to support the face-to-face dynamic in another transcription. As a board member representing Ireland, he spoke of his own leadership style and the environment most conducive to his rhythm, and how he develops and expands on those relationships. An excerpt from his interview text was taken from the data compiled and coded using the NVivo system. He commented,

The meeting in London was such a relaxing and loving experience, and Paris to me was much colder. Give me the London experience anytime not necessarily London, but give me the London experience. Again, it was down to the persons' approach, whereas the one that was in Paris was so cold, and so their approach manifests, and recognizing that then is important, because for other countries that we happen to go to. Each different place brings its own learning, and for me it is that the relationships are terribly important. Relationships are built over a drink, built over a goal, built over family experiences and that also needs to be part of the way that we do business. I will not build a relationship up in front of everyone. I am best at building relationships sitting in a meeting room, back here. I will build faster if I am in the back meeting with people, than I would do, and with the board meeting recognizing that each of us brings different styles and I

will work as best I can. You know, you get more from me if I am building relationships through conversations personal conversations and some business too. We like to still talk about business, but personal is important as well.

Therefore, Donnovan and those who ascribe to his thoughts and ideas of building relationships can attest that the responsibility of the depth of the relationship has everything to do with the learned behavior and adding to the mental library of how to build upon what was currently on file from experiences. Relationships were vital to the existence of the board because the relationships are the internal feelers, which confirm the extension of board members with other board members. The relationships confirm the individual perceptions of the board member's epistemology, ontology, and axiology to the board. Most board members agreed in some fashion that their work relationships were necessary and meaningful; however, because of the distance, specific efforts had to be made during the face-to-face meetings to capitalize on similarities, e.g., values, morals, and ideals.

This example further corroborates that face-to-face meetings were extremely vital and effective to building the relationship of the team and its leadership (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001). Board members volunteered their time to benefit the organization in order to most effectively formulate leadership dimensions. Although the leadership roles were collaboratively exercised by the board to exhibit the face of the organization, interdependence developed through their relationships, influenced perspectives of board members, as well as general membership (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001).

Other participants had the same sentiments as Donovan. They believed that face-to-face was a key ingredient to effectively working as a virtual team. For example, during the course of this research study, Ming, a board member representing the United Kingdom explained the importance of building relationships and why relationships were so important in a virtual setting from her perspective. An excerpt of the interview text was taken from the data collected, classified, and coded using the NVivo software. She stated,

[We] need to get together and have a face-to-face meeting from time to time. It is hard to maintain emotional closeness if this [face-to-face interaction] is missing. Distance destroys trust. We managed to replace the face-to-face with wine drinking and guitar playing over Skype [internet telephone] and this has helped. Relationships are not equal, because of the frequency of connecting in pairs.

The leadership environment was fundamentally shaped by the freedom that board members have as they are able to support and express themselves. In other words, having a voice with the ability to command an audience to listen and discern the sender's message goes a long way with the conversations that result amongst the group of individuals. Ming further offered.

The board is doing better now than at the beginning. After we had community training we have come closer and it is easier to get things on the surface and talk about problems and frustrations. [We] communicate more often, create clear roles, agree on a plan, develop interim steps, offer a lot of praise for achievements and try to laugh off difficult moments. Check progress in a non-

threatening way (so people do not run away), be realistic of expectation, and not be too hard – we are volunteers, who have other things to do in life as well.

In another example, Arthur, a board member representing Germany, also had a similar need for building upon the leadership relationships. An excerpt from his interview text was taken from the data gathered, collected, and coded using the NVivo software program. He responded,

I do it [build relationships] mostly individually. I will get into conversation with somebody and finding an issue and a common theme that one can relate to, very often it [conversation] can be business. It starts very often as business, but then it [conversation] has to proceed to personal things, to the whole person, and what they are about, and what is important to that person. Do they have children, or not...what does it mean to him or her? And getting to know more about their personality, and then again having fun in a group also.

As a result, a social history among team members establishes the purpose for trust to build relations with other virtual board members. The atmosphere that resulted from the face-to-face meetings provided a lasting impression and set the tone for future interactions and exchanges within the virtual team. The unique circumstance of events opened the cultural perception of communicating trust as a manifestation of shared values, norms, and rules of behavior (Martin, 2002). In other words, the trust culture communicated through face-to-face interactions mirrored board member values (Martin, 2002). Since the virtual team's movement was perceived as a unified cohesive collective

coordination of events, each virtual team member held a certain responsibility to the team because they acted for the good of the bigger organization.

Yet, another board member reiterated the point of establishing relationships with each other so that walls would be removed to freely dialogue for understanding.

Jacques, the board member representing France wrote an email shortly after the national conference some of the volunteers and copied the board members. The email excerpt is taken from text classified and coded with the NVivo software system. He wrote,

I have received dozens of spontaneous accolades by email in the days since the congress [national conference] – so many people truly loved and enjoyed the congress [national conference] and found it the best they had ever been at – and they took the initiative to write us about it. These accolades belong to you as well and to the other volunteers and members who put in the extra effort to bring it off well.

The comments provide an excellent example of the way in which Jacques viewed himself and his contributions to the national conference and the way he viewed the work of his team members. The communication encapsulates an example of the trust communicated through the competency and safety of the team members to successfully accomplish and perform (Martin, 2002). Trust is built on past experiences, understanding of the motives of others, and a willingness to believe in the team (Levi, 2007; Martin, 2002).

Furthermore, the relationships of virtual team members were derived from the combined efforts produced through visual contact, textual, as well as auditory exchanges

(Sarker & Sahay, 2004b). The face-to-face meetings, where communication was exchanged within a trust culture, really did add value to the relationships being developed. Specific details exchanged during these meetings assisted with the invisible voice of the email system as well as the Skype internet telephone system. Felicia, a board member from Turkey, submitted an email to board members specifically detailing what the face-to-face meeting with board members meant to her. The excerpt of her communiqué was taken from data collected, classified, and coded using the NVivo Software system. She wrote,

Dear All,

I was very glad to have a chance to get to know you. Some of you better during this time. I would like to thank you all for any kind of support you have provided and also for being so open and honest...

WELL DONE TEAM...

Look forward to seeing you all again

Felicia (personal communication, September 28, 2005).

Thus, communication systems created over the course of time are nurtured through consistency of interaction and behavior (Giddens, 1979). Abbi, the board member representing Austria, commented on the way in which communication shaped trust. An excerpt from her interview is presented from the data compiled within the NVivo system. She commented,

This experience helped me to get convinced that it [trust] works this way in any project, in any organization. Really there is a pattern, and these cultural roles are

really kind of European. They [European Culture] are very determined by democratic values, trying to keep the peace or to see the different objectives, not to go one way [but] to go many ways.

Based on Abbi's view, the history and culture was incorporated into the team culture. Basically, her example supported the idea that people get in their own way of succeeding or failing. The social structures are directly derivative of the team members' shared experiences resulting from the same cultural, national, or professional backgrounds, and their beliefs regarding their coordinator's expectations of the project (Sarker & Sahay, 2004b). Virtual team member messages are analyzed through reflection of past experiences, relationship, cultural aspects, and familiarity (Giddens, 1979) which directly affect the team performance (Ocker & Morand, 2002). The support system through which a trust culture is instigated allows the team to collaboratively function as a more intelligent system more quickly and more completely (Moran, 2005).

Face-to-face meetings significantly affect the behavior, interaction, and atmosphere created in a virtual setting. Through social exchange and interaction bonds are created to house and grow the tender seedlings of trust that each virtual team member brings to the established relationship (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; O'Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). In other words, the communication that takes place during the face-to-face meetings greatly impact the virtual relationships because the virtual team members are able to refer back to the cultural dynamics communicated through trust. To be even more literal, each experience with another provided a view of trust to the relationship.

Advantages of Virtual Teaming

Once the team understands the first step of the virtual team performance framework, they can easily grasp the second step, which is discovering, trust, and an advantage of virtual teaming as well as discovering the leadership abilities of each member of the virtual team. Trust is the catalyst, which bridges the gap between communication and relationship. For example, Grenier and Metes (1995) stated that the virtual communication “provides the framework, clues, expectation setting, trust, and language that helps the team members understand the web of communication that is so integral to their work” (p.229). Purposed communication opened the door to trust for the board members because they understood that their relationships were established for the purpose of virtual team performance (Dani, et al., 2006). In other words, true, implicit communication in a virtual team is vital to everything the virtual team was established to be. Researchers found,

With this virtual team, the board members have expanded their relationships, this in turn increased their awareness and observations of fellow board members and the styles of communication employed to make points, respond, and offer input on topics of discussion. The increased awareness of their relationships allowed the board members to subjectively observe and confidently identify characteristics and qualities of fellow board members resulted from the trust established. Board members viewed their communication from the perspective of building relationships (Dani, et al., 2006).

The interpretation of trust in communication through the eyes, voices, and perspectives of the virtual board members is presented. Trust in Communication was purposed to provide the voice of virtual team members and how trust in communication was enacted in their conversations with others, their thoughts and perspectives on trust as well as the pockets for which trust was stored within their communications. Trust is referenced in pockets because understanding bridges the gap to what was not presented for the reader in the conversations, interview texts, or email correspondences.

Not only is working out of a trusting relationship an advantage of working with a virtual team, but, members can also develop strong leadership skills that they may not have tapped into because the trust of the team has allowed them to step up and lead. For instance, after the national conference, Jacques, a board member representing France, discussed his role as the conference administrator/organizer. Holding the conference in France gave Jacques a lot of autonomy and leadership in pulling things together to make the conference happen. He was asked about the needs of the board concerning working as a virtual team. The excerpt provided is from his interview. Jacques discussed the perceived needs of the board to most effectively work together. His response was taken from the transcribed interview text coded in the NVivo software program. Jacques responded simply,

Well, you just do it. There are big, nice statements about what your ideals would be but it is not, it is not an implementation.

Jacques continued by describing his own work ethic from what he had learned from putting the national conference together and relying on people from the France

Chapter of the organization to work with him. In his statement, he revealed that the board members who were unable to provide a lot of tangible assistance to organizing efforts in France for the successful accomplishments of the national conference to rely on him. Basically, he revealed trust to be a two way street. The board members entrusted him with a majority of the administrative and organizing work in order to make the conference happen and Jacques trusted the board members to give him the reins to make things happen. As a result, he recruited a team in France who worked with him to successfully accomplish advertising, marketing, venues, transportation, hotel accommodations, presentation sessions, as well as many other minor and major details associated with a national conference. As a result, the importance of empowering one another to do great work rested on each board member's shoulders. Board members often encouraged each other through positive feedback, discussion and conversation utilizing technology, and being accountable to their board's goals and deadlines (Boule, 2008).

If it had not been for the buy-in of the face-to-face meetings and the forming trusting relationships, the board members may not have afforded Jacques the freedom to plan and execute his plan for the national conference. However, through this opportunity Jacques was able to realize and showcase his leadership abilities, which is another advantage of virtual teaming. Not only do members have to trust each other, but they also have to rely on the work ethic and the skills of team members to get the job done effectively.

Virtual teams require better understanding of the everyday practices of communication, which constitute leadership and deeper knowledge of how leaders use communication to craft reality out of the hustle and bustle of events that surround them (Clifton, 2006). In other words, virtual board members working together to be supportive of one another and responsive to one another facilitated an environment conducive to growth and development for the benefit of the leadership. The leadership perspective of owning the tasks and responsibilities of the board contributed to the diligence, commitment, and confidence with which the board members spoke, communicated to one another and walked in the power of responsibility of leadership (Boule, 2008; Clifton, 2006; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2003). In addition, board members as individuals represent the virtual team as well as the national organization as a whole in terms of their leadership roles (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). Although board members behave in a manner conducive to the teams' functioning, their behavior manifests leadership as a miracle of social structuration (Giddens, 1979; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000).

According to Gibb (1958), on any board there may be at any time, a number of leaders because as board goals change through time, a succession of persons may occupy the various leadership offices. Virtual teams require leaders with multiple dimensions for collaboration and excavation of all specialties by those making up the team (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Kirkman, Rosen, Tesluk, & Gibson, 2004; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). In other words, leadership within a virtual team consists of multiple individuals taking on the role of leader. Therefore, trust must be present as the change in roles and responsibilities as well as various members are held accountable throughout the life of a

virtual team. Each member must feel confident in their abilities to take the helm at any given time and trust that team members will support, encourage, and grow them into a better leader during the process.

Irene, a board member representing Poland, demonstrated an example of leadership skills being honed because of the relationships that have been formed through her virtual team. In an email correspondence from Irene, she provided the board members with a one page summary from the board detailing a link for the numerous accolades following the completed national conference. Please note that Irene was methodical and exact. When she did things, she did them as she said she would and would not provide anything more nor less than what she indicated she would provide. Her methodical nature and thoroughness was a great addition to this team. She was not the type to instigate conversations pertaining to new thoughts and ideas; however, she often had well thought out questions requesting details concerning decisions or events that were to happen. An excerpt from Irene's email text was taken from the NVivo software program which included coded and classified data. The excerpt from Irene's email follows:

Dear All,

Please find enclosed the evaluation report plus a page of accolades that Jacques put together. As agreed on our Friday Skype meeting, I am writing a one-page executive summary that will go out to members, containing a link to the full report. Any comment or feedback is welcome.

Presenting the email text in this manner provided two concepts for the reader to glimpse trust in communication and leadership. First, it insured that all board members had the option of being involved with suggestions, modifications, and omissions in the communiqués going out to the general membership. Second, it was important to note Irene's posture. Irene was not the president of the organization. In fact, her position was that of secretary of the board. Although fully competent, Irene acted in the manner of a subordinate by asking approval. Organizations comprised of individuals with more working knowledge have placed more and more emphasis upon trust between team members for collaboration, unity, and uniformity (Dani, et al., 2006). She then emailed the board members a follow-up message referencing a compilation of information she composed. Irene stated, "As agreed on our Friday Skype meeting, I am writing a one-page executive summary that will go out to members, containing a link to the full report."

Another example of the advantage of growing leaders was an email correspondence submitted by Felicia, a board member representing Turkey, in reference to establishing a time to meet utilizing technology. Felicia wrote, "I sure will take charge of the Dec. 1 Skype session." In another example, Ming, a board member representing the United Kingdom, corresponded to the board by email stating, "Please look at the agenda and the sections we need to prepare, I have assigned tasks." Finally, Abbi, the board member representing Austria, submitted an email correspondence stating, "It is our role as the board to be *one step ahead* of our membership to develop new ideas and to maneuver the ship to some yet *undiscovered lands*." Through the email communiqués,

the board members exhibited examples of their leadership endeavors to push the board into active operational mode (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Kirkman, et al., 2004; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). Thus, board members exemplified leader behaviors in their leader roles by encouraging and supporting the goals and objectives of the team. In other words, when the board members are submitted to the virtual team objectives, achievement of those goals are immediate because the outcome – unity – is fed back into the virtual team context for success (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Majchrzak, et al., 2005; O’Hara-Devereaux & Johansen, 1994). Board member roles are dependently intertwined to multiply the leadership functions according to the strengths of each board member in order to be most effectively utilized and implemented for reciprocated success.

To conceptualize leadership from a servant’s perspective through support for other board members spoke volumes through time and space. Board members played different roles that made up the body each taking on a leadership role. An example of the leadership roles can be compared to a group of lions hunting a meal, e.g. zebras. When a pack of lions hunt, each lion takes on a solitary but dependent role of its very own. For example, there are those who lead in order to make things happen, because they are aware of the traps that the other lions in the pack set for the zebras. The pack fully understands each other and their strengths; therefore, they complement each other with their hunting strategies. In the pack, each lion is empowered to take on a leadership role to hunt the zebra that will be a meal to the lion pack. They know what must be accomplished to be most effective without bellowing a groan; however, they

communicate with their senses to get the most effective assistance from the other lions. Essentially, the lions' hunting skills are strategic and in full effect.

Lastly, virtual environments do not allow team members to be micromanaged. Therefore, adding trust to a virtual team environment gives way to some degree of honesty, flow, reliability, and predictability (Bradley & Vozikis, 2004; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). A significant amount of the work was self-directed requiring commitment and motivation from the team members completing the tasks, which in turn develops the leadership skills of all the members of the virtual team. No one attempts to take a back-seat and shy away from taking on leadership roles because they know that at some point during a project they may be called to perform; all members realize that they will and must take on the responsibility of leading; however, they know that through the process they will be supported by the members of their trusting and non-threatening virtual team.

Overcoming Challenges of Virtual Teaming

By step three of the virtual team performance framework, the members of the team began to realize that there were some challenges that came along with being virtual. There were three areas in which the challenges appeared or were realized, performance outcomes impacted by lack of trust, having to be open to vulnerability, and being dependent on someone who was not nearby. Please note that the virtual environment is unlike traditional team environments in that the team members are displaced and separated through space and time. Each team member is housed in a totally different section of the world in and throughout the European continent.

However, the team members because of previous opportunities to have face-to-face interactions and capitalizing on the advantages of virtual teaming, did overcome the challenges of working virtually to meet desired goals.

Although trust usually is thought of in the context of a long-term relationship, when people join teams for a short period of time, building and maintaining trust is a more difficult and therefore, more important phenomena (Duarte & Snyder, 2006). Virtual team structures are different from traditional team structures because they require a greater degree of colleague interdependence, telecommuting/telework and often produce increased management support and less colleague interaction (Morris, et al., 2002). Based on the structure of the team as an interrelated combination of structure, tasks, technology, and virtual team members, changes in one function directly affect the other component parts (Morris, et al., 2002). In other words, trust results from the removal of physical boundaries and limitations which make the team borderless and boundless to eliminate the focus on control in a working virtual team environment (Morris, et al., 2002). Jarvenpaa and Leidner's (1999) indicated in their study that swift-trust resulted in global virtual teams utilizing technology to communicate with virtual team members. Dani, Burns, Backhouse, and Kochhar (2006) stated,

First, communication via the earliest keystrokes begins to establish trust. Task communication maintains trust while social communications (explicit statements of commitment, excitement, and optimism) strengthen trust. Finally, the members' initial actions as well as their responses to one another are critical to trust development (p. 952).

Interestingly, virtual teams constantly worked on the dynamic of trust because they understood that there was one certain; change is inevitable and absolute; virtual teams would encounter this change much more often than traditional teams in traditional environments because of the nature of their structure. Therefore, leadership changed hands often, so trust had to be built and rebuilt depending on the scope of the project or plan being implemented. In other words, the structural archetypes ready and available in a traditional setting are not held together in the very same manner as with a virtual team. Basically, the virtual team environment may be more nimble due to the leadership and relationships established because time is of the essence (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2003). Virtual team members were much more dependent on their team members and their communication because they resided in an environment where they were unable to have immediate face-to-face contact with a team member.

This dependency created or resulted in vulnerability. This idea of vulnerability could be demonstrated in the simple example of sometimes, with technology context is difficult to master much less identify; take the following transcription for example,

You know Antoinette or Ingrid...I can visualize these people, you know, with you, I can see you, but if I could not see them. There was no context. You know, it was just this rocket that came from nowhere, you know, we will do whatever. That [working and communicating virtually] is the down side of it for me. It is not a downside. It is reality.

Thus, the meaning and the message dwell in conjunction to one another. Because technical communication entails a greater uncertainty than face-to-face communication,

there may appear to be an intense need for reaction or response (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Providing a response offers an endorsement that another person is willing to take the risk of interpreting the sender's message and supplying the missing elements to make it understandable (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). Nevertheless, members continued to work together and supported each other's efforts, which in turn diminished the fears that came with feeling vulnerable. Members continued to foster the commitment to contribute, collaborate, and converse, which allowed the walls of fear of dependence and vulnerability to come crashing down and the walls of trust to be erected.

Lastly, virtual teams must remember that they are often established to acquire knowledge, skill, and abilities that are elite to the norm (Jarvenpaa, et al., 1998; Morris, et al., 2002). The team unity and cohesion is not necessarily accomplished through normal methods of communication because the tools for communicating are different and require a different frame of reference. For example, in a traditional setting, a recipient of a message usually responds to the voice pitch, social cues and gestures, as well as physical gestures. On the contrary, in a virtual environment, the recipient of the message will take memories of experiences with the sender and context cues from what was previously gleaned from face-to-face encounters to determine meaning and intent of message. Lack of trust affects team collaboration and communication (Fernandez, 2004; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Morris, et al., 2002). Arthur admittedly reported that he was not at a place of full and complete trust; however, his openness of his stance and perspective was a sure sign that anything was possible. Therefore, the knowledge, skill, and abilities that virtual team members possess depend on the relationships and the trust

environment created. With this in mind, virtual teams can develop processes, policies, and procedures to counteract these so-called challenges into advantages by strategically working together and implementing and practicing the three step virtual team performance framework.

Summary of Findings

Virtual teams allow for openness of expression and encouragement which impacts the trust presented because it is nurtured and stretched to expand exponentially. Manifesting trust so that teamwork, communication, and relationships are instigated causes the circle of trust to expand rather than break (Dani, et al., 2006; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998). In other words, the environment, the social context, and the roles and/or behaviors of virtual team members build on the vitality that each component parts establish in the implementation and manifestation of teamwork outside the physical limitations. No matter where a virtual team member is located, they may be open to bringing the virtual team into their world because the foundation of trust (e.g., security, stability, responsiveness, and membership) is present.

Morris et al. (2002) stated that virtual teams generally have five specific characteristics that comprise the virtual team environment: opportunism, excellence, technology, borderless, and trust. The characteristic of 'opportunism' was presented because virtual teams were established to meet specific objectives during a specific period of time (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Morris, et al., 2002). Excellence was cited as a characteristic based on the competencies of the team (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Morris, et al., 2002). Building on and developing the virtual team environment requires

implementation of the gifts and talents brought by each board member to utilize for purposes of best-practice achievement (Morris, et al., 2002). Working with and through distance, time, and space, technology was employed to connect the team, bridge communication, and offer feedback based on the prevalent limitations of virtual work (Bradley & Vozikis; 2004, Morris, et al., 2002). Leading to the borderless characteristic which essentially classifies the physical boundaries through the application of information technology (Morris, et al., 2002; Townsend, et al., 1998). Finally, Morris, Marshall, and Rainer (2002) stated, “The characteristic of trust arises from the same removal of physical limitations that makes the virtual [team] a borderless entity” (p. 23).

Filtering the knowledge and acquisition of the organization has a significant impact on how the organization is perceived, received, and categorized by those encouraged to join the cultural forces (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). Therefore, the board’s leadership is emulated to the general membership who in turn emulates it to and through the local chapters. The board’s role is to be the type of leadership that embodies the goals and visions of the larger organization (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2007). Thus, the way in which they present themselves to each other as well as in the presence of general membership speaks to the type of trusting relation that is exemplified.

According to Dani et al. (2006) trust is commonly influenced by several factors, e.g., the accustomed relationship established; the shared history, goals, and experiences; divulging professional and/or personal information between individuals; and finally a feeling of security and protection in the relationship. Practicing trust through communication with virtual team members encourages best practices the more it is

exercised and refined. The environment created within the boundless atmosphere of the team influences the trusting teamwork relationship. The greater the levels of trust and success manifested from trusting teamwork, the more virtual team members are able to focus on their own tasks without the hassle of monitoring team members (Furumo, et al., 2009). Communicating trust in a virtual arena is dependent on the relationships that have been built. Alignment of goals, commitment to accomplishment and task performance, as well as supportiveness significantly impacting the atmosphere to encourage growth and development. Being able to offer an open forum where virtual team members can redirect and refocus the tangents back to professional competencies when necessary and understanding the forums in which to present unrelated information provides a melting pot for sustainment and growth because each virtual team member has a vested interest in the team's success (Dani, et al., 2006; Furumo, et al., 2009; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998).

In the final chapter, the researcher summarizes the findings of the study. An overview prompts the recall of important features and facts related to the study. Then the key findings are elaborated upon. Implications for future HRD research are detailed in seven points and then the limitations are discussed. Finally, the information is compiled in the conclusion.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OVERVIEW

Reflection of the concept of virtual work revealed that many corporate entities with which I had previously worked have in fact worked in a type of virtual setting. When thinking of the whole of the organization, the concept of virtual work includes, the internal as well as external workers who have a vested interest in the companies' outcomes. The vested interest includes providing goods and/or services as well as buying goods and/or services from an independent worker employed with a third party entity. Although the third party worker is not one of the organization's workers, the two are united for a brief stint of time with a common goal – providing quality goods and/or services.

The study of virtual teams broadened my perspective and outlook on the parameters of business commitment and responsibility to consumers. Virtual teaming happens each and every day, but many are unaware. For instance, I have a virtual relationship with my cell phone provider because we both have the same succinct goal, i.e., the best possible quality service to more individuals with the same service as well as with other phone services. I pay them a monthly fee for the cell phone service and in return they count me as a 'Valued Customer'. Our communication is through documentation and multiple forms of communication technologies (Lee, 1994). We have no planned face-to-face meetings but I am free to meet with a representative at any time I choose by phone or online through live chat.

We have mutually agreed upon our method of operation as well as our role for ultimate accomplishment of satisfaction as a service provider and a service consumer. The beginning relationship was documented in the contract, and thereafter, all inquiries, questions, and suggestions are documented for record keeping purposes. In this relationship the trust was established in the provider/consumer agreement. Information is communicated up front and personal. We are both aware and in agreement on expectations, the quality of service, and what interferes with the quality of service. Trust has been established. Thinking in terms of who you partner with is the same concept with a virtual team. Although, one may not have the option of selecting one's virtual team mates as one does have with a cell phone provider; the organizational agent taking one's questions and concerns through information technologies may not be the first pick as a team member either. The reality is that both entities are supposed to be in alignment working toward the same goal through a relationship established, nurtured, and developed through communication and trust.

Virtual Board Member Background

The purpose of this study was to identify and yet understand the experiences of executive multinational, virtual board members working as a team in a virtual environment. Through this research the virtual dynamics of the virtual team have been studied, prodded, purposely mismatched, and weaved together to understand the culture of the virtual environment in which the team members interact and perform duties. With this particular board, there has been a history of previous work experience or exposure in some capacity; however, it has no great impact on their interaction and work with the

entire board. When I first met this board in February 2005, they informed me that they met face-to-face four times per year; however, after spending a longer period of time with them in September 2005, those face-to-face meetings were reduced to twice per year. Board members believed they were well able to condense the meeting times because they had built relationships that could be further supported with technology. In some respects they adhered to the correct ethic for working virtually because virtual work requires more frequent communication to check on things, assist, encourage, listen, and /or provide direction (Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Sarker & Sahay, 2004b).

On the other hand, eliminating the face-to-face meetings decreases the effects of the communication richness that adds to understanding and comprehension of information. “Face-to-face is the richest medium because it provides immediate feedback so that interpretation can be checked. Face-to-face also provides multiple cues via body language and tone of voice, and message content is expressed in natural language” (Daft & Lengel, 1986, p. 558). Leaner mediums of communication, e.g., telephone, personal documents such as letter or memos, interpersonal written documents, and numeric documents, lack the capability for immediate feedback (Lee, 1994). Leaner mediums tend to use single channels for communication, filter out significant cues, are more impersonal, and request a reduction in language variety (Lee, 1994).

The findings of this study reveal that there are many ways to communicate utilizing technology, but the objective for this virtual team is to be multidimensional in use. That means that honest communication is necessary for the board to perform at their optimal level. For instance, Fernando was the only board member who admitted being

computer illiterate; however, his own admission was to himself as well as me. On the contrary, Jacques was aware that board members suffered from technophobia; however, the two sides were never able to meet in the middle to resolve and move forward.

Unfortunately, partially due to the communication breakdowns neither virtual board member received what they were supposed to receive from each other. Each had the capacity to communicate their frustrations; yet, by not being able to voice those frustrations to one another, Fernando resigned because he was unable to successfully join the virtual discussions as a contributing member. Had Fernando expressed to board members that he did not fully understand the technology use, they would have assisted him and gone out of their way to help as they did with me. However, Fernando's silence to email as well as Skype was misinterpreted as lack of interest and/or lack of commitment. "Decisional behaviors involve team members critically examining others' contributions with the goal of converging to a common understanding such that a decision can be reached or problem solved" (Massey, et al., 2003, p. 131). Therefore, the honest communication helps the team to achievement rather than become stagnate.

According to Maznevski and Chudoba (2001) being able to fully and completely utilize various technologies that are matched to the communication requirements of the task at hand affects the effectiveness of the virtual board. The more technology resources at hand the better the virtual board is equipped to adapt, adjust, and accomplish tasks (Kayworth & Leidner, 2000; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2001). Additional time and attention to learn the technological operating system may be necessary (Chidambaram, 1996). Individual virtual team member adaptation to the technology speaks to the virtual

team's environment and structure because all members can be attentive simultaneously (Chidambaram, 1996; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2001). Basic adaptations to technology assists with communication to fit the team's structure (Majchrzak et al., 2000) and it empowers the virtual team member to exist in the fullness of the team (Sleezer, et al., 2002).

Virtual Board Members

Virtual board members represented various countries across Europe. Initially the virtual board consisted of four women and four men. By the end of my research endeavors the virtual board was represented by five women and three men. Two females replaced the two board members who left. The virtual group ranged in age of 25-70. They had different life perspectives, different outlooks, different histories, and different experiences which they brought with them to the virtual team. Most of them take the organization to heart and are committed to pursuing the organizational endeavors fully.

The virtual board members are elected officials by the general membership. They are each elected for two year terms. The general membership consists of several European countries with their own local chapters. The local chapters represent collective groups of individuals living within the country. The largest represented country was Germany or Deutschland as it is referred by its residents.

The virtual board members appeal to many different individuals joining the organization for specific reasons. The virtual board's responsibility is to bridge the cultural divide across Europe. In other words, the board orchestrates a platform or podium for experienced and expert consultants, trainers, expatriates, and implants to

come together to learn, discuss, and inform of experiences in training, consulting, and find real people who have experienced similar cultural milieus where they can mentor and coach the next facilitator. Essentially, the organization is a network and the board is the resource that provides the tools and essentials that others may need to answer questions, and give credence to specific situations and circumstances.

Of all the board members there was one who was by far the most prominently controversial and most talked about by other board members. Some of the board members talked of this individual in awe and reverence, likewise, others spoke of the board member dismissively and trivializing. Why were the reactions of this board member so diverse? This study has revealed that relationships are more prosperous when communication is open and honest. In other words, for individuals to effectively and efficiently work together, the dialogue, no matter what form, must be reciprocated with clarity of purpose and honesty. It is necessary for individuals to put aside their personal desires that compete with the goals of the virtual board and rather move toward accomplishing the tasks and viewing them as the common language that brought them together initially to serve as virtual board members.

Research has already confirmed the fact that virtual teams experience the greatest degree of communication pitfalls (Powell, et al., 2004). Therefore, beginning the planning stages of the virtual team and its future structure and development should begin with shared knowledge that more effort, more time, more patience, more diligence, more commitment is necessary to minimize the virtual component for the group. Although the limitations of virtual work magnify the deficiencies of time, distance, and space in

responding or making decisions, the one common component of this virtual group was that they all spoke English so there were added deficiencies. Although English was not necessarily their first language, they were willing to use English as the language for their meetings, emails, and conversing over the phone. The bottom line is that the virtual board was able to establish their language of communication; therefore, other elements of working virtually can be established with the same uniformity.

Researcher Reflections

Since completing this research study, my definition of virtual teams has expanded from “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, et al., 1998, p. 18) to become groups of geographically, organizationally, and/or time dispersed coworkers joined together through the use of multiple information technologies to successfully accomplish one or more organizational tasks through virtual team relationships that are established, nurtured, and developed through communication and trust (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000; Massey, et al., 2003; Powell, et al., 2004; Townsend, et al., 1998). I have found that the geographical, organizational and time dispersed boundaries are minor limitations. Rather, a high degree of shared context facilitates the groups’ communication and problem-solving activity (Ocker & Morand, 2002). “Conversely, a low degree of shared contextual information can have the opposite effect – of impeding member’s ability to effectively work together and communicate” (Ocker & Morand, 2002, p. 27).

Interestingly enough, thinking of this virtual board made me think of relationships in a more curious way. For example, the family unit closely resembles an organization. The vision, mission, and objectives for the family unit are established in a similar fashion to organizations. Both work on and from their reputations as with credit scores, paying bills, and produce self-sufficient contributors of society. Each member is a vital part of the unit influencing its outcomes and existence within their world of reality. The organization is also responsible for its reputation, the quality of the goods and services produced as well as for the culture created by the individuals making up the organization. Both units have a responsibility to the public community to alleviate fear, the unknown, and provide an explanation for their purpose and intent. A macro-level view of each institution opens the door of opportunity for a micro-level view which reveals the relationships between each of the members of the family as well as the organizational department and/or team.

Removing the physical forms of intimacy, some can conclude that the process of entering into a relationship is the same. For example, trust is given out and measured with each interaction by all individuals. Entering into relationships involves communication and trust. Depending on frequency and predictability of communication that is consistently reciprocated with feedback, improves communication effectiveness leading to higher trust and improving team performance (Jarvenpaa, et al., 1998; Javenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Kayworth & Leidner, 2001; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Powell, et al., 2004).

Like families, virtual teams that have early face-to-face meetings have more ability to form closer interpersonal relationships between virtual team members because the value of each member's contribution is sought from the very beginning (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000; Powell, et al., 2004). The early meetings should focus on relationship building to strengthen the socio-emotional development of the team, foster success through performance improvement, and learning as well as debating group issues from all aspects of the virtual team members (Kruempel, 2000; Powell, et al., 2004). Through these early interactions the swift trust paradigm is established by presuming that virtual team members are trustworthy and begin working as if trust were already in place while seeking proving or disproving evidence throughout the life of the team (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Myerson, et al., 1996).

During the process, I have come to know and understand board member statements from where they are actually residing in their thoughts and opinions. The interesting thing about this study and understanding the individual perspectives of each voice was listening to their responses to the research questions with the realization that each participant brings their culture, history, past, experiences, failures, accomplishments and lessons learned to each and every interaction. Each face-to-face conversation, email response, telephone conversations, and telephone conference was like a painting. Each participant's words painted a picture of a virtual board with their own variations to the visual components. As the interactions continued, it was a welcome surprise to witness the growth and development from the previous conversations. Points were remembered with the specifics of individual members.

Key Findings

The key findings are presented referencing three questions presented to the virtual board members. Each question describes what the board members revealed of themselves pertaining to their experiences, their perceptions, and their beliefs about making a virtual setting work best for them. Their revelations emphasize the significant features which enable the virtual board to perform at their optimal level. Descriptive details are highlighted under each question heading.

Question 1

The first question of the research study was: What is the experience of being a member of a multinational, virtual executive board? There were various analogies and answers to this particular research question; however, for the most part, although the perspectives and words were diverse, the answers were all very similar. Good and bad experiences were identified by virtual board members; nevertheless, the biggest difficulty expressed came with communication through technology. Interestingly enough, more of the male board members expressed their preference to visual interactions and exchanges than their female counterparts. In Table 4, references are made to the advantages and disadvantages of working virtually through technology identified by the board members. The advantages and disadvantages detailed the perceived experiences as identified by board members. Some of the board members only identified disadvantages and some of the board members only identified advantages. Their answers are compiled in a table to show how the positive and negative responses offset the other.

Table 4 Advantages and Disadvantages of Working Virtually Associated With Technology

<i>Participant Responses</i>	<i>Disadvantages Expressed</i>	<i>Advantages Expressed</i>
Learning to adjust and adapt	New type of work dynamic – unknown and complex	Training and experience – learning to adapt and become comfortable with technology and media sources
Time and convenience	Out of perspective from a personal people's touch	Acclimation to technology – convenient and inexpensive
Opened many new worlds for contacts and communicating	Accustomed to personal relationships (traditional setting)	Accountability of input and consensus
Work autonomously	Most things are done over drinks or a meal	The use of Skype allowed for creative ways to bring their own worlds together (i.e. the introduction of personal hobbies)
Working comfortably with email	You cannot sing songs together while typing email responses	Interaction through technology allows for everything except seeing one another
Competence with knowing how to use the email system and internet conference call system as well as phone someone through the internet	No previous experience working in a virtual capacity	Building relationships for one and all with the technology available
Convenience to meet more frequently in real time without the expense of travel, hotels, food, etc.	Email is a junkyard	Clearly defined purpose for utilizing the technology and how to utilize it most effectively
A matter of space that is not so far apart	It can be cumbersome	Expectations for responses
Established history from working with the board members	Unable to determine the social cues of the sender or receiver	Establishing a history with team members first to be able to better understand where they are coming from
New developing and changing technology	No questions asked only statements made	Alignment of goals through technology

The advantages and disadvantages as expressed by virtual board members through the use of technology for working virtually detail the experiences voiced during interviews. The areas of improvement were provided to identify the lessons learned from working with the board. For example, Abbi was an advocate for reducing the face-to-face meetings from four meetings per year to only two meetings per year because of the

advances in modern technology which allowed them to correspond through time and space synchronously (internet conference calls and internet telephone) or asynchronously (email). Although technology was not an issue for most who were acclimated to the systems already in use, relationships were already established which added to the comfort and ease of working virtually.

Contrary to Abbi's opinion and the trust that she viewed already present within the board, Fernando was semi-adverse to establishing a relationship with most of the board through the use of modern technology. He preferred the face-to-face interaction with others to establish a history as well as maintain a history to build upon because he was not fully comfortable with the method of communication derived from email. Fernando's experiences with building relationships was from a face-to-face perspective rather than online through the use of technology.

The two perspectives contribute to the ease of use and simplicity of utilizing technology as well as the fear of use and lack of trust. Had Fernando's inhibitions with technology been diminished, it would have been interesting to determine his perspective of building relationships through the support and use of technology. The knowledge and skills of the multinational executive virtual board were varied based on their familiarity and willingness to work in a virtual environment to adapt their traditional thoughts with new thoughts.

The experiences of being a member of a multinational, executive virtual board were focused on the technological aspects of virtual teaming. The participants based their experiences largely on the use of technology and how their own familiarity and

skill with technology affected their team performance. Teamwork processes were fostered through the use of technology or the lack thereof. As in the examples of Abbi and Fernando, each one's perspective of technology contributed differently to their team relationship.

Question 2

The second question of the research study was: What are the executive board dynamics as perceived by board members working in a multinational, virtual environment? The main point that I have realized since this research study took place was that each virtual team member had their own perspective, which was constructed and based on their own belief system. The most prevalent way in which the virtual board members of this particular team construct their relationships is through the communication portal. For instance, Arthur targeted in on the core reason they were on the board which was for the organization. Once that was settled with questions regarding values, beliefs, and perspectives on the organization, then he felt comfortable taking it to a more personal level. Donovan, eliminated the questioning regarding the organization, rather than starting there, he felt at ease to start with the personal side. Donovan informed that the primary way in which he built relationships was in the back of the room networking or after corporate hours in a relaxed environment outside of work and home where mutual exploration would be welcomed. Fernando was another board member who preferred interacting socially face-to-face. He did not quite go into great detail on the specifics; however, I observed how comfortable Fernando was with me. At first, he was not completely forthcoming; later, he opened himself up the more our

conversation progressed. What I noticed most about Fernando, was that the more I listened to him and gave him the floor to tell his story, the more Fernando was willing to reveal of himself. In fact, I spent several meals, and smoke breaks talking to him on a personal level, asking questions, and observing.

On the other hand, Ming and Abbi were both open to exploring deeper relationships any place, anytime and anywhere. Abbi showed her heart right from the start. It was a though she jumped in with her whole self. Ming, on the other hand, was the one board member whom I perceived as sincere, but there appeared to be a distance or cautionary stance. In other words, there was a place that was not revealed to me during the research study so I could not help but wonder if the other virtual board members noticed it also. Her perception of building relationships was remembering details or personal information shared by other board members to disarm and build.

Most participants revealed that interpersonal communication was the largest leader in building virtual work relationships. Through these interpersonal interactions virtual team members reveal beliefs, values, morals, and fears about themselves. From these revelations, other virtual team members are able to measure their own moral, values, and beliefs as to what similarities are shared with virtual team members.

“Virtuality rests on its bringing about a new potential for two domains of interaction involving digital reconstructions of our natural and imaginary worlds” (Castel, 2000, p. 27). Virtual team relationships are constructed through various levels of participation that is physical; it involves virtual team member actions that are based on elements in the virtual world that have a direct effect of some kind on the participants (Castel, 2000).

Likewise, Dani et al. (2006) agrees that interpersonal relationships are built on similar personal relationships, professional characteristics, and qualifications revealed during initial conversations whether through email, face-to-face, or over the telephone. The earliest form of communication is the beginning foundation for the ensuing construction of the virtual relationship. The virtual team member's initial actions as well as their reactions to one another are critical to the development of their relationships (Dani, et al., 2006).

In establishing relationship history with virtual team members, trust was first established in a variety of ways. Trust has been framed in terms of the virtual team members' belief that the organizations' management and fellow workers will interact honestly and fairly and in a reliable and predictable manner (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). "Trust usually develops over a period of time through regular interpersonal contact. This suggests that F2F [face-to-face] interaction is often an important factor for trust building" (Bradley & Vozikis, 2004, p. 101). The team was able to reduce the amount of face-to-face meetings because of their confidence in each virtual team members' ability to complete tasks in an autonomous way.

Question 3

The final question of the research study was: What conditions are perceived necessary by board members for executive virtual team members to best foster optimum virtual team performance? Hands down, the virtual team members express that support, relationships, and encouragement were all necessary. However, when looking beneath the surface of those answers, the significant components for performance of the virtual

team were communication, relationship, and trust. Being able to weave the components together through the various forms of communication media in order to build and move forward in the pursuit of relationship significantly impacts the level of trust existing within a virtual team. Having the three components present affect task accomplishment (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000).

In order for projects to be completed with each virtual team member providing the specifics of their particular area of expertise, the line of communication must be open and accepting (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). Even though the virtual team members operate autonomously, they elect to participate in group meetings through technology to accommodate for lost time and space. These meetings allow for information in the form of dialogue to flow so that each achiever is armed with the same information, status and timelines for project completion. The specific details depend on each contributing member individually; nonetheless, bringing all the parts and pieces together create the desired output (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000).

Participation and presence of virtual team members confirm who they are and adds to their professional characteristics. Even prior notification when virtual team members are unable to attend meetings provides a display of support, dedication, and commitment to the team. Individual characteristics that lead us in our organizing, communicating, managing, and supervising work are anticipated to influence virtual team performance outcomes (Montoya-Weiss, et al., 2001; Workman, 2005). Often, early face-to-face meetings of virtual team members as well as newly appointed virtual

team members allows for foundations to be established early on (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000).

Implications for Future HRD Research

Few organizational and HRD studies have been conducted on virtual team research reflecting a multinational executive virtual board's perceptions of team dynamics. The vast majority of virtual team research has been conducted within classroom settings. Not many organizational studies actually examine relationship building, trust, and communication that adds to the virtual team layers of understanding; therefore, there is a dimension of our understanding which has not been investigated (Workman, 2005).

Provided are more specific research areas that need to be explored in future research on team dynamics of executive virtual teams (Avolio, et al., 2000). Some of the themes result from the current literature, while others build on what has been learned from a review of the literature (Avolio, et al., 2000).

1. There is a need to investigate the degrees of context for virtual team members and the effects of those varying degrees of relationship building. To accomplish this suggested investigation, a longitudinal study with multiple virtual teams should be conducted to determine the team effects of those virtual team members who have established context versus those who have had no prior experience working together. A simultaneous longitudinal study would allow various degrees of difference versus common steps and features. It would be interesting to observe each team's work through measurement of their relationships.

2. There is a need to examine the team modifications that are made when new virtual team members join the team. How are the new virtual team members included into the already existing team cohesiveness? Some studies have investigated the time and duration of the teams (Grosse, 2002) as well as the team relationships (DeSanctis & Monge, 1999; Yoo & Alavi, 2001); conversely, there are no specific studies which give fact to the way in which new virtual team members are transitioned into already existing virtual teams.
3. As we focus on executive virtual teams, more research, study and investigation is needed on executive virtual teams where all team members share the responsibility of leadership to effectively work for the larger organization. Studies have already been conducted on virtual team leadership (Avolio, et al., 2000).
4. Specific implications for a virtual team performing on a specific project in a specific amount of time is another area in need of attention (Powell, et al., 2004). Focus must center on the type of skill and expertise necessary for specific virtual team projects and also the specific projects where virtual teams will perform best (Powell, et al., 2004).
5. Since this research study revealed that communication is a more than significant element of the virtual team experience, it would be interesting to identify the reason for silence with virtual team members. It is one thing to not respond to a question or suggestion, but to determine the reason for extended periods of silence. How much psychology goes into being silent when one is expected to be a part of a virtual team? How committed are the virtual team members to the social identity, value, and

worth associated with the organization and the team? To date, there is no information concerning this proposed topic of study.

6. Investigation of environmental effects which add to and take from the characteristics and cultural norms of virtual team members. In multinational teams, what procedures and steps are taken to get past the environmental effects of the organizations they work for as well as the multinational virtual team members they work with?
7. Finally, the dimensions of communication and the ways in which relationships are constructed can be examined more deeply to confirm or add to the results that were determined in this study. Specific investigation on the communication, relationship and trust components which manifest into accountability, loyalty, commitment, and dedication to performance outcomes will provide more insight into the individuals, organization essentials, and factors contributing to virtual team success.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this exploratory case study. First, according to Ahuja and Galvin (2003) the transferability of this study is limited to the specific type of executive virtual team studied here, e.g., one that is multinational, inter-organizational, and voluntary in nature. Thus, this executive virtual board may not mirror other virtual work groups and/or virtual teams in corporate settings (Ahuja & Galvin, 2003). Second, the lack of virtual team experience of some of the virtual board members. The majority of virtual board members were comfortable working with technology in a virtual environment. Those virtual board members were able to consistently communicate as a team through multiple methods using technology. Other virtual board members were

unclear of the concept of utilizing technology as a vehicle for communicating with board members. This limitation may have skewed the amount of responses to email and telephone conference availability.

Third, not all virtual board members were available for interview in person or otherwise. Initial interviews were conducted in a face-to-face environment. Interviews and general conversations with each board member began in a face-to-face setting but further interviews were non-existent with three of the virtual board members thereby limiting the access of interviewee perspectives. Fourth, the attrition of multiple board members during the duration of the study again limited the access of interviewee perspective. Three virtual board members resigned and were replaced by substitutes from their local chapters. One substitute elected not to participate in this research study; another substitute was appointed after the data collection phase of the research; and the third substitute was unresponsive to requests for interview availability. In spite of these limitations, the researcher continued moving forward with the virtual board members willing to add their perspectives to the research and data collection process.

Final Thoughts

Throughout this whole process of exploration as I have worked through this research study, I have been surprised to find a lot of myself in the people participating. Additionally, I have discovered that everywhere I look I am able to see communication, relationship, and trust ever expanding and developing my depth of understanding of them. Communication, relationship, and trust in teamwork benefits any team virtual or

otherwise. It is the glue that binds the team together to encourage growth and development.

The executive virtual board selected to participate in this research study was best suited to this experience because they were, like me, willing to make mistakes along the way and learn from them. They were open to innovation and fresh ideas just as they volunteered their time to participate with an executive virtual board. Most of the board members voiced the significance of working in a supportive environment that gave and took as well were willing to do the same with this research study. Essentially, they were a cool group of people to work with and learn from. Their perspectives and experiences were diverse and varied. In essence, they were a true virtual team and provided the tools and resources necessary to conduct a qualitative case study.

Although I made many mistakes during the research process, there is nothing I would do differently because it enabled me to learn. However, now that I know what to do and how to do it, the next time, I will use those lessons to build upon my learning so that I may successfully gather and collect data from participants. This study will benefit the next group of participants because I will be better prepared and have an understanding of the research process. Therefore, I expect to be a more calm and comfortable researcher. My hope is that I will be better able to articulate the significance and purpose of my work to accomplish buy-in with participants.

The one thing that I value most from this research exploration is that I have learned to dig deeper for meaning and clarification. Rather than stopping the conversation, instruction, work order, or research at assumption, move forward to

understanding. During this research study I have learned that communication allows us to better understand the message. I am totally connected with the research that took place and am happy to stand alongside of it.

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APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES

The participant summaries are displayed and referenced in Table 3 which is introduced in Chapter IV. It is referenced as Table 3 representing a summary of the participants who participated in this study. Table 3 provides a composite summary of all participants involved with the board from the initial meeting in February 2005 and throughout the course of the data collection. The table provides the names, country of origination, country represented as board member, age, gender, board position, and the most important lesson conveyed. The first six columns represent approximate information as projected at the time of the initial meeting of each board member. The column representing the most important lesson conveyed is a summation of all the conversations through email, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, scripted texts and observations. These lessons were the points that board members circled back to when communicating their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions.

Table 3 displays the highlights of major characteristics of each virtual board member participating in this study. The most common message communicated throughout the data collection phase of the study was the need for belonging or being a part of something and having the ability to contribute to it. The initial meeting with the virtual board members was seven months prior to the extended meeting and interviewing. In that time, board members left and new board members joined the group. All participants are referenced in Table 3.

During the data collection process of this study, each participant provided lots of information on their views, ideas, suggestions, leadership styles, and understanding of their roles as virtual team board members. Although those details from the conversations

have been referenced in and throughout the dissertation, a short and small summary of the characters is provided through Table 3 referenced in Chapter IV. The objective was to familiarize the reader with enough details about the participants referenced in order to form a glimpse of the characteristics of each participant without providing too many details revealing participants' anonymity.

Although each participant was presented with the informed consent forms referenced in Appendix B, lots of information was provided during interviews that was unique and specific to their particular roles on the board. The virtual board participant summaries referenced in Table 3 provides ample details and specifics to the responses to questions and the perspective from which each board member responded because they represented a position on the board as well as their represented country for board membership. In essence, the details from the conversations provided the basis for this study, its implications, and suggestions for further research.

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent Document
“Understanding the Team Dynamics of an Executive Virtual Team”

You have been asked to participate in a research study to investigate the team dynamics of an executive virtual team. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a member of an executive board working in a virtual team capacity. A total of 15 board members have been selected to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to identify the team dynamics of an executive virtual team in order to understand what makes an executive virtual team successful as part of the dissertation requirements for a Texas A & M University doctoral degree. You understand the following about this research study:

- The anticipated risks associated with this study are that discomfort may occur due to the possibility that the interview questions may be too long; therefore, interview questions are short and concise.
- There are no direct benefits associated with this study.
- The conversations had during the face-to-face interviews will be tape recorded.
- This study is confidential which will have my replies coded.
- No identifiers linking me to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.
- Research records will be stored securely and only Ramona Leonard Riley will have access to the records.
- This study will only take six (6) months from September 1, 2010 until February 28, 2011.
- The anticipated time for the interview will be approximately 1.5 hours.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer questions concerning your experience working within an executive virtual team. You are aware that email interviews may be conducted throughout the course of the six (6) month study period. You will receive no monetary compensation.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Texas A & M University or SIETAR-Europa. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without your relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected. You can contact Ramona Leonard Riley at 713.269.9015 or (RileyRamona@gmail.com) with any questions about this study or Dr. Toby Marshall Egan at 979-458-3585 or (Egan@tamu.edu).

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in research, Texas A & M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects’ rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Compliance, (979)458-4067 or (IRB@tamu.edu).

You have read the above information. You have asked questions and have received answers to your satisfaction. You have been given a copy of this consent document for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Email Script for Email Interviews
“Understanding the Team Dynamics of an Executive Virtual Team”

You have been asked to participate in a research study to investigate the team dynamics of an executive virtual team. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a member of an executive board working in a virtual team capacity. A total of 15 board members have been selected to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to identify the team dynamics of an executive virtual team in order to understand what makes an executive virtual team successful as part of the dissertation requirements for a Texas A & M University doctoral degree. The following specifics are involved with this study:

- The anticipated risks associated with this study are that discomfort may occur due to the possibility that the interview questions may be too long; therefore, interview questions that are short and concise for answers to be typed within the email format.
- There are no direct benefits associated with this study.
- This study is confidential which will have your replies coded.
- No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.
- Research records will be stored securely and only Ramona Leonard Riley will have access to the records.
- This study will only take six (6) months from September 1, 2010 until February 28, 2011.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer questions concerning your experience working within an executive virtual team. You are aware that email interviews may be conducted throughout the course of the six (6) month study period. You will receive no monetary compensation.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Texas A & M University or SIETAR-Europa. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without your relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected. You can contact Ramona Leonard Riley at 713.269.9015 or (RileyRamona@gmail.com) with any questions about this study or Dr. Toby Marshall Egan at 979-458-3585 or (Egan@tamu.edu).

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in research, Texas A & M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Compliance, (979)458-4067 or (IRB@tamu.edu).

You have read the above information. You have asked questions and have received answers to your satisfaction. By proceeding with this email interview, you consent to participate in the study.

Ramona Leonard Riley
RileyRamona@gmail.com
713.269.9015

Telephone Script for Telephone Interviews
“Understanding the Team Dynamics of an Executive Virtual Team”

You have been asked to participate in a research study to investigate the team dynamics of an executive virtual team. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a member of an executive board working in a virtual team capacity. A total of 15 board members have been selected to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to identify the team dynamics of an executive virtual team in order to understand what makes an executive virtual team successful as part of the dissertation requirements for my Texas A & M University doctoral degree. You understand the following about this research study:

- The anticipated risks associated with this study are that discomfort may occur due to the possibility that the interview questions may be too long; therefore, interview questions that are short and concise.
- There are no direct benefits associated with this study.
- The conversations we have during these telephone interviews will be tape recorded.
- This study is confidential which will have your replies coded.
- No identifiers linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.
- Research records will be stored securely and only Ramona Leonard Riley will have access to the records.
- This study will only take six (6) months from September 1, 2010 until February 28, 2011.
- The anticipated time for the interview will be approximately 1.5 hours or less.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer questions concerning your experience working within an executive virtual team. You are aware that email interviews may be conducted throughout the course of the six (6) month study period. You will receive no monetary compensation.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Texas A & M University or SIETAR-Europa. If you decide to participate, you are free to refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You can withdraw at any time without your relations with the university, job, benefits, etc., being affected. You can contact Ramona Leonard Riley at 713.269.9015 or (RileyRamona@gmail.com) with any questions about this study or Dr. Toby Marshall Egan at 979-458-3585 or (Egan@tamu.edu).

This research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board – Human Subjects in research, Texas A & M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, you can contact the Institutional Review Board through the Office of Research Compliance, (979)458-4067 or (IRB@tamu.edu).

You have been read the above information. You have asked questions and have received answers to your satisfaction. By proceeding with this telephone interview, you consent to participate in the study.

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

VITA

Candidate: Ramona Leonard Riley

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Education: Bachelor of Arts, Political Economy
Sweet Briar College, 1989

Master of Arts, Curriculum and Instruction
Clark Atlanta University, 1999

Doctorate of Philosophy, Human Resource Development
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The DeJohn Group, LLC
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San Jacinto College
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Teacher, 1999-2000
Aldine Independent School District
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Fulton County Board of Education
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