Fruitful Solutions for Challenges in Distant Teams

A Case Study

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Preface

We want to thank Marina Systems for letting us conduct this case study on their company. We are grateful to all the interviewees who have been very helpful, sharing information and their honest experiences, enabling us to create this thesis. It has been truly instructively and inspiring.

Furthermore we want to thank our supervisor Anna-Carin Nordvall for guiding us through this experience with engagement and helpful advice. She has encouraged us to problem solve on our own and made us feel proud of our result.

Thank you.

Emmi Salaterä and Sofie Brandt
Abstract

We are currently in an ongoing internationalisation period, demanding organizations to coordinate activities spanning geographically through time and traditional boundaries. Co-workers begin to work more frequently geographically dispersed from each other creating new challenges for leaders and organisations all over the world. The distance requires groups to use technology to cooperate, bringing both advantages and disadvantages. These changes demand organizations to go from traditional team formations to virtual. This leads us to our topic of research, investigating Marina Systems experience with the previously stated work setting.

What problems can be found at Marina Systems regarding their dispersed work setting and how can they be solved?

The purpose of our research was to find the challenges and possibilities that Marina Systems perceive, as well as contributing with sustainable solutions for managing their distant teams. We conducted a qualitative case study with interviews. Different theories used in this case study regarded geographically dispersed teams, virtual teams, hybrid teams and distant leadership.

The results found in the interviews showed that Marina Systems had some of the challenges and problems found in the theory chapter. They can become more successful in their planned expansion if they start considering their employees as members of a hybrid team and start adapting their leadership behavior to what such groups need. Areas of communication and a lacking reward system were some of the opportunities for improvement.
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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In this chapter we will introduce our choice of subject, the geographically dispersed teams, and why this distant work setting is an interesting area to research. We will provide an understanding of the background that lies behind and fall into our purpose and problem.

Choice of the subject

Through our years at the university we have come across many different interesting management theories about group behavior. But we have not obtained the opportunity to look closer at the new concept of virtuality in groups. The ever evolving dimensions of technology bring possibilities to organizations and therefore constantly create new needs and challenges to be solved. Due to this interesting aspect, new research possibilities and results can be achieved. This is especially interesting to us since we are both currently living in between two countries where we might find ourselves facing the reality of distant working. To learn more about this specific work situation is going to help us handle challenges as both employees and as managers. We believe in an always developing technology improving the possibilities to use globally dispersed organizational structures.

Background

“…Hitler disliked using the telephone because he felt that it minimized his magnetism”.1

In this new world, where we spend more time all around the globe than at our office, the importance of effective leadership is increasing rapidly. With a spread out work force, companies can respond faster to market opportunities and utilize talent from diverse sources. Co-workers being more frequently geographically distant from each other create new challenges for leaders and organizations. The distance requires groups to use technology to cooperate towards their common goals which both bring advantages and disadvantages.2 Having to communicate through technology bends the traditional social rules since face-to-face interaction is not the prime way of communication, for example, the social self-explication to wait for someone to finish speaking before you speak. Since the physical contact is low it can have

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an effect on the leader’s possibility to be inspirational. Employees also have a harder time to read the social context in the technology based communication and therefore it is unclear if trust can be established.³

All teams consist of individuals with their own level of commitment. A high individual motivation has a positive impact on the willingness to achieve a group performance goal. A too high motivation level however can have team members only focusing on the performance goal, forgetting about the importance of social relationship building.⁴ In a virtual team the group building and task performing is especially hard due to the distance and the tight timeframes. To succeed you need the right people, who understand each other’s roles and give very clear task instructions, which is hard to obtain even under traditional organizational structures.⁵

Recent research has defined different forms of geographically dispersed work teams, for example virtual teams and hybrid teams. A virtual team communicates solely through technology because of the distance which can be due to space, time, culture, or organizational affiliation. Many studies assume that the team members never meet face to face but it is rarely the case in practice. Teams existing between never meeting and always meeting are referred to as hybrid teams and are therefore faced with a potential paradox with both virtual and traditional team challenges.⁶

Purpose
The purpose of our research is to find out how Marina Systems employees and managers perceive and experiences the geographically dispersed work setting. The aim of the research is to investigate possible problems and contribute with sustainable solutions in order to have a continuingly growing organization.

Problem
What problems can be found at Marina Systems regarding their dispersed work setting and how can those be solved?

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Theoretical Methodology

In this chapter we will explain and motivate our preconceptions, our epistemological considerations and our research strategy. These aspects constitute our view of science and knowledge providing an understanding of us as researchers. Further on, this chapter will serve to explain our choice, collection and critique of secondary sources used in the theory chapter.

Preconceptions

Our whole lives there have been family businesses around us. From our fathers’ businesses we have seen and learned about different organizational structures and their complexity. We have seen the difficulties and rewards of managing medium size corporations built from many different individuals, with their own skill sets and needs. This has built an interest in learning more about leadership and management. Our previous work experiences have also taught us about the problems that can occur around people of an organization. We have both seen situations where leadership has been a part of the solution as well as the source of the problem. This interest was one decision factor towards studying leadership and management at university level. The courses taken in English at university level have taught us to read and write more academically and therefore prepared us to do our thesis in English. Writing this thesis in English has been a learning experience, being that our native language is Swedish and Finnish. We have translated Swedish literature to the best of our ability and got the opportunity to practice English in reading, writing and speaking.

The knowledge gained from our previous studies in management has educated us theoretically and has given us a foundation to do the research about hybrid work groups. We had studied management on a base level at Umeå School of Business but wanted to get a deeper international understanding. The best way to do this was to study management in the countries where we see ourselves living in the future. The courses we took at California State University Long Beach and at Helsinki School of Economics were generally about leadership psychology and business strategies which gave us an understanding for the human side of a company as well as the business side. This, we feel, is an important dimension when writing about groups and employees and at the same time trying to see what the best thing is for the company.

Epistemological considerations

When conducting a study the researcher chooses a research method and a methodological approach. Quantitative methods are usually conducted with
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positivist epistemologies while interpretivist epistemologies are connected to qualitative methods.\(^7\) Interpretivism is also referred to as having a hermeneutic approach and regards the willingness for a deeper understanding and interpretation. A hermeneutic approach focuses more on the words and the deeper meaning of the human behavior while quantitative studies conducted with a positivistic approach, relay more on the numbers. Numbers, objectivity and absolute knowledge is of interest in positivism. These studies usually tests and verifies existing theories looking for the only logic truth of science, rather than creating new theories.\(^8\)

We have conducted a case study with a hermeneutic approach. This is the case mainly because of our research method with qualitative interviews and because of our topic of interest. We are linking human emotions and intrapersonal behaviors with existing theory rather than testing a hypothesis by examining research figures from questionnaires. We had to interpret clues from interviews to get a closer understanding of the opportunities and difficulties of our researched distant organization.

**Research Strategy**

Researchers can have two different approaches when connecting theory with empirical evidence. To begin with it is possible to see the relationship between reality and theory by connecting concrete evidence with ideas and then test them together. This approach is called deductive approach, a logical way of seeing the empirical reality where numbers and evidence matters. Another possible way to perceive the research strategies is to use observations of the world and then continue with creating empirical generalizations and identifying preliminary relationships. The inductive approach is different from the deductive because of the nature of being based on observations and interpretations and the level of probability that can be obtained.\(^9\)

Case studies implemented with qualitative research method can be considered more similar to the inductive approach than to the deductive. Doing a case study of management and people makes the human factor significant and we feel that to be able to study human behavior, results cannot be interpreted only with numbers and logistics. When results consist of deep interviews and open questions, emotions and opinions should be given space to. It is more interesting and valuable to the case-object and their organization

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\(^9\) Ibid., p, 53
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to get an extensive analysis and not just hypothesis tested on them. After we get the results of our case study we want to complete the theory chapter so it will represent all the areas requiring focus. This way of doing our study makes us something between inductive and deductive, abductive. According to the literature: “…most researchers are flexible and use both approaches at various points in a study”\textsuperscript{10}.

Collection of Secondary sources

After deciding the purpose of our research we wrote down the key words regarding our topic. With words like independent work, flexible work, self-managing work groups, employee empowerment and distant leadership we searched in databases for new current research. We found new exiting articles about the subject and further appropriate key words like geographically dispersed teams, virtual teams and hybrid teams. We saw that this is a relatively new concept of research and that the interest has increased rapidly along with the new fast developing technology. Due to this wide interest of the area we could find many specific articles about dispersed teams using technology as their main way of communication. Different articles interpret the used terminology slightly differently but thanks to the amount of research done we could find what we needed. Our sources for finding our secondary data were mainly databases such as Business Source Premier and Emerald Fulltext as well as the Umeå University Library. Used secondary sources where scientific articles, printed books and previous studies from which we have collected more possible interesting references. We chose as new articles as possible to get the latest findings regarding our subject. But we also have articles from as early as 2000 to cover and understand the history of how our subject has developed through time.

Choice of Secondary sources

After going through the found articles we could see common reoccurring factors making a path we wanted to follow. These emerging factors creating a pattern were distant leadership, group behavior, communication and technology, commitment, trust, rewarding systems and work stress. By these observations we were able to construct the bases of the theory chapter and take with us what was considered as the most important dimensions of distant work setting. Although it was vital for the theory chapter to have the newest scientific articles it was not enough to us to only use these articles. This is why we wanted to complete the theory chapter by writing about established theories making the theory more multilateral. Since we researched

\textsuperscript{10} Kreuger, L. & Neuman, W. L. (2006), p, 53
hybrid teams it was also important to have theories about traditional teams to cover that side of team working and not to forget the original foundations of team functionality. In the end of building and finishing the theory chapter we looked at the empirical evidence and wrote about issues that were considered important to our research object. We displayed these findings organized under the same topics found in the theory chapter except for commitment and trust that became integrated because they were hard to break apart within the respondents’ answers. Issues and areas that were not considered problematic did not get as much attention as areas in great need of improvement. To conduct the theory chapter this way supports our research strategy which was in the between inductive and deductive.

**Critique of Secondary Sources**

To our advantage we found a lot of recent fresh research since we wanted to minimize the risk for out of date theoretical framework to compare our study with. This approach with only choosing new updated information was even more important to us since making a study about communicating with ever developing technology. Because of this standpoint the theory chapter consists of more articles than books, and therefore also regards less established theories. Since this could be to our disadvantage we cross referenced all the findings and found that most researchers had similar conclusions. This point in the direction that these new studies eventually will become accepted recognized theories. A lot of our selected references are results from studies made on American organizations which are to our advantage when doing a study on a company from California. All the way through our search for secondary sources, we have had to evaluate the relevance and reliability of the found literature. *The leadership quarterly, Information Systems Journal, Academy of Management Journal, Organizational Dynamics, Management Research News, Human Resource Management Review, Small Group Research etc.* have strict prerequisites and are therefore trusted high quality sources of our choice. Many of our books come from well known publishing companies used for course literature at Umeå University, such as McGraw-Hill, Pearson Education, Liber AB and Studentlitteratur.
Theory

In this chapter we will present the most important theories and recent research regarding our subject of research. Recent research showed the same reoccurring problems and challenges in distant teams which we have presented in a summary figure “The tree of Theory”. We have supplemented the found problems with relevant theory to provide a complete picture of the research area.

The tree of Theory

Like the sun, Distant Leadership nurtures the fruit tree of Hybrid Teams. The amount of Traditional and Virtual roots constitutes the consistence of the tree. If you nurture the team you grow fruit in all areas of the tree.

Figure 1. Authors’ summary of the theory chapter.
Distant Leadership

“How does leadership play itself out in an environment where trust is difficult to build, influence is difficult to express, self-leadership is required, and communication is often ambiguous?”

Now when organizations are moving towards more individual flexibility the demands on leaders are changing. Past important factors such as goal setting, delegation, participation and motivation is getting more and more complex and crucial for a leader to master in these new dispersed organizations. Insufficient knowledge about the appropriate leadership challenges can lower the possibility to notice problems like consciously lazy behaviors by distant employees. Qualities of inspirational leadership, a sub category of transformational leadership, are found valuable while working with dispersed groups. A team’s distinctiveness and prestige is enhanced by the inspirational leader’s ability to express confidence in them while the leaders energizing way encourages interpersonal interaction in the group. They push developing socialized relationships and are also able to reinforce the common goals in an effective way. To be a transformational leader is important in all types of business settings, but even more so in geographically dispersed contexts.

Some more basic dimensions of a transformational leader are outlined by: articulating vision, role modeling, fostering goal acceptance, performance expectations, individual support and intellectual stimulation. To be able to articulate the vision a leader must create an ideological future image for the followers to perceive. The role modeling dimension is needed when the leader wants the followers to share the same values and beliefs in order to transfer the behavior into their work performances. Further on, high expectations are connected to the confidence, to be able to expect a lot the leader must make the followers believe in their capability to success even if the goal is difficult to achieve. This also increases the individual support when giving this confidence. A transformational leader should also give intellectual

11 Zigurs, I. (2003), p, 342
stimulation by for example helping them to come up with new answers and solution.\textsuperscript{14}

Transformational leaders have no or a low degree of transactional leader behavior, behavior based on an exchange relationship where manager gives constant tangible or intangible rewards when the team performs well. This leadership style also includes punishments following when failing. It also assumes that the main task of a subordinate is to do what managers tell them to do. Chain of command is furthermore a vital part of the social system. A leadership test can show if a leader have a tendency to be a transformational/charismatic leader (Appendix 3). The questions have the same basic transformational leadership dimensions as earlier mentioned. Results can be interpreted on a scale from 0 to 7 where 2 or lower is to not have tendency and 6 or greater is to have a tendency to engage in transformational leadership. The test also shows one score describing the tendency for transactional leader behavior.\textsuperscript{15}

Project based organizations are commonly run with distant leadership. Virtual teams’ project leading has the same important factors for success as any project lead team, but it becomes even more important to be clear and articulated. Good preparations, detailed planning with criteria, expectations and way of work becomes a more crucial process for success with distant projects. The possibility to access the company intranet is important both for sharing information and for documentation even when you are out in the field. Team members cannot take ownership of projects but understand that the whole organization needs to know and learn from their work. To handle this challenge management can require project diaries, the team members have to share their thoughts and experiences while documenting. Management is also responsible for having an overview of all resources needed in the project, material as well as personal resources.\textsuperscript{16}

These and other new needs are found when organizations go global and must coordinate activities spanning geographically trough time, culture and/or organizational boundaries. Face-to-face teams have a hard time responding to

these new demands which now requires their organizations to go from traditional team formations to virtual with all the new challenges that comes along.\textsuperscript{17}

**Traditional teams**

Two or more people can be considered as a group if they regularly interact over time striving towards common objectives. Groups can be divided in informal and formal groups. Informal groups can be interest, friendship or reference groups, while formal groups are task groups. Since formal groups are more task-orientated they are often seen as work groups, with either permanent objectives (standing task groups) or temporary problems (task groups). When these people work together more permanently like work groups with set performance goals they become a team. Autonomous teams that get authority for monitoring, scheduling and planning are usually referred to as self-managing work teams. To be able to develop groups into well performing teams managers need knowledge about team buildings all crucial elements. Some of these components the leader needs to provide and master is clear goal setting, clear rules of behavior, to model the way, provide time for social bonding and give positive feedback and rewards. The leader should regularly provide challenges, new projects and problems to solve for the team.\textsuperscript{18} Especially since all work-groups exists because of their common purpose being the task at hand, cooperating together towards their common organizational objectives. Task performing together creates the desired group state and leads to achievement of the goals.\textsuperscript{19}

**Virtual and Hybrid Teams**

“We define a virtual team as a collection of individuals who are geographically and / or organizationally or otherwise dispersed and who collaborate via communication and information technologies in order to accomplish a specific goal.”\textsuperscript{20}

With today’s flat organizational structures many companies have increased their degree of virtuality. Since communicating through technology has grown it is more difficult to see a single cut-off point of becoming completely virtual. Different objectives, cultural diversity, organizational affiliations and membership criteria are some of the differences between virtual teams. The virtuality of a team depends on the degree in which the team is dispersed,

\begin{itemize}
  \item Zigurs, I. (2003), p, 340
\end{itemize}
such as the geographic and / or temporal dispersion. Under the right conditions virtual teams has been proved to be even more effective than face-to-face teams.

Hybrid teams are a mix of traditional face-to-face teams and virtual teams, with some team members co-located and some in multiple geographic locations. These semi virtual teams can consist of several employees in remote locations or a single team member working aside from the rest of the group, for example being the only one left at the office. Because of the demand to expand globally is growing in most industries some suggest that most traditional teams are partly virtual today. Consequently organizations and their management are required to be educated about both traditional and different geographically dispersed team settings to be able take full advantage of their possibilities and challenges.

In virtual teams the members may feel isolated due to the absent socialization, particularly when some employees work locally and others distant. Lack of socialization can lead to feeling disconnected and contributing to misunderstandings and conflict. Isolation and demographic attributes can develop sub groups and further management problems. Gender, work location and different work descriptions can be the faultlines dividing the team into sub groups. The more homogeny and similar sub groups are the stronger they get and the more challenging it becomes for the leader to manage them. This complexity can also be referred to as in- and out groups. Hybrid teams might for example, depend more on their co-located colleges than their distant team members and develop us versus them mentality. This kind of favoritism has a negative effect on the trust and perception of remote team members.

The theoretical frame work for strategic contradiction has established four opposites when explaining hybrid teams on the basis of traditional and virtual teams. The contradictions are remoteness-closeness, cultural uniformity-cultural diversity, rationality-emotionality and control-empowerment. These paradoxical frames are roughly drawn traditional vs.

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21 Zigurs, I. (2003), 340
24 Fjermestad, J. (2009), p, 38
26 Staples, D, S., & Webster, J. (2007), p, 68
virtual team attributes from which hybrid teams have to make balanced tradeoffs. For example, if tension is created between the contradictions it is cured by reducing the opposing element, for example setting up more face-to-face meetings (closeness) when remoteness is an issue.\textsuperscript{27}

**Group behavior and organizational culture**

All individuals take on different roles while in different groups. Roles are automatically issued to the team members, often without a personal choice, and exist to form a temporary inner safety.\textsuperscript{28} Some roles do not provide progress for the group performance, they are called dysfunctional roles. The functional roles however guide the group towards achieving their primary tasks and objectives. These are divided in three categories such as task, maintenance and personal roles. Task roles have a direct connection to accomplishing the group goals while maintenance roles provide relationships within the group. At last there are personal roles that only exist for personal needs which can easily harm a group’s interaction. To be effective these roles should be replaced with relationship and goal supporting roles.\textsuperscript{29} This is one of the aspects of which people change when being placed in a group setting. Therefore the assumption that the human behavior remains the same when the individual is alone as when in group situations is wrong. A good leader’s job can be defined as helping the group to easier overcome difficulties and achieve their goals, a post where knowledge about the social effects of individuals building a team is essential.\textsuperscript{30}

Organizational structure is hierarchic when it has centralization. Minimizing this pyramid reminding structure created by centralization, gives a more flat and decentralized structure. To have this kind of decentralized organization means that the authority is dispersed and that decision-making is given to all entities right through the organization. By having dispersed authority and less hierarchy the organization can be considered as a flat organization.\textsuperscript{31} Organizational culture is defined by values, norms, beliefs, rituals and other fundamental assumptions. Unwritten guide lines describe the accepted behavior that gives meaning to the team membership. When the assumptions are accepted by most of the members a strong culture exists which members

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\textsuperscript{27} Cousins, K, C. et al. (2007), p, 460-462
\textsuperscript{28} Svedberg, L. (2007) *Grupp-psykologi – Om grupper, organisationer och ledarskap*, Studentlitteratur, Sysne, p, 161
\textsuperscript{29} Bloisi, W., et al. (2003), p, 394-395
\textsuperscript{31} Bloisi, W., et al. (2003), p, 631
are proud to be a part of. This is harder to achieve when members are multi located because it takes a longer time for the assumptions to surface.

Problems can not only arise from having different language, ethnicity and religion but also from a too strong organizational culture. Filtering information through “cultural lenses” can be one of these problems where strict core believes creates misinterpretations. When going through changes, a strong organizational culture can be an obstacle. The employees’ can resists a future change if it makes them throw away assumptions and approved methods of doing the work.

Cultures in organizations become family orientated if family members are a part of the business. Work performance and compensation can therefore become emotional issues leading to serious conflicts. To prevent this from happening performance measurement, compensation policies and clear guidelines must be established for family members. Issues need to be discussed and it is important to revisit these policies continuously to be able to ensure harmonious family relationships and the sustainability of the family business. This way it is possible to have a leader from inside a family.

Communication through technology

Communication is an important key factor to be a successful group, and even more important for virtual teams. Body language constitutes more than seventy percent of the communication for face-to-face interaction. When using telecommunication (systems used in transmitting messages electronically) it is difficult for individuals to utilize information from gestures, facial expressions and vocal accentuations. Because of the lack of face-to-face communication misunderstandings and conflicts can easily occur in virtual teams. Many companies live under the illusion that using emails to replace the face-to-face communication is good enough. Unfortunately this is no way of holding a productive meeting due to the lack of interaction. An organization with virtual teams needs to find a flexible electronic conference system that suites the group and the occasion to utilize all individuals

32 Bloisi, W., et al. (2003), p, 662
33 Zigurs, I. (2003), p, 341-342
35 Bloisi, W. et al. (2003), p, 713
39 Fjermestad, J. (2009), p, 38
knowledge and all opportunities.\textsuperscript{40} Using richer communication channels, not only emails, helps against information loss. Different forms of communication tools such as group web pages, web collaboration and other web-based tools each help towards project outcomes and facilitate the work interactions. It is important to make sure everyone who participates in the communication has the knowledge and information needed to optimize the use of the technology. If this is not the case these tools can create problems and misunderstandings to the cost of the advantages originally possible.\textsuperscript{41}

"...technological developments occur much more rapidly than our ability to incorporate them meaningfully into on-going work practices\textsuperscript{42}."

A defined structured communication plan is important, including communication tools and interaction frequency for both virtual and face-to-face meetings. The structure is needed to be able to utilize effective communication through the different web based tools. Finding the right process with scheduled phone conferences, electronic brainstorming, active discussion threads and group display screens are examples of a structured communication system. Electronic brainstorming gives the group a possibility to trade ideas and solutions despite the geographical distance. Discussion threads are used as a more flexible way of chatting, since people have different schedules and projects. This gives the team members a possibility to read and write ideas and thoughts when time is available.\textsuperscript{43}

To be successful and able to maximize the productivity in virtual teams they need constant activity. These electronic conference systems need to be actively used and updated by everybody in the organization. Even when there is lack of work team members need to be motivated to share thoughts and solutions of improvement and continuously interact virtually. Also sharing ideas for after work activities for group development should be encouraged activities for distant team members.\textsuperscript{44} Another useful part to add in the communication plan is weekly work summaries to share and gain experiences, knowledge and information among the members of the team\textsuperscript{45}. Communication technology continues to change to become richer with more media synchronicity. Media richness involves personalization and language variety.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{40} Nordengren, M. & Olsen, B. (2006), p, 38,41-44
\textsuperscript{41} Kayworth, T. & Leidner, D. (2000), p, 186
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p345
\textsuperscript{44} Nordengren, M. & Olsen, B. (2006), p, 44-45
\textsuperscript{45} Fjermestad, J. (2009), p, 39
\end{flushright}
among other things. While synchronicity is the possibilities to format and actively change messages because of their reprocessability and rehearsability. This is an advantage, for example being able to withdraw an email that already has been sent or just change the content to more current information.\footnote{Zigurs, I. (2003), p. 346}

Intranets have been used for a long time in large industries but are now also an option for smaller companies. Many of the previous mentioned communication tools are often a part of the complete intranets that you can purchase. A business with an intranet have the upper hand since all the web based communication tools are gathered in one place for everybody to use. The group of authorized users of the intranet can also find procedures and firm policies which helps the workflow. Conflicts can easier be solved when rules, practices and ethic policies are displayed to refer to when disagreements occur within the company.\footnote{Cherkas, J. (2007) A Guide to Developing an Intranet. \textit{CPA Practice Management Forum}, Vol. 3, Issue 11. p. 15}

\textbf{Commitment}

Employees’ feel more committed if their leader also has an ability to show commitment. As a leader of a virtual team commitment should be demonstrated in at least four ways. First a leader should convey the importance of the virtual team, clarify that their work is respected and a necessity of the company. The team members should know the value of having different skill sets, of being a diverse group, and the benefits it brings. Second, expectations need to be clearly stated and openly discussed with all stakeholders, in person. Commitment is achieved when concrete intended long and short term outcomes, high standard performance goals and work procedures are communicated clearly.\footnote{Duarte, D, I. & Snyder, N, T. (2000), p. 45-46}

To allocate resources is another important aspect of increasing the commitment. Leaders need to set aside time and money for appropriate training for virtual team leaders and members. Their specific work environment requires special training in technology, project management and cross-cultural work, an investment that cost time and money. Finally, the most important way a leader can achieve commitment in a team, is by modeling the expected behaviors. Showing flexibility, trust and ability to change when business conditions require, characterizes a good leader. Behaviors not engaged in by the leader should not be expected of the team members.\footnote{Ibid., p. 45-46} As mentioned before communication of the vision, expressing
confidence and energizing the team is considered characteristics of inspirational leadership which is also found to foster feelings of commitment in dispersed teams.\textsuperscript{50}

\textit{Trust}

High commitment and trust is associated with team-level performance and considered to be a key aspect giving team members the ability to overcome the challenge with physical distance.\textsuperscript{51} As described before, due to the technology based nature of communication in distant teams, the interaction has deemphasized social and human contexts. Because of this cold relation, team members can have a harder time identifying and trusting their leader.\textsuperscript{52} One of researched solutions to achieve high trust is to work with inspirational leadership. Since found that inspirational leaders facilitate trust in geographically dispersed teams it has been mentioned as the missing link to be able to utilize all the advantages with this type of work setting. These leaders also enhance team members confidence in their own and others abilities which also leads to increased trust.\textsuperscript{53}

Trust is not only important when talking about team performance but also an essential part of team functioning and interpersonal relationships. Good communication and enthusiasm increases the amount of trust, leading to positive interactions, accomplishing shared goals and team effectiveness.\textsuperscript{54} This key issue is fragile and hard to maintain much because of group members’ first impressions of one another. This quickly formed feeling is hard to break away from, even with new information about the other team members. This creates an issue with trust, and possibly erodes the ability to have any understanding of each other.\textsuperscript{55} The leader needs to work with all conflicts or concerns before they become serious problems, a proactively behavior which in itself contributes to a team that trusts their leader.\textsuperscript{56} An option that lowers the risk for false initial impressions in virtual teams is to have physical face-to-face meetings to get to know each other in the beginning, this is also a step to take when conflicts has gone out of hand.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{50} Joshi, A et al.. (2009), p, 241-242
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., p249-250
\textsuperscript{52} Antonakis, J. & Atwater, L. (2002), p, 698
\textsuperscript{53} Joshi, A et al.. (2009), p, 249
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., p, 243
\textsuperscript{55} Zigurs, I. (2003), p, 341
\textsuperscript{56} Fjermestad, J. (2009), p, 37
\textsuperscript{57} Nordengren, M. & Olsen, B. (2006), p, 134
The less trust management has in its team members, the more they feel the need of monitoring them. This also happens within a group and can result in the team members not monitoring each other at all due to high trust. Further, getting monitored by a team member can be perceived as lack of trust, leading to fear and anger. Combined with an individual’s level of autonomy, amount of freedom and discretion, too much trust can be considered negative to team performance. Even though surveillance in this context is indicating negative effects, most research find monitoring supporting performance benefits and reduce process loss. Leaders need to be aware of this obstacle with high trust, but still understand that a certain level of monitoring is necessary for team performance.58

**Motivation and rewards**

A positive work environment is important when replacing unwanted behavior and creating inner motivation within the employees. There are traditional tools that managers use over and over again that only can give short-term effects on an outer motivation. The most common mistakes a manager can do are hereby made to ten golden rules that should be avoided:59

- Do not raise your voice to get the attention from your employees when feeling irritated
- Do not threaten to pull back resources
- Do not take away work assignments from people who are not working well or fast enough
- Do not correct the employees with negative feedback
- Do not say to the employees that you will be inspecting the crew’s work so “be prepaid or else…”
- Do not give too many specific instructions or rules
- Do not give away the same job to many employees so that “one of them will do the job at least…”
- Do not repeatedly ask “when are you going to finish your assignment…”
- Do not make the noisiest and most self-secure person to a project leader just to be sure that the project will be completed
- Do not have your only regular dialog with the employees only when things go wrong60

60 Hiam, A. (2006) p, 89-95
Traditional leading styles are often considered as insensitive and there easily make the employees frustrated. This affects them in many unconstructive ways, for example it can make them feel stressed, inadequate and irritated. When having these pessimistic feelings it keeps them down and makes them react differently to stimulus than if feeling more positive feelings. Having an employee carrying negative attitudes with him/her can lead to opposite reactions and to a weaker work performance. Positive attitudes which are gained with supportive and sensitive leadership styles create feelings of security, satisfaction, and optimisms. This consequently leads to behavior that is characterized by open-mindedness and good work performance.\(^6^1\)

To be able to create positive attitudes and destroy negative feelings, different tools can be used such as observation tool, non-verbal signals, stimulating positivisms and thoughtfulness. Observation tool is used when a manager wants to be aware of the employees work related feelings. This can happen through a simple question “how are you doing” although not everyone is able to tell freely about their emotions. That is why there could be a more structured model that can be used if a manger decides to take a talk with an employee. Non-verbal signals should also be interpreted when interacting. Words and emotions that can be read between the lines, using instinctive state of being, emotional intelligence are all important aspects and should not be forgotten even if they are more abstract dimension.\(^6^2\)

To show thoughtfulness is not only done by actions, it is sometimes enough to use words and make the employee feel like he/she is being heard and understood. Kind words may not solve the problem but can make a big difference to someone when they are not able to proceed in a situation. The last factor, stimulate positive feelings is a tool to the manager, a manger can stimulate wellbeing and emotions by trying consciously approve the current humor. Listening to the right music and thinking of successful projects are some easy ways to recover enthusiasm needed to support the employees and find strength in difficult situations.\(^6^3\)

Because of the physical absence, distant group members fear that they do not get the same career possibilities as their fellow workers working beside their managers. Losing visual immediacy may get managers to forget the importance of making special team arrangements which is important but not

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\(^6^1\) Hiam, A. (2006), p, 30-33  
\(^6^2\) Ibid., p, 89-95  
\(^6^3\) Ibid., p, 89-95
always directly related to work. For that reason a leader must always make sure that not only traditional team members get the best opportunities but also virtual team members get to proceed on their careers. Career-development opportunities and rewarding systems are the two of the most powerful ways of influencing employees and should therefore be used by leaders. Many rewarding systems are based on the effort put in work and not on the results which is harder to recognize in virtual teams. Because of this rewarding systems should be developed and adapted to virtual teams and their way of working.64

Work stress and Self-leadership

Leaders often have to work in highly stressful work environments created by rapid technological advances, increasing costs and fading resources. A leader’s responsibility is to create a successful organization and make the changes and decisions needed in order to succeed. If downsizing, restructuring and demanding more flexibility is considered necessary, this happens on the expense of the employees and makes the leaders position difficult. To manage the work load, psychological load and completing projects on time, can have negative outcomes, as increased risk of disease and psychological problems as anxiety, depression and exhaustion. Problems of this nature can become expensive in addition to productivity and health-care expenses and should thereby not be overlooked. Leaders ought to be prepared to manage the work stress.65

Self- and shared-leadership can be used as a tool when work becomes too demanding. These leadership methods help the leader to get better control over coping and finding motivation and effectiveness. The core of self-leadership is to make work processes more functional and to take away the leader’s redundant work assignments and responsibilities. The benefits of this method even facilitate the employees in form of getting a greater amount of empowerment when taking over more responsibility.66 Virtual teams also work best when constantly having interesting projects and challenges presented to them, so leaders need to develop trust for their team members

64 Duarte, D, I. & Snyder, N, T. (2000), p, 45-46
66 Ibid., p, 379-380
quickly to be comfortable with delegating responsibilities, to have this win-win situation.\textsuperscript{67}

Practical self-leadership strategies comprise different methods of managing work issues and give a positive control in leaders work roles. For example strategies as self-observation, self-reward and self-job redesign can not only help the leader but also the employees and give positive outcomes such as self-efficacy and diminished absenteeism. Empowerment is the essence of shared leadership and it gives the team members shared responsibilities and helps them to lead one another to accomplish the goals of the group. All the team members exercise leadership when needed at different times and in different ways and thereby removes burden from formally designated leader. Delegated tasks and shared responsibilities constitute opportunities for designing work practices and leadership training that has a major effect on managing work stress.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{67} Nordengren, M. & Olsen, B. (2006), p. 45
\textsuperscript{68} Lovelace, K, J. et al. (2007), p, 379, 384
Practical Methodology

In this chapter we will explain our practical research process and motivate all the choices needed to conclude the study. We will introduce our qualitative style and our case study respondents. This chapter provides information needed to evaluate the creditability of our research.

Qualitative Style

“The key features common to all qualitative methods can be seen when they are contrasted with quantitative methods.”

There are eight contradictions between qualitative and quantitative method:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure objective facts</td>
<td>Construct social reality, cultural meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on variables processes</td>
<td>Focus on interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability is the key</td>
<td>Authenticity is the key</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value free</td>
<td>Values are present and explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent of Context</td>
<td>Situational Context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many cases, subjects</td>
<td>Few cases, subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical analysis</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher detached</td>
<td>Researcher is involved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After deciding the object of interest, dispersed groups working together, it became apparent to us that qualitative method should be used. This research method also applies to our hermeneutical view of knowledge and to the inductive way of viewing the empirical evidence. To be able to explain and understand dispersed groups it is important to learn about the values, interactive processes and social context they operate in. Therefore we chose to do a qualitative research which gave us many aspects to analyze. Quantitative method was not considered as a potential method because it does not provide as wide comprehensions as qualitative method, especially when trying to understand a group phenomenon.

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Ibid., p, 16
**Case Study Style**

To gather detailed, varied and extensive data for comparison with past research, case studies is often used. In case studies the researcher can look at individuals, groups and organizations intensively, focusing on several factors. Case studies is one way of conducting a qualitative research and it can be used both for comparison between different companies and cases as well as investigation of one case deeply. The method is used when the logic of analytic is of interest rather than enumerative information.\(^71\)

Our quest was to learn more about geographically dispersed teams. Since we wanted to analyze these group behaviors on a deeper level, case study was an obvious choice. By doing this we would get a clear view from both the leaders and team members’ perspective to compare with recent theoretical findings. To achieve the most useful knowledge we wanted to conduct the research on a company in one of the countries where we can see ourselves living in the future. We knew of a few different companies in Finland and California that might be interested in cooperating in this research.

The case style research represent to us an ability to look at the object as a total impression and trying to find all possible ins and outs of the matter needed to create an overall picture. That is why we chose to do a leadership test on the case company’s owner, and thereby retrieve a complete analysis together with the interview. The owner also had a mentor involved in the company willing to share his valuable thoughts through a letter. Because of the mentor’s high level of engagement to the company and regular presence he can be considered to have managements’ authority with objectivity in his reflections.

**The Case Study Respondents**

The company with the most appropriate work setting regarding our research topic was Marina Systems (a fictive name) in USA. They are a small company with five fulltime employees that work spread out all over California, which makes them a geographically dispersed team. They have to use technology to communicate which makes them a virtual team and since they do sometimes meet face-to-face, they can be considered a hybrid team, perfect for our research. They have their main office and warehouse in Huntington Beach where their office manager spends all her working time. The rest of the employees, including the owner, work on project basis all over California. The company offers services in marina construction and other marina related work for example underwater inspection. Marina Systems has plans for

further growth in other parts of the world, a process that already has started with a recent Boat Show in Mexico. This expansion is a process, where knowing about the effects distant working has on individuals and there organizations, is more important than ever. They agreed to have all their employees interviewed for our case study and we are both hoping for mutual learning.

Marina Systems (MS) president (referred to, in this thesis, as the owner) lives in Long Beach, California, close to their office and warehouse located in Huntington Beach. Besides being the manager of his employees, he does a lot of hands on work such as diving for their marina construction projects. The Office Manager works full time in Huntington Beach, handling bills, paychecks and answering the phone. MS newly hired an Operations Manager who is set responsible for organizing labor and materials for each particular project. He is responsible for supervising all the work, to make sure everything runs smoothly. The southern California office has one more fulltime employee (referred to as one of the project managers) who gets sent out on projects to dive and/or do other construction related work for the company. These employees all live relatively close to the warehouse but spend more time out in the field in different group constellations to which the driving usually is longer.

In northern California MS has one employee handling sales and marketing (often referred to as the northern sales and marketing representative). He also gets sent out alone or with others, to job sites for diving and marina construction, sometimes as project manager. Depending on the project size MS have to hire more workers to get the job done, but these five are the regular employees. MS does projects all over California but is expanding to all of the US, as well as the rest of the world, starting with Mexico. MS Director (referred to as the mentor) come in from time to time to help mentor and develop the company further.
**Telephone and Semi-structured Interview Style**

Structured interview methods do not give as much space to explore beyond the questions as a semi-structured interview. If some structure is needed instead of just having focused interviews, without taking off the freedom of answering in own words, semi-structured interview is the right method to use.\(^2\) Because of our inductive research strategy and the hermeneutic view of knowledge, we wanted to interview the employees and get aspects that had not been considered in theory chapter. We had created a theoretical ground for the interviews but it was important that the employees could tell us freely their opinions and reflections before finalizing the theory.

Telephone interviews have many advantages, they are economical, timesaving and an interview done by phone can also be experienced as less threatening than if done in person\(^3\). We knew that we needed to do telephone interviews because it would be too expensive to fly to California and the fact that we did not think that we could reach so many advantages by interviewing the employees in person. We believe that it was easier for them to answer and reflect on the phone than if we had been there interviewing them in the same room. This is because one of the author’s, Sofie Brandt, already had met them face-to-face hence we were not considered as total strangers, which could have affected them negatively for example by not talking openly.

The interview questions were chosen and formatted with theory chapter as a foundation because we wanted to have a theoretical ground behind the questions. We started the interview questions with open questions where the respondents had the possibility to develop answers as they saw it necessary and also reflect openly. Further on we had some other questions which helped the respondents if she/he had difficulties with understanding the question or nervousness. Structuring the questions like this gave us the possibility to compare the empirical evidence with theory and add aspects to our study that had not been considered in advance.

When conducting the interviews we started doing them together as a team, both asking questions. It worked quite well but somehow we felt that it was too structured way of doing the interview and the wanted dialog


disappeared. After the first interview, we decided that only one of us would ask questions. It was clear that the author Sofie Brandt would be this person because of the fact that she had met these people, all but one, at least few times before. We both were present when interviewing so that we both could hear the answers and discuss them later on. It worked better than expected and we were able to get the wanted dialog and decrease the amount of help questions.

Access

Marina Systems is a distributor to a company that is owned by the other author Sofie Brandt’s father. She has met all but one employee face-to-face when travelling to California or them visiting Sweden. She also has got the opportunity to create a website for the company. Therefore she has developed a relationship with the employees which we think is for our advantage. We believe that they felt comfortable with opening up since she was not a stranger. It could be to our disadvantage if they feared that she would tell their sensitive opinions directly to their boss but we made sure they were aware of that they had an option to be anonymous. We decided to keep all the respondents anonymous and only use their work titles. Also the decision was made to create a fictive name instead of using the real company name. The name was changed to minimize any negative publicity that possibly could harm the company’s reputation. This could also have a positive effect on the company’s willingness to share negative information.

To do a research through interviews makes it obviously necessary to contact the participants. This might happen easily or by contacting a formal gatekeeper who controls the access to the interview objects.\(^4\) In our case we needed to contact the leader and the owner of the company to be able to do the interviews and write the case study. After contacting the owner he gave us all information needed to contact his crew. We believed that it was best to contact the employees directly so that we could explain what we were researching and how it would happen. This was also important to us to not increase the owners work load. To contact respondents directly is considered the best way to make contact because a researcher has internalized the subjects and can in the best possible way to answer to questions that naturally arise in this context\(^5\).


\(^5\) Ibid., p, 39
We understand that there was a certain amount of access problem when interviewing a small company with only few employees. They knew that a total anonymity could not be guaranteed because it is easy to figure out who they were from the statements. This could therefore bring problems when discussing organizational problems at their workplace, being afraid that their employer could find out how they really feel. We did not feel that this was the case but we wanted to be aware of this specific aspect. It felt like everyone was able to talk freely because they care deeply about the company and was able to see the possible benefit of improving the organization through this case study.

*Transcription of data*

A transcript of data material is very vital to a researcher, especially when it is done with precision and the transcript so it can help to re-create the verbal and non-verbal interview material.\(^76\) We did a transcript of every interview directly after it was conducted using a special program as a help. After one of us had transcribed the audio file into a text document the other one read it and made sure nothing was missing. The interviews were done with Skype and recorded both with a recording machine and with a computer program. Afterwards we would decide which of these methods had a better quality and use that one. The used language was English which did not create any problems because we were asking questions about the theoretical framework which was used in the theory chapter which therefore was familiar to us. After we were done with the transcriptions we contacted the employees and asked if they wanted to stay anonymous, if they wanted to add something or had any other questions regarding the interview. None of the employees wanted to stay anonymous or had any other questions.

*Critique of primary data*

Reliability is a term for being able to show the same result if a study was to be repeated, to be sure that the measurements have been done right. Validity shows the degree of generalization that can be done to other similar units. When doing a qualitative research, terms validity and reliability can be seen slightly differently than when doing a quantitative study. Even though the essence of the term validity is not going to be changed, less importance is to put on the weight on measurement aspects. For example when describing extern reliability it is harder for qualitative studies to be replicated because a

social environment cannot be “frozen”.\(^7\) We did a partly inductive study and wanted to let the respondents describe their work reality and experiences through semi-structured interviews. If more structured interviews were done it could show conclusions that did not come up in our study. However we consider that the degree of reliability in our study is high because of the freedom to describe aspects that the respondents felt were important to discuss. By giving this freedom we think that if the study was repeated the results would not differ a lot. Also the theoretical framework in our study was made as strong and as fresh as possible which also increased the reliability and the fact that we measured right aspects.

The extern validity is good when the results can be generalized to other social environments\(^8\). The chosen case object was a small company with only 5 employees, which would make it difficult to draw statistical conclusions as well as to make generalizations in more extensive contexts. We wanted to gain a deeper understanding and benefit this specific company and by that our main focus was not to make large generalizations that would apply to all other companies. Our research was however made more valid because we used legitimate literature about qualitative research method throughout all the interviews and by that we were fully prepared in the interview situations.

\(^8\) Ibid., p, 306
Empirical evidence

In this chapter we will present the empirical findings of our study. The findings are presented and organized according to the different found topics of importance in the theory chapter. Each topic is divided into the leaders’ and the employees’ perspective and presented separately to ease the readers’ comprehension.

Group behavior and organizational culture – Leaders

The owner of the company described how they just have created a new organizational structure- and a new operational plan, showing how the company operates, from the lowest employee throughout the chain of command. He reflects that the employees are comfortable with calling their immediate supervisor who then passes the problem to the overall operations manager subsequently contacting the owner. When the actual problem is solved, the solution travels all the way back through the chain of command to the particular employee, whether or not they are at the office or out in the field. Although this operational plan has been made, it does not include ethics and morals which on the other side are covered in the employee manual. This chapter in the employee manual describes how the company expects their employees to act when they are on a job sight, how they are expected to dress, what they are expected to say and not to say to specific customers.

MS mentor believes that the leader of a distant team must be from outside the family/friend circle, having the authority to discipline those who refuse to improve. “...everyone knows family ties are stronger than the rules. The mentor points out that until very recently, MS has only consisted of family and friends. This has flavored all other issues in the company. Hiring an operational manager was the first step towards having people outside the family within the company. The negative aspect hiring the new guy was, his work was reduced to a “ghost-like-entity” and he consequently has not been able to get to know the rest of the crew nor had the time to set up his operational protocols.

When asking about the team feeling among the employees MS owner points out how everyone feels a part of the team even though this may not be as strong feeling as it should be. According to him some feel that there is an issue with upper management not always sharing detailed descriptions of what is going on with the company. This makes the employees feel like they are in the dark about certain things. He also adds that being a leader means that you must choose what information to disseminate. In his opinion the information should be distributed only if it is directly related to their work. A leader is able to see the bigger picture but the employees can have difficulties
to understand the company’s situation and all the aspects involved. MS owner hopes that he has the right people that are responsible enough to understand that there is a job that needs to get done and it needs to get done as quickly and efficiently as possible.

When talking about if he thinks that his employees’ roles’ change when he is not around, he comments: “It is human nature I think, when the cats away the mice will play”. The mentor also notes that when the owner is not present, things do not get the attention needed. There might be a lot of standing around and talking about the task leading to the work to proceed slowly. This has been reported by the clients but has not decreased the quality of work which has remained on a reasonable good level.

**Group behavior and organizational culture – Team members**

All the respondents thought that the organizational culture at MS was strong. A project leader explains how well he and one of his team member’s know each other by giving an example of them being able to communicate without even saying a word. When asking him how he feels about new people, not a part of their team, he replies: “It can slow things down, but as long as that person who is from the outside is willing to learn and, you know, listen to what they are being told then I think that in the long run it can be beneficial.” He further on explains that there is a time period right at the beginning that is crucial when the new employees need more help and should learning and observing what the older employees are trying to teach.

The office manager also summarizes the question of organizational culture as it being strong and that they all are at the same page. She adds that some of the company policies can be found in the employee manual where it is written what you should do and should not do. Everything is so family orientated that it makes this aspect easy. They also have the same mind setting about how they want the business to work because everyone wants the company to be successful. “We all feel like one team and we are striving towards the same thing.” The northern sales and marketing representative deliberates the same way as the office manager, stating that such a small company with such a small amount of people ought to be on the same page and that he is feeling pretty confident that they are a good team.

According to two of the employees, it does not matter if the owner of the company is in the room, the roles and behaviour is still the same. One said that everyone is aware of that even though the owner is not physically there, he is still in charge. And when the owner is absent it is the operations manager’s job to step in and take the management role, to make sure that things get done and then communicate the results back to the owner.
According to the operational manager everyone has the same interests inside and outside work (all the employees enjoy cars and equipments) which makes the work environment very good.

After discussing the roles with the office manager we also took up the possibility of sub-groups existing at MS. She replied that there is not usually any certain groups that work together because there is so few employees. The northern representative is doing his thing up north and the others have been working together down in southern California. The operations manager is trying to get filled in and is still learning as he goes on jobs to learn. She asked us after this if we meant more like social groups to what she then answered: “Oh no, everyone does kind of their own thing.”

**Communicating through technology – Leaders**

The main way of communicating while distant within MS is, according to the owner, cell phones with calls and text messages, and the Internet with emails. He explains that the employees are required to check in once a day while working distant and that he tries to call once a day when he is working away from them. He cannot think of any other way of communicating due to the nature of their business and feels that it really works for them. When discussing an intranet with discussion threads as an extra communication method he explains that their blackberry phones together with emailing covers that need.

The owner’s mentor writes that the benefit of casual interaction between personnel, occurring in standard work settings, is lost with distant working. He explains how the virtual setting isolate each area possibly losing idea flow and unique solutions conjured from casual interaction. The owner’s mentor writes in his letter of reflections that he would find a chat room with different topics of discussion helpful. “In any group of people who attempt to work as a team, there must be some chatter about what is happening, how they are feeling, and being a part of the decision making.” He also suggests a weekly newsletter covering events, jobs and opportunities.

**Communicating through technology – Team members**

Most employees think the communication works really well but one wanted to add that the face-to-face communication always is better if it is an option. He describes that there sometimes can be misunderstandings with people writing something one way and somebody else interpreting it different, but overall he thinks that the communication is really good. The operations manager says that the communication is good simply because the technology allows it to be. The office manager agrees and says that they usually do not
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

have any problems with their way of communicating while distant. She says that the owner sometimes is hard to get a hold off on his cell phone but that emails fixes that. She originally felt that they were not missing anything in the used communication methods but continues with that scheduled phone meetings probably would be a good thing to look in to in the future.

Also the most distantly working employee thinks that phone meetings through Skype would be a good extra method of communication, he feels that virtual meetings would be the closest way to seeing each other. He believes that communication is the key. It is all about containing an ongoing, constant communication even if there is nothing to say, to just touch bases and talk. He suggests weekly virtual meetings but explains that talking once a week is not enough; you need constant communication like if you are right next to each other. Having an intranet with virtual meeting possibilities and frequently updated discussion threads would be very helpful to MS according to him. He feels that only using emails and text messaging brings a lot of misunderstandings to the table. He explains that you cannot hear a person’s tone in an email and therefore easily misinterpret each other. One good thing about using emails though is that you can copy everybody in on them. MS unfortunately has a lack of communication, that people forgets to email, or forgets a certain crucial word that turns the whole conversation around. He reflects over the possibility that he especially has seen this problem, since he is the one working alone in his own location. He truly believes feels MS can improve a lot. “Communication! That’s it! That’s the key thing!”

Commitment and Trust – Leaders

The owner of MS feels that he shows commitment to the organization and its employees by constantly working, 24 hours a day 7 days a week. He shows commitment by being diligent in maintenance, repairing equipment and by supplying them with the most state of the art equipment that is available to the company, which they can afford. Further on a positive thing is his open door policy where the employees’ always can come with suggestions for improvement. He feels that he is always willing to listen. When asked about how he communicates expectations to the employees he explains how people learn. Employees learn from either watching or actually doing, the best way is to show them, explain that this is the right way to get it done, this is the way you want it done. This will provide them with guidelines. He continues with referring to his open door policy which enables employees to discuss their different idea of how something should be done to together find a solution.

When asked if there is any resources set aside for the employees to hang out and get to know each other, the owner explains how they meet every day
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after a project discussing what they learnt and how they can improve. Different group constellations work on different projects but he feels that they are constantly meeting and discussing. All the preparations and planning for projects is done in house and that they try to schedule meetings around that to try to ensure that everybody has enough of a notice to participate. According to the owner they also have monthly meetings discussing past and future projects and he feels that the distance is not making meeting a problem all the time, just every once in a while. He also talks about resources for education and training explaining that the company can pay for classes for employees if it shows beneficial to their job.

MS owner thinks that you have to have the outmost trust in your employees to carry out the tasks that you set forth to them and feels that the level of trust is affected by being a spread out work force. He explains that it takes a while to build trust and that the only way he can build it is by putting them out in the field, letting them work and then judge their performance accordingly, on customer response for example. Since he is related to some of his employees, he shares his experience with hiring family in relation to trust. He says that the initial assumption, that you could trust them more and right up front, is not always true. That family members can have the assumption that they should be able to get away with more or less than a regular employee and that you as a leader have to ignore the fact that they are your relatives and treat everybody the same. Finally he says that it is a case by case basis, that it has its reward on some levels.

MS mentor explains in his letter of reflections that even though team members are friends they still have personality traits from prior experience and training. The owner says that one hard part to handle with distant working is getting the employees responsible enough to call in their time sheets and organizing their tools. It is hard to make sure that they are prepared to do the job he expects and with the quality he expects them to do it. He has a good team to fulfil those requirements but mentions that they can always improve! When asked about the hardest part he answers:

"The hardest part is to be able to, for me anyways, I’ve got to be able to rely on each employee to be prepared, to look nice, speak to the customers professionally, without me being there."

According to the owner, MS assign project leaders for each project to supervise the employees on that specific project. The project leader will rotate from project to project and that they are chosen because of their skills and past experiences. When asked if close employees can get offended by getting monitored as much as other employees he explains that he considers that a
personal issue that they have to deal with and refers to this as the problem with hiring relatives.

MS mentor explains that there is built-in trust in the welfare of the company since the business is made up of trusted friends or family. He continues writing that this familiarity and need to operate on a self disciplined base can make it awkward for management to discipline.

Due to the familiarity at MS, an atmosphere of freedom to exercise individual decision making is created. “That is, the employee refuses to perform in the manner requested because he has decided to do the task differently or to do something entirely different.” The mentor gives examples of this attitude with friends/family not respecting the tools, damaging them, throwing them away and not caring about their maintenance. He also shares that excessive drinking each evening on projects has been a weakness of some employees. Even though nightly socializing can help build trust and understanding, “...the adverse effects of excess seem to dominate in this instance.” However, that this is not true behavior of all employees and writes that the family/friend relationship is beneficial in terms of loyalty.

Commitment and Trust – Team members

“...new people that come in. Yes it makes it difficult when you don’t see them day in and day out to know if you can trust them with your life in their hands.”

One project leader explains that he knew many of his co-workers before he started and that it therefore was a certain level of trust that they built as friends. But for new people that trust has to be earned. He describes that when you dive you put your life in somebody else’s hands that monitors you and for this to work you need to be able to trust each other and be a hundred percent committed. When you watch a person work you can figure out how committed they are, so if you do not see each other day in and day out trust can be difficult to build. He says that they are all like family and therefore they care about each other and monitor each other more.

The operations manager’s point of view is that everybody is very committed and that there is very high trust in the company. He feels committed because it is a challenge for him and thinks that one reason for the others commitment is that they are friends with the owner. Friends do not let friends down so they all do whatever needs to be done. Having a family commitment is not a negative thing, rather a very positive aspect. He says that he cannot see negative aspect with distant working simply because of the friendship between the employees. Everybody is pretty self-disciplined at MS, knows what to do and tries to get it done as quickly as possible. He thinks that no
resources set aside for the perspective of getting to know each other though. It
is not a real problem having one employee up north and refers to one day’s
drive as not so far away.

The office manager feels that she can trust MS owner and never hesitates to
call or ask him for anything. She feels respected as an employee and that her
work is important. The owner does not let it go unnoticed that she is
appreciated and is very clear with his expectations. Everything is very
straightforward even with the vision and where the owner wants to take the
company. He knows exactly what he wants, is very focused and driven.
According to her everybody has got together and talked about the vision and
is clear about where they are going. When talking about trust she adds that it
is more of a question of responsibility, of being honest. They were trying to
structure this by hiring an operations manager to monitor and oversee.

They have also tried different timesheets to make sure the responsibility is
there, the office manager explains. Negative aspects with the time sheets and
distance are the payrolls which are her personal responsibility. She needs to
get the timesheets from the employees which can be hard sometimes due to
the distance. Another negative feature with distance that was discussed with
her was the absence of work mates. She admits that being alone at the office
can get lonely sometimes and that she really enjoys when the other employees
are at the office. She also told us that when things get lonely she keeps herself
busy by reorganizing and being a lot on the phone with the others.

The office manager believes that it sometimes can be bad to mix business
with family but says that it so far has been good for MS. Things like lack of
work can become problematic when you are trying to keep family members
busy with work. Finally she says that they do not have get-together
happenings on a personal level for group development, but they have
meetings every few months to re-group.

The northern sales representative feels that it is hard to get to know somebody
if you do not spend any time together besides talking on the phone, but he
does not see it as a big problem yet since they luckily has such a close core
group of people. The level of trust and commitment is also affected by the
distance and is hard to gain trough the phone or email. A solution could be if
building different teams for every project, so you do not only work with the
same core group. He feels that he is not involved in talking about MS vision
as well as unable to read any written down goals and mentions that it has
been discussed in team meetings but never written down in a manual. They
are not assigned to monitor each other, but it is expected to do so. He also
explains the difference from the beginning of the company with only him and
the owner until now. The need of structuring is growing with the amount of employees and that everybody, including himself, is trying to get used to this change.

"...they down there think I'm much closer than I really am, like I'm right down the street or something"

When discussing whether or not MS gives clear directions the northern California representative explains it while dividing it job to job basis and over all work expectations. He feels that it has been clearly discussed and laid out what is expected from him, what he needs to do and how to get it done when talking about his overall work situation. But the clarity of what is expected on a job to job basis is lacking a little bit. The clarity is never there and if there are spoken expectations they are pretty vague and leave the employees having to interpret which can lead to misinterpretations. He has a harder time knowing what is going on since he is distantly located from the others. He is off on his own and not as involved in the ongoing structure change he described earlier. Getting a last minute phone call about being needed down south and having to make fast plans on driving down there. If something is going on up north he has no problem calling the office to see if anybody is available, and usually he will get help. Sometimes if the owner is busy and customers from up north do not want a phone meeting, scheduling becomes an issue. He continues with explaining that there are high expectations often announced after the job; you should have done it this way for example. He also feels that there is little understanding about that everybody is different and does not work exactly the same.

Rewards and Motivation - Leaders
At the moment there is not an official rewarding system at MS, but according to the owner it is something they have been thinking about developing when getting the opportunity. The owner further explains that because of the company size and the daily use of verbal praise they have not needed a rewarding system yet. He also adds that certain work projects are more attractive which can be seen as a reward if getting to deal with that particular work project. The right person for the job is chosen based on the earlier job performance.

The mentor’s reflections about the rewarding system at MS follows: “The friends and family affair also meant that they accept more uncertainty and look to the future benefits rather than demanding immediate and consistent rewards. The owner has made some effort at this by having a Christmas party at which he has the crew and families in. Gives a talk wherein in compliments and recognition for accomplishments are handed out.”
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The problem with distance was mentioned when talking about if employees working away from the owner get the same amount of verbal praise. MS owner thinks that the employees who work from a distance get more of this verbal praise than the ones working closer to him. If he hears good things about the employees from the customers he praises them highly because they work autonomously and solve the problems on their own. He also tells that he criticizes more easily people who work close to him by asking questions like, “Why are you doing it that way, I would do it this way”, which he refers as “nitpicking”. The mentor also wanted to point out how the crew sometimes can perform better when working independent which improves their performance as a personal incentive.

Another issue with distance discussed was the career opportunities if everyone had the same chance to proceed on their careers. The owner said that the distance did not affect being able proceed on their careers but because the company is small these opportunities are limited and the only way to for the company to grow is through new work projects. The mentor analyses how young people (again friends and family) have taken their negative leadership cues from the older friends and family who occupy the team leadership roles. Thus their attitude and performance suffers from the start. This according to him is all being a very bad initiation for their future career performance.

Rewards and Motivation – Team members
All the employees agreed that there was not a systematical rewarding system at MS. They also mentioned that verbal praise was the main way of rewarding them when they have done a good job. One employee thinks that because it is their job and it is expected from them a reward system is not really in place and “good job guys” is enough for him. The office manager reflects how the owner expects a lot but also trusts the employees at the same time. For example giving everyone a freedom to do their work and not being as right above them. The distance does not create any problems with rewards because all the employees get equally verbal praise even though some works closer than others. She also mentions the annual Christmas bonuses and thinks that it is a good thing.

The operational manager expresses that the owner is very appreciative even though the expectations are high and that he is not afraid of showing if disappointed. Further on he thinks that it is nice to have an owner who has been there and done that so that the owner knows what to expect and how to relate to the crew. The most distantly working employee does not quite agree with the others. He thinks that it is hard to get verbal praise from the owner because of his high expectations and also because you are expected to do a
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good job. He adds that it would be a good thing if people got praised when they do something right and that this would work as a confidence boost for them. He feels that the distance is not a reason for lack of support, because that this can be done through the phone.

Work stress and self-leadership - Leaders
We asked MS owner if his responsibilities made him stressed and he replied: “Do I ever feel stressed about putting somebody else in charge on a particular project when I’m not there? Oh yeah!” He feels stressed everyday and then continued explaining that people being un- and disorganized have more stress in their lives. He also notified that when a project occurs and everything is in order, paperwork and schedules, he feels much better. “So I think stress is a matter of organization, to be honest with you.”

We continued the owner’s interview by asking his opinions about delegating work and responsibilities and he answered that this can be a helpful thing to do when feeling stressed. He also pointed out the negative parts of delegating work because it can create serious problems and therefore increase the stress level “...sometimes at the end of the day you say shit I should have done that on my own. I should have just done it by myself and got it done right and not have to worry about it.”

In the mentor’s letter of reflections he notes a situation which is stressful for a manager, telling bad news to family members. How can you tell a family member who has risked his career on you (the manager) that he is walking dangerously close to a point of termination? That he must change his ways, and especially his attitude or else?

Work stress and self-leadership – Team members
Everyone at MS experienced that the owner had a certain, quite high, level of work stress. A solution that was brought up by everyone was that the owner should put more responsibilities on to his leaders and not so much on to himself. A project manager thought that this stress is generated from an overload of work, not enough people to fill in everything and to be able to take care of the customers in order to maintain a good reputation. He also declared that: “...then we kind of get a little stressed because it kind of comes back on us a little bit.” Nowadays the owner has more help because they have both an office manager and an operating manager in the company. To have more people working for you means at the same time that you have more people to worry about and get work for.
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A distantly working employee told that the owner has lately been able to delegate more and is anticipating less stress in the future. Getting more responsibility makes the employee feel more trusted. He enjoys being his own boss and is happy that the owner can soon take on more of a sales role. He still believes that the owner’s stress level is not truly tested before things actually piles on each other and creates a stressful situation.

**Distant leadership – Leaders**

MS owner feels that his employees were aware of the distant work setting before they started and that most of them therefore are ok with it. He believes that his employees grow as individuals with the company and start to see the opportunities with working in the field. Employees like their type of work, they like to problem solve on their own. He does not see it as an advantage or disadvantage to work spread out because of the nature of their business and explains that people have to be able to work autonomously away from the office. MS mentor believes that “long range management is difficult in terms of assessing the employees’ efforts at certain tasks.”

On the self-assessment test about transformational and charismatic leadership MS owner showed the following tendencies: He got top scores on “role model” (7) and “high-performance expectations” (7), showing a high behavioural orientation to engage in transformational leadership. He also showed tendencies for “articulate vision” (6,6) and almost showed tendency to “foster goal acceptance” (5,75) and “intellectual stimulation” (5,75). He got 5 points on “individual support”, a score between having a tendency and not having a tendency for transformational leadership. At last he got a rather high score on “Transactional leader behaviour” showing a tendency to engage in behaviours characteristic of a transactional leader.
ANALYSIS

Analysis

In this chapter we will connect the empirical findings with the theory chapter. We will use the same topics as earlier to simplify the reading process and provide a clear display of the comparison between empirical and theoretical data.

Group behavior and organizational culture

Organizational structure

To be able to develop groups into well performing teams, managers need knowledge about the crucial elements improving team building. Two of these components are clear goal setting and clear rules of behavior. The leader should regularly provide challenges, new projects and problems to solve for the team. To develop groups to well performing teams requires executing a structured organizational plan is a vital tool for all different kinds of businesses and especially for smaller family-orientated organizations.

According to the owner, MS had done an operational plan and an employee manual and can therefore get assistance when managing the company where both associates and family work. The operational plan contains the model that shows who is the primary contact person for a certain employee and the employee manual includes rules about behavior and morals. If the hierarchy is increased too much it might also come back as something negative. Small companies like MS, have the advantage of being flexible and may therefore suffer from unnecessary hierarchy. To be able to be an organization that can adapt quickly to changes, a flat structure is a desirable option because it makes it possible for the chain of communication to not be too long between the beginning and the wanted action.

According to the theory, having family orientated company requires planning and organizing issues, compensations and work performance expectations, brought into concrete policies prevents conflicts from problems taking place. The mentor reflected that because until very recently MS has only consisted of family and friends, it has flavored all other issues in the company. Hiring an operational manager was the first step towards having a company not only consisting of family. He also adds that because the new manager has not been working as much as maybe needed, the operational protocols are not completed yet as it was planned.

79 Bloisi, W. et al. (2003), p, 389-390, 408-409, 413
80 Van der Merwe, S. P. (2009), p, 61
81 Bloisi, W. et al. (2003), p, 636
82 Van der Merwe, S. P. (2009), p, 61
Organizational culture

Organizational culture is defined by fundamental assumptions as values, norms, beliefs, rituals. When the assumptions are accepted by most of the members a strong culture exists and becomes something that members can be proud to be a part of. When asking about the team feeling, the owner’s reflection was that the work crew had a good team feeling even though it was not as strong as it could be. Owner’s statement differences slightly from the other respondents, all of them thought that the team feeling and the organizational culture was strong. It seems that this “us” feeling and the group dynamic is on a solid ground and contributes the work entity to become better and more productive. This happens, at MS, through the insight of always helping out each other’s even when it is beyond the required duties.

Group behavior

Although this team feeling was highly praised, we were able to deduce through answers that some of the employees were closer to each other and created a so called sub-group, group-setting that according to the interviews did not exist. For example one of the respondents stated that there was a co-worker whom he understood so well that they almost were able to communicate without talking. He also mentioned that if new people would enter the team it could “slow things down”. The respondent continues explaining that if a new person would enter MS he/she would have to respect, listen and learn from the old team members, about how the work is done. This process would have to take place in order to adapt her/him to the work society and to become accepted as a crew member. If the organizational culture is too strong the employees’ can resists a future change if it makes them throw away assumptions and approved methods of doing the work.

Roles

All individuals take on different roles while in different groups. Roles are automatically issued to the team members, often without a personal choice, and exist to form a temporary inner safety. None of the employees admitted that the role setting would differ when the owner is presence or absent and that everyone carries the same role that they would otherwise. The owner did not agree that the employees would have same roles and behaviour with different people involved. He expressed that there can be a difference in behaviour between having and not having an authority presence. The

83 Bloisi, W. et al. (2003), p, 662
84 Ibid., p, 713
85 Svedberg, Lars (2007) Grupp-psykologi – Om grupper, organisationer och ledarskap. p, 161
findings connected to the role settings at MS gave us contradictious results. According to the theory people change when being placed in a group setting therefore the assumption that the human behavior remains the same when the individual is alone as well as in a group is wrong\textsuperscript{86}.

**Communication through technology**

**The importance of communication**

As previously discussed, communication is an important key factor to becoming a successful group, especially in virtual teams\textsuperscript{87}. But because of the lack of face-to-face communication in distant teams misunderstandings and conflicts can occur\textsuperscript{88}. Simply using emails to replace the face-to-face communication is not a productive way of holding all meetings\textsuperscript{89}. High media richness involves for example possibilities of personalization of language\textsuperscript{90}. Most people at MS thinks that using cell phones, text messages and emails is enough communication methods while working distant and feels that it works well in their organisation. But some employees have noticed that misunderstandings easily can occur with people interpreting messages differently. Especially the most distant employee has noticed the difficulties with communication while working geographically dispersed from each other. He shared that there has been miscommunication due to badly chosen words or lack of words.

MS mentor writes that casual interaction between personnel, which occurs in standard work setting, is lost in distant teams, but the owner of the company says that he cannot think of any other way of communicating due to the nature of their business. He explains how they have monthly face-to-face meetings though, planned well in advance with enough of a notice for distant team members. The most distant employee, however, describes that he sometimes can get last minute phone calls and has to drive through California to meet at the office. A defined structured plan is important, stating these communication frequencies for virtual as well as the face-to-face meetings\textsuperscript{91}.

**Different communication methods**

Since people have different schedules it is important to define a structured communication plan. Some of the helpful web based tools you can find today is virtual conferences, electronic brainstorming, active discussion threads and

\textsuperscript{86} Helkama, K., et al. (2004), p, 232, 257
\textsuperscript{87} Kayworth, T. & Leidner, D. (2000), p, 184
\textsuperscript{88} Fjermestad, J. (2009), p, 38
\textsuperscript{89} Nordengren, M. & Olsen, B. (2006), p, 38-44
\textsuperscript{90} Zigurs, I. (2003), p, 346
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., p, 345
group display screens. These and other technology based tools can be part of a complete intranet that you purchase, now also available for small companies. The most distant employee at MS can certainly see the benefits from getting an intranet and some of the other employees say that virtual meetings might be something to look into in the future. A chat room with different topics of discussion as well as a weekly newsletter is mentioned. The owner of MS, however, feels that their current methods cover their needs.

As mentioned, some employees had thought about the possibilities with having virtual weekly meetings. These weekly work summaries makes it easy to share and gain experiences, knowledge and information. The same employee had understood the importance of keeping the communication constant. In a period with less work people can actively be working together inside an intranet finding new ideas and work opportunities as well as discussing after work activities. This would also be beneficial for the fact that distantly working people needs to be constantly activated to keep being productive.

**Commitment**

**Modeling the way and allocating resources**

The four ways, mentioned in the theory chapter, for a leader to show commitment are: allocating resources for training and group development, modeling the way, conveying the importance and respect of the virtual team members and finally to be clear about expectations. The owner of MS feels that he shows commitment by constantly working, having an open door policy and supplying his employees with the most state of the art equipment. Some co-located team members appreciates his open door policy while others feel that they cannot always get through to him. One of MS employees also feel that employees’ different way of working is not always appreciated at the company.

As mentioned, a leader shows commitment by allocating resources for group development and training. Everybody at MS, though, agrees that there are no resources put aside for group development to get to know each other. When asked about this the owner explains that they casually meet after

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92 Zigurs, I. (2003), p, 345
93 Cherkas, J. (2007), p, 15
94 Fjermestad, J. (2009), p, 39
95 Nordengren, M & Olsen, B. (2006), p, 44-45
96 Ibid., p, 44-45
97 Joshi, A. et al. (2009), p, 241-242
98 Ibid., p, 241-242
projects to talk, but explains the more work related topics that they discuss. Everybody talks about their friendships and that they do know each other well. MS does provide resources for training and job related education though but their mentor finds no response from the employees when offered this opportunity for development.

Expressing expectations
When asked about communicating expectations the owner explains that he believes in showing employees how things should get done and telling them about the right way to do it. One employee felt that the job to job expectations were high but vaguely discussed and they often get feedback after a job instead. He says that the clarity is never there. Commitment is achieved when concrete intended long and short term outcomes, performance goals and work procedures are communicated clearly. The leader should not correct the employees with negative feedback and only have dialog with them when things go wrong. Team members should know that they are respected, valuable and a necessity to the company.

Employee commitment
Most MS employees feel that people are committed at the company. They think it is important and that people are more committed because they are friends. Some consider the level of commitment affected by distance, making it harder to achieve, and others believe that it can take a while between new people to know if the other person is committed. The mentor, however, have seen lack of commitment and respect from employees, giving examples like damaging tools and drinking excessively on work nights effecting their performance the next day.

Trust
The importance of trust
High levels of trust are associated with team-level performance and can help team members overcome the challenge with physical distance. Due to the lack of human context in distant teams employees can have a harder time identifying and trusting their leader. Trust is also an essential part of team functioning and can be increased by good communication and enthusiasm. MS management and employees describes high trust for each other.

100 Hiam, A. (2006), p, 29-30
101 Joshi, A. et al. (2009), p, 241-242
102 Ibid., p, 249-250
103 Antonakis, J. & Atwater, L. (2002), p, 698
104 Joshi, A. et al. (2009), p, 243
Everybody describes them as a close core group of people. The mentor of MS thinks that there is a built-in trust and feeling of loyalty with some of the employees that are family. The owner of the company believes that trust is very important and that it is one of the hardest things to master in distant teams. One employee suggests building different teams for each project for everybody to get to know each other and build trust. This is a good idea since the best conditions to build trust between new and current employees is to schedule face-to-face meetings in the beginning, lowering the risk for false initial impressions\textsuperscript{105}.

**Monitoring**

Surveillance supports performance and reduces process loss. The less trust management has for their employees, the more they feel the need to monitor them. Also, employees that completely trust each other can stop monitoring one another, and if somebody would continue the monitoring it can create anger and disappointment\textsuperscript{106}. The owner describes this behavior as a personal issue that they need to take care of. MS mentor has seen this challenge, from a family perspective, saying that it can be awkward for management to discipline due to the familiarity. He also describes that the familiarity of MS creates an atmosphere where employees feel the freedom of individual decision making, for example refusing to perform in the manner requested. The owner explains that their project managers rotate, but one employee feels that this is never decided out loud but rather quietly expected. Trust can be viewed as a question of responsibility, according to the office manager; she explains that they have hired an operations manager to handle that problem.

**Socialization-Isolation**

In virtual teams the members may feel isolated due to the absent socialization, particularly when some employees work locally and others distant. Lack of socialization can lead to feeling disconnected and contributing to misunderstandings and conflict\textsuperscript{107}. Team members can overcome the challenge with physical distance easier when the levels of trust are high\textsuperscript{108}. The office manager at MS stays at the office when the rest of the staff is sent out on projects, from time to time she can get lonely and miss having her work mates around. The sales and marketing representative that works from northern California can sometimes feel disconnected and not as part of things that is going on at the office. Management says that everybody knew about their work situation before they started.

\textsuperscript{105} Nordengren, M. & Olsen, B. (2006), p, 134
\textsuperscript{107} Fjermestad, J. (2009), p, 38
\textsuperscript{108} Joshi, A. et al. (2009), p, 249-250
Rewards and Motivation

Rewards in practice
Career-development opportunities and rewarding systems are the two of the most powerful ways of influencing employees and should therefore be used by leaders. Many original rewarding systems are based on the effort put in work and not on the results, which is harder to recognize in virtual teams. This is why many virtual teams have result based reward systems which should be developed and adapted creating a mix between effort and result based system.\(^{109}\) We found out that MS did not have a rewarding system at the moment but it may possible be included in the company’s future plans. However, the company’s unofficial rewarding system consisted of verbal praise as well as getting to work on wanted projects. When the job was well done the owner would praise and say good things, getting praised by good job performance is why the rewarding system seems to be more based on result than on effort.

According to the CEO he praises more easily the employees working away from him and criticizes the ones working closely. Most of the employees feel that this verbal praise from the owner works quite well. The high expectations match the amount of praise received after doing a good job, according to the closely working employees. For the owner to state that distantly working employees get less criticism was quite contradictory when comparing answers with the most distantly working employee who thought that it was hard to get praise from the owner. Feeling negative frustration can be, according to the theory, because of management correcting employees’ with negative feedback, not observing the employees’ non-verbal signals or lack of thoughtfulness\(^{110}\).

Inner and outer motivation
A positive work environment is important when replacing unwanted behavior and creating inner motivation within the employees. There are traditional tools that managers use over and over again but can only give short-term effects on an outer motivation.\(^{111}\) Both the operating manager and the northern sales- and marketing representative agreed that the owner has very high expectations and is not afraid of showing if these are not achieved. One argued that the expectations are justifiable high, because the owner has “been there and done that”. At the same time the other one thought, that there

\(^{111}\) Ibid., p, 29-30
should be more of verbal praise as a confidence boost, when “just” doing things right.

Before negative attitudes emerge it is good to know how to create positive attitudes and destroy negative feelings. Different tools can be used as observation tool, non-verbal signals, thoughtfulness, and to stimulate positive feelings. Positive attitudes gained by supportive and sensitive leadership style makes us feel happy, secure, satisfied, and optimistic. This leads to behavior that is characterized by open-mindedness and good work performance.\textsuperscript{112} Underlying negative attitudes as not wanting to get important work training, having trouble letting new people in and taking things for granted because being almost like family should not become bigger issues if actively preventing and working on them by making these attitudes to positive mind settings.

**Career possibilities**

Because of the physical absence, distant group members might fear that they do not get the same career-possibilities as the fellow workers working beside their managers\textsuperscript{113}. Losing visual immediacy may get managers to forget the importance of making special team arrangements\textsuperscript{114}. The owner stated that the distance did not effect on employees being able to proceed on their careers. The company is small and the only way to for the company to grow is through new work projects which would also mean career development for the employees. According to the interviews it is highly recommended for the employees to take courses and training helping them to proceed in their work, even though this opportunity is not always utilized by the crew.

**Work stress and self-leadership**

**Leadership stress**

A leader’s responsibility is to create a successful organization and to make the changes and decisions needed in order to succeed, which can be for example, downsizing, restructuring and demanding more flexibility. These decisions can take place on the expense of the employees and therefore make the leaders position unbearable. To manage the work and the psychological load, can result in increased risk of disease, psychological problems as anxiety, depression and exhaustion.\textsuperscript{115} It became apparent that the owner’s work load, responsibilities and stress level is a high especially when he replied that he

\textsuperscript{112} Hiam, A. (2006), p, 30-33
\textsuperscript{113} Duarte, D. I. & Snyder, N, T. (2000), p, 45-46
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p, 45-46
\textsuperscript{115} Lovelace, K, J. et al. (2007), p, 374-375
feels stress every day. It is also a load to the employees who get affected when stress increases. The owner reflected that being organized and structured is the only way to minimize and relieve the stress level. It was also noted that because of the family aspect the difficult decisions, for example downsizing, becomes even more difficult when your family is concerned by these conclusions. Being forced to take care of the organization can therefore increase the risk for the psychological load.

Delegating workload
Questions about delegating revealed that the owner does not have an easy time giving away his responsibilities. Delegating could make the work load bigger if the receiving person fails to do the given assignment. Even though his opinion is negative towards being able delegate without any problems he still confesses that it can be a good thing if done right. The theoretical view accentuates that, for example, stress managing strategies as self-observation, self-reward and self-job redesign can not only help the leader but also the employees and give positive outcomes as self-efficacy and diminished absenteeism\textsuperscript{116}. Delegated tasks and shared responsibilities constitute opportunities for designing work practices and leadership training that has a major effect on managing work stress,\textsuperscript{117}

A solution all the employees agreed on is to increase the delegation and spread out the responsibilities, which consequently would build up more self-leadership. That would be favorable both to the owner and to the employees because of being able to minimize the negative effects of work stress. It seemed that several employees were more than ready to take on more responsibilities which would also give them more freedom and empowerment. This process had already started and the one employee receiving more responsibilities and trust was happy to have this new role and with empowerment. The core of self-leadership is to make work processes more functional and to take away the leader’s redundant work assignments and responsibilities facilitating the employees’ in form of empowerment\textsuperscript{118}. Virtual teams also work best when constantly having interesting projects and challenges, so leaders need to develop trust for their team members quickly to be comfortable with delegating responsibilities, to attain the win-win situation\textsuperscript{119}.

\textsuperscript{116} Lovelace, K, J. et al. (2007) p, 379, 384
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p, 374-375 p, 379, 384
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p, 379-380
\textsuperscript{119} Nordengren, M. & Olsen, B. (2006), p, 45
**ANALYSIS**

**Distant leadership**

**Inspirational leadership enhance trust**

Inspirational, transformational leadership is found to facilitate trust by enhancing team members’ confidence. They also encourage interpersonal interactions, socialized relationships and are able to reinforce the common goals. The owner showed tendency of being a transformational leader in several basic dimensions. He received the highest scores in role modeling and high performance expectations. Modeling is important for a leader because of the ability to make the followers share the same values and therefore show this behavior in their work performance. High expectations come with having confidence in the employees and giving them individual support for them believing in capability to reach that may seem impossible.

A transformational leader also articulates a future vision which the employees can identify with. The owner also showed tendency in articulating the vision. Moreover two dimensions, fostering the goal acceptance and intellectual stimulation was near the score 6 which could be interpreted as to have a tendency to this kind of behavior. The lowest score was individual support, 5 points, which can create problems when having high expectations. Expectations require the leader to give confidence and individual support to the employees to accomplish the goals.

To be a transactional leader is not an inspirational leadership style and consists of punishment and rewards when doing things right or wrong and therefore having a relationship based on exchanges. This leadership style considers that a subordinates’ only work description is to do things as told. The owner received a higher score than expected and shows therefore signs towards a transactional leader which is not desirable when working with distant teams. He received high score in other dimension which could make him to a certain extent a transformational leader.

**Hybrid team contradictions**

The owner explains that he prepares his employees by showing them how to do things and by telling them the right way. In hybrid teams, however, the organization needs to balance their rationality and control with emotionality and empowerment, as described in the theory chapter. Some employees

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120 Joshi, A. et al. (2009), p, 241, 249
121 Pierce, Jon L. (2006), p, 384-386
122 Ibid., p, 387
123 Pierce, Jon L. (2006), p, 384-386;p,273
124 Cousins, K, C. et al. (2007), p, 460-462
ment that they have noticed this difficulty that the owner has, with trusting them to be prepared for their jobs when he is not there. But they think that it has become more structured and that the distant sometimes can help him let go. These opposites for strategic contradiction also shows organizations that they need to make balanced tradeoffs between remoteness-closeness and cultural uniformity-cultural diversity. A company can cure lonely employee’s feelings of too much remoteness with bringing them together to work on a common project (closeness). MS employees enjoy their strong friendly organizational culture, but if it gets to strong, new people can get a harder time to adapt and fit in.

With clear and good preparation, detailed planning with criteria, expectations and way or work distant project lead organizations does not have to be a disadvantage, rather an advantage. Distant project groups have other, or more enhanced needs of articulated information. One tool to handle the difficulty with assessment and employees taking ownership of projects can be to require diaries for both sharing experiences and documenting efforts. MS project based work is necessary for their type of work. The owner does not see it as an advantage or disadvantage but it requires people who like to problem solve and be able to work autonomously. The mentor believes that “long range management is difficult in terms of assessing the employees’ efforts at certain tasks.”

125 Cousins, K, C. et al. (2007), p, 460-462
Conclusions

In this chapter we want to enhance our findings through a discussion with our own reflections. We have summarized our case company’s challenges in the figure “The fruit of Analysis” followed by a discussion answering the purpose of the research.

The fruit of Analysis

Like the sun, Distant Leadership nurtures the fruit tree of Hybrid Teams. The amount of Traditional and Virtual roots constitutes the consistence of the tree. If you nurture the team you grow fruit in all the areas of the tree. The analysis of Marina Systems has grown fruit in all areas of the tree, but some are more mature than others bringing opportunity for improvement. Green apples will become red and ripen when progress is made. If you nurture the tree, success will follow and profit can be harvested!

Figure 2. Authors’ summary of the findings.
Conclusions and recommendations

Purpose
The purpose of our research was to find out how Marina Systems employees and managers perceive and experience the geographically dispersed work setting. The aim of the research was to investigate possible problems and contribute with sustainable solutions in order to have a continuously growing organization. The following discussion concludes our own reflections, answering the purpose of the study.

Hybrid teams
We see many good and successful aspects of Marina Systems and think that they will continue to evolve and grow. We believe though, that they can become more successful in their expansion if they start considering their employees as members of a hybrid team and start adapting their leadership behavior to what such groups need. By viewing employees as distant team members, Marina Systems can easier get aware of their possibilities for improvement and get conscious of the challenges and solutions forthcoming with their organisational structure.

Communication is the key
Communication is a key for success in hybrid teams. Therefore a detailed communication structure through many communication channels is needed, preventing process loss and irritation caused by the distance. A custom intranet is recommended for Marina Systems for everybody to interact, comment and change things when it suites them, and it should also be used to share information such as company policies between all employees. MS hybrid teams need the opportunity to take part of personal and business information flow, making them feel involved, important and part of something bigger.

Communicating with text messages and emails should still occur but everybody need to constantly try to write as rich messages as possible, minimizing misunderstandings and creating personal relationships. MS needs to encourage their employees to talk and interact not only about emergent work things, but about information that other face-to-face teams talk about while passing each other in the hall, or at their coffee break. Besides constantly interacting electronically, having virtual weekly meetings and monthly face-to-face meetings should be part of the communication routine at MS. This will make the company more efficient and knowledgeable covering some of that communication loss and irritation currently found.

Showing commitment
Marina Systems should consider actively showing their commitment in all four ways discussed in the theory chapter. Commitment is already
CONCLUSIONS

successfully communicated on some levels but others could be strengthened. MS owner should continuously model everything he expects from others. When issues with negative attitudes are solved, MS allocating of resources and training is going to be an appreciated and successful way of showing commitment to their employees. In addition to that, they need to discover the importance of group development for their dispersed teams. Besides casual project related time spent together they should plan group development activities for everybody to get to know each other, develop trust and feel as part of the team, disregarding their regular distance from each other.

If possible, common team mates within MS should rotate encouraging employees to interact with everybody no matter if they are co-located or even have the same job description. These activities are especially important now when MS is expanding and bringing in new people in the organisation, but should continuously happen as a company routine. The owners open door policy will get enhanced and be available also to distant employees when expanding their electronic communication possibilities with an intranet. Openly discussing and writing down everybody’s responsibilities and employee expectations is needed. Inspiring their distant employees to development when writing their performance goals together, could be useful for their motivation to achieving them. MS need to constantly emphasize their employees importance for the company, showing them respect and appreciation.

**Trust and monitoring**

We believe that MS need to find a healthy level between their high trust and surveillance that nourish productivity and makes people comfortable. Being comfortable does not need to result in deciding that one has the freedom of individual decision making, if clear direction and motivation is provided. To minimize uncomfortable feelings MS need to talk about these things and document them in advance; especially how monitoring is expected to happen when hiring family.

**Group behavior and organizational culture**

A step towards success has been taken when MS started working on different organizational manuals in order to create some needed organizational structure within the company. We rate this progress highly and suggest MS to continue updating and process these plans and manuals constantly. Having more structure creates security, harmony and promotes a common understanding regarding the practices and rules. MS just have to make sure that the amount of rules and policies is the right for their organization to retain the advantages of being a flexible small size company.
CONCLUSIONS

Another dimension that MS has succeeded in is the way their employees feel unity as a team. The state of team spirit would be a desirable position for any type of company. Even though the organizational culture is strong at the moment, it should not be taken for granted at any times. Consciously working and developing the team is needed in order to remain, the sometimes even fragile, team feeling. Also recognizing destructive behavior towards a too strong team feeling is important when wanting to expand successfully in the future. To make it easier for new people to enter the company it might be a good thing to make sure that all work training is not laid on the co-workers’ responsibility so that they can see the new person as equal to them as possible, instead of teaching them like students.

Rewards and motivation
Rewarding system was a very green apple on the fruit tree of analysis at MS. Because of the lack of structure and systematic processes the rewarding system has to be completed sooner or later. Even if virtual team rewarding systems often are based on results and not on efforts, we consider that MS should have rewarding systems also consisting of measurements for effort for their hybrid teams. If only rewarding for actual results, it can lead to negative reinforcement by giving feedback only in case of failing or succeeding. This does not give a chance to be rewarded when giving the best possible performance but failing to achieve a particular result. If wanting to keep the employees motivated in the future, positive reinforcement should be used to generate a constructive work environment and to help to destroy any negative attitudes.

Work stress and self-leadership
The owner’s level of stress was worryingly high. In the theory chapter we discussed the possible outcomes of a too high level of trust and a worst case scenario can become a terrifying future reality. But only if the work stress is not managed well. It is easy to judge that the current work load is not too much to handle but having a tendency to gather self-inflected work load may suddenly make the work load flow over. To prevent this from happening actions should be taken towards decreasing the work load through delegating and learning to trust the employees. Other methods regarding self-management should also be considered because of their stress relieving nature and ability to increase well-being.

Leadership for distant teams
To get productive healthy geographically dispersed teams, leaders need to show some emotion and empower them to be creative. Even though these distant teams are formal task-oriented groups that constantly need to be activated, they cannot be totally handled with rationality and control. If
CONCLUSIONS

understanding is found for the benefits of socialized relationships, encouragement and clarity, management might feel exited to nourish the leadership skills enhancing this and see improvement in their distant teams. MS should strive towards using transformational leadership rather than transactional for their hybrid teams to be as successful as they possibly can!

These are our recommendations for Marina Systems further development as a growing organisation with hybrid teams. If effort is made in these areas they will be fruitful, growing healthy hybrid teams for the future.

Suggestions for further research

The purpose of our research was to get a deeper understanding of the problems and challenges with distant teams found at Marina Systems. Our further aim was to find sustainable solutions for the company to manage their distant teams. When conducting our research we found other interesting angels of our subject, intriguing ideas for further research. One of these angels of future interest was to try an alternative method for researching distant teams. More information might have been found if discussion groups were added to a similar study, letting people argument for their opinion when disagreeing, might have shown further interesting truth about their actual work situation. Researching while a hybrid team is adapting to a recent introduced intranet would also be an interesting topic for evolving easy to learn and efficient electronic communication tools for the future.

It would also be interesting to conduct a bigger research involving comparisons between many companies. Comparing many distant teams might bring more knowledge to the subject since this one case could be coloured by other situational factors. We found that virtual teams was more explored than hybrid teams; this seemed to be the case even though researchers agreed that most teams today are a mix of virtual and traditional. This left us with a desired wish for further research with that perspective in mind. Furthermore, the perspective of family members in hybrid teams is quite unexplored leaving opportunity for new findings. Due to the ongoing internationalisation and ever evolving technology, new interesting angels of further research of virtual/hybrid teams will appear.
References

Articles


REFERENCES


Literature


REFERENCES


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Appendix 1

Email to Case Respondents

Hi U.S. Mooring Systems,

For our bachelor’s thesis we have decided, in agreement with *, to do a case study on U.S. Mooring Systems employees. Our main objective of research is how geographically dispersed teams’ function as well as how they manage the challenges with this type of work setting. We have studied the recent theories about this subject and decided to take a closer look at virtual teams, hybrid teams and distant leadership in dispersed groups.

Since you often work away from each other as well as away from * you can be considered working in a dispersed team setting. Having to use technology to communicate makes you a virtual team and since you sometimes meet face-to-face, you become a hybrid team. These terms are going to be used in our research while comparing your experience with scientific theories.

We are hoping to learn from your experiences through Skype-interviews scheduled on your earliest opportunity. All opinions and thoughts are valuable for us to be able to make meaningful conclusions to learn from, both for us and your company. The interview topics will be sent to you previous the appointment to make it easier for you to describe your work situation.

Please contact us for any questions or thoughts. We look forward to start scheduling your interviews!

Thank you so much,

Sofie Brandt and Emmi Salaterä.

*= U.S. Mooring Systems President
Appendix 2

Interview topics

We are only researching situations in which you are working distant, alone or in
team, away from the president of the company. So please answer all questions with
this in mind. We have open questions, please discuss freely.

1. GROUP BEHAVIOUR AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE
When I talk about organizational culture I mean the feelings of common morals,
ethics and ideas of what is ok and what is not. A company can have a good strong
organizational culture with a strong *us* feeling, but also a strong bad culture that is
hard to break away from. How would you describe U.S. Mooring System
organizational culture?

- Strong/Weak
- Part of it
- Social sub-groups
- Set roles
- Conflicts due to cultural differences?

2. COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY
When working distant the communication is tested and companies have to use
technology for help. How do you adapt and handle that at USMS?

- Communication methods
- Positive/negative aspects
- Misunderstandings/Technology difficulties
- Planned communication/scheduled virtual meetings/communication
  frequency?
- Missing something?

3. COMMITMENT
Can you please discuss the commitment level at USMS, both from your perspective
and your boss/co-workers?

- Respect
- Clear directions
- Vision
- Group development resources
4. TRUST
Please discuss the trust levels at USMS, between you and your boss/co-workers?

- Distance effect on trust
- Monitoring, you-them, them-you
- Family members in the organization

5. REWARDS AND MOTIVATION
Can you tell us about the rewarding system at USMS?

- Personal/Group rewards
- Distance effect on rewards
- Distance effect on career advancing opportunities

6. WORKSTRESS & SELF-LEADERSHIP
Can you describe your manager’s level of stress?

- Share responsibilities/share leadership

7. DISTANT LEADERSHIP
Over all as a group this distance work setting brings new opportunities as well as difficulties that have to be handled. Describe the distant work setting situation.

- Positive/negative aspects

Thank you, is there anything you would like to add or clarify?
## Appendix 3

### Transformational and Charismatic Leadership test


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational and Charismatic Leadership</th>
<th>EXERCISE Self-Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions:</strong> Think about a situation in which you either assumed or were given a leadership role. Think about your own behaviors within this context. To what extent does each of the following statements characterize your leadership orientation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Have a clear understanding of where we are going.</td>
<td>Very Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Paint an interesting picture of the future for my group.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Am always seeking new opportunities for the organization/group.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Inspire others with my plans for the future.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Am able to get others to be committed to my dreams.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Lead by “doing,” rather than simply by “telling.”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Provide a good model for others to follow.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Lead by example.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Foster collaboration among group members.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Encourage employees to be “team players.”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Get the group to work together for the same goal.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Develop a team attitude and spirit among employees.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Show that I expect a lot from others.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Insist on only the best performance.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Will not settle for second best.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Act without considering the feelings of others.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Show respect for the personal feelings of others.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Behave in a manner thoughtful of the personal needs of others.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Treat others without considering their personal feelings.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Challenge others to think about old problems in new ways.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Ask questions that prompt others to think.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Stimulate others to rethink the way they do things.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Have ideas that challenge others to reexamine some of their basic assumptions about work.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Always give positive feedback when others perform well.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Give special recognition when others’ work is very good.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Compliment others when they do a better-than-average job.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Personally compliment others when they do outstanding work.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Frequently do not acknowledge the good performance of others.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>