



Remote work - divided by space, united by team culture

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Team communication and cohesion, the feeling of belonging together, are central requirements to successfully perform as a part of a larger organization. During the challenging times of working from home due to COVID-19 it has become increasingly difficult to maintain conventional teamwork practices. This highlights the team manager's role and abilities to adapt to changing environments. In this study, a project to improve communication and cohesion within an international consumer engagement team in a company providing outsourcing services was executed and analyzed. These improvements were hypothesized to enable the team to better reach the set targets.

Practical implementation of the thesis project was carried out using a survey concerning a team cohesion project that had been implemented previously. The survey was delivered via an anonymized electronic form. The agents' personal development discussions had become a monthly habit to look forward to and the agents were very interested in their own performance. Based on the survey results this is partly due to the cohesion project. The agents are also slowly understanding the fact that "the bubble", their limited connectivity space, prevents them from reaching their full capabilities and that this can be at least partly remedied by the improved team communications facilities. Measurable improvements in performance are still inconclusive but the daily operations have started to run more smoothly as the team has begun their journey towards proper function and success.

Keywords: organizational behavior, remote work, communication, motivation, team culture

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1 Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to study how a consumer engagement team's work was affected by working from home and how the negative effects could be mitigated by a team cohesion project. This cohesion project (not to be confused with the Project, see below) was planned and conducted by the author before the analysis presented here.

1.1 The corporate environment

The study subject was "Team 2", a part of the Project, a consumer engagement unit in a Barcelona based award-winning outsourced sales agency, hereafter "the Company". The Company operates on the managed application and network service industry providing trained sales and consumer engagement teams among a variety of digital marketing solutions while employing close to 2000 employees in Barcelona. 80% of Company clients have been using the Company provided services for more than 10 years.

Within the Project we have three persons as a part of the higher management, project owner, project manager and the operations executive. Next in line we have six team leaders including the author, who all have 6 to 15 agents under them, adding up to 60+ agents. As a whole we cover Europe, South Africa, Nigeria, Turkey, Russia and the Middle East.

The Project within Company provides consumer engagement to the Client as a third party, outsourced service. The Client is a global, multi-billion dollar revenue company in the health care business.

The Project's teams are responsible for providing quality consumer service to all of the Client's consumers. The responsibility as one of the team leaders is to ensure all the quality standards of this outsourced service are met.

Despite the fact that the service is outsourced we are in daily communication with the Client. For each region we cover we have different contacts and headquarters to report to. We are also closely working with third-party companies co-operating with the Client or providing services to the Company such as courier firms across the region.

1.2 Study overview

The goal of the study was to improve team communication and thus to improve team cohesion and improve the team's ability to reach the set targets. The team was observed and a

development plan was based on the survey and available resources. The survey was conducted to gain greater knowledge on the team's needs. The specific questions and what aspects regarding WFH, working from home, have been beneficial and what were the challenges the study subject Team 2 encountered. The idea for the thesis evolved once the author was promoted from assisting team leader to the acting team leader. At the new position, the Team 2's performance could better observed and it became evident that it was not performing to its full capabilities due to lack of motivation and team cohesion.

During these challenging times with COVID-19, infectious disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus (WHO 2021), many businesses were forced to transform overnight. In order to stay on top of the game and carry on business as usual as far as they could it was vital to move as many employees as possible to work from home due to indefinite lockdowns and restrictions affecting daily life. While this arrangement has allowed businesses to run their daily operations, it is quite natural that a transformation of this extent does not come without a few hiccups.

The Barcelona lockdown started on the 30th of March 2020. This was a turning point for many companies. All non-essential workers were to remain at home for the next 14 days. Now, looking back, the last day at the office was almost surreal. The employee list was called through to inform them about the estimated time of arrival of their WFH kits. At the end of the day the author walked through the empty center of Barcelona while carrying a monitor and office supplies. If only would have the lockdown last the initial 14 days. Now a year later we are still working from home with no plans on moving back to the office anytime soon. In person team building activities have proven to be quite challenging due to heavy restrictions and curfews. As the present starts looking like the new normal while the days go by and the attrition rates keep on climbing the team cries for help.

Due to attrition and growth of the Project new team members are joining in on a monthly basis. This creates challenges we have not experienced before. How can you be a part of a team when you have never seen any of the team members in real life? How does that affect your motivation to work towards the set team goals? How to reassure the team in fact works as a team and not as a group? How to improve the team communication in such way that the employee is able to exit their bubble?

1.3 Scope

This study focuses on employee motivation of a consumer engagement team while working remotely. The employee motivation is examined by using a questionnaire which was concluded at the end of the team cohesion project. The results of this study are based on the

questionnaire, the team leader's (the author's) personal experiences and key performance indicator, KPI, data. The KPIs for the monitored team are the accuracy percentage of case coding and Quality Assurance, QA. The case coding refers to recording all incoming consumer contacts into an internal system for trending, monitoring and consumer reimbursement purposes. The QA consists of listening of inbound calls, call abandon percentage of calls not answered compared to calls offered, and service level - calls answered within the first 20 seconds. Both the accuracy target and the QA are individual agent targets. These individual targets contribute to the team total percentage. The calls abandon and service level are considered primarily team targets even though individual workers influence them.

This study will only focus on the motivation of the monitored team in this particular company. The results of the survey or work performance are not compared with other teams.

1.4 Research questions

Once a team starts working remotely overnight all members of the team are required to adapt to the new situation as fast as possible in order to carry on with the daily functions. In this case when the change to remote work was not pre-planned the team underwent a lot of stress that could potentially have been avoided by allowing the team some time and training to embrace the change. Initially as the working from home period was to last for 14 days only, no further thought was allocated to one of the cornerstones of a functioning team, the team communication. Once time went by and the initial shock was over it became evident that the team slowly started to dysfunction. The attrition rates grew higher, employee satisfaction plummeted, team members started to report increasing levels of stress and the team no longer achieved the set KPIs. Meanwhile, to the consumers everything had to appear as business as usual. This discrepancy started to drive the team apart as the team members felt cornered. It was clear that even though the root cause for these team problems was easy to identify as the unplanned and almost unmanaged transition to remote work, quick solutions were required in order to the team to function in a healthy manner and to keep up the united front for the consumers. One of the factors that had undergone the most significant change was the internal communication within the team. The channels and communication methods that were in place back at the office were no longer sufficient and fulfilling the Team's needs.

As the necessary and valuable improvements in communication technology provided by the Company required personnel-centric changes in working practices to be effective, it was decided to set up a team cohesion improvement project. One of the key questions to evaluate the success of this project was, (Research question 1) **does a cohesion project improve internal communication? This raises two follow up questions, (Research question 2) could**

improvement in communication affect the employee motivation, and, (Research question 3) if the employee motivation would be improved, would that have an effect on the KPIs?

1.5 Study structure

This thesis has been divided into seven chapters. After this introduction the second part describes the theoretical framework which provides the reader with background of team functions and culture. The third chapter describes the methodology after which the specific team cohesion project is introduced in chapter four. The results and their interpretation regarding the analysis of the cohesion project are presented in chapter five. The chapter six discusses the outcomes and benefits of the project. The final chapter seven summarizes the work and conclusions regarding the research questions.

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework provides the structure for the data analysis, defines key concepts and explains the assumptions made. The team cohesion project targeted the communicational and motivational factors in the Team 2. In the following, theoretical background of the project in human resources and organizational behavior is presented.

2.1 Organizational behavior

The core of organizational behavior (OB) is to understand, predict and influence employee behavior. Awareness of organization behavior theories supports the manager's capability to create successful teams. The classical, neo-classical and modern organizational behavior theories (Butts, 2017, pp 339-345) support the reasoning behind one of the key questions of OB, why do employees behave in a certain way in an organizational setting? All three of these main theories have their own restraints as well as appraisals. In classical organization theory employees were seen as machines and the human behavior factor was forgotten. Scientists were mainly concentrating on the structure of an organization, not the fact whether a particular structure would be better suited than another. The neo-classical theory started seeing an organization as a living organism which consisted of multiple interacting parts (Teece and Winter, 1984, pp 116-121). Employees were recognized as individuals and their behavior could be predicted. Once moving further away from the mind set of machines rather than individuals, motivation was now recognized as a complex process rather than a tool missing from a toolbox. The modern organizational behavior theory recognizes both intrinsic and extrinsic variables and closely analyses them and their effects on the organization as a

whole. The modern theory has two different approaches, the systems and contingency approach (Hatch, 2018, p 58). The systems approach can be split into five subsystems: technical, supportive, maintenance, adaptive and managerial. The contingency approach supports the ideology that an organizational structure must be uniquely designed for it to work for the target organization. This approach relies on four influential factors; people, structure, technology and external environment (Sims, 2002, pp 7-8).

As the very core of the team cohesion project was to boost the team motivation by improving the communication within the team a knowledge of the three organizational behavior theories is crucial. The modern organization theory appears to be the best suited approach for the cohesion project as it accounts for multiple different variables.

2.2 Motivation theory

One of the most well-known motivation theories is the Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The hierarchy is based on human needs and is often presented in a shape of a multi-tiered triangle. Maslow argued that in order to reach the next level of the hierarchy the previous needs had to be fulfilled. The hierarchy has 5 levels; the physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization needs (Ozguner and Ozguner, 2014, pp 213-214). Maslow believed that once a level in the hierarchy has been reached the factors on that level are no longer motivating (Maslow, 1943, pp 5-12). The theory does not account for multiple overlapping levels in the hierarchy in other words the theory relies on definite hierarchical order.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs was extended by Frederick Herzberg. He introduced the motivation hygiene theory, more commonly known as the two-factor theory (Dartey-Baah and Amoako, 2011, pp 1-9). The theory measures satisfaction and not satisfaction, dissatisfaction and not dissatisfaction rather than employee motivation.

McClelland's need theory recognizes the background and culture of an employee and argues that needs vary from person to person based on their ideology (Royle and Hall, 2012, pp 23-24). Differentiation between needs is considered as acceptable and it is recognized that not everyone has the same needs and motivators. McClelland's theory acknowledges that the behavior of employees varies based on the needs they possess. The three needs McClelland focuses on are achievement, power and affiliation.

McGregor's participation theory, most commonly known as the "theory X" and "theory Y", is a work motivation theory focusing on supervision, rewards and recognition. The theory X is generally viewed as negative toned whereas the theory Y emphasizes positivity (Kopelman and Prottas, 2013, pp 874-877). McGregor's theory is highly dramatized as no one would actually belong to one or the other extremity, behavior and motivation could be better

viewed as a wave fluctuating between the two. McGregor's theory is known to be of great importance to human relations studies.

2.3 Human resource theories

Management behaviors and structures influence employee behavior. The effect can be either positive or negative. The human resource theories help to explain these effects. By gaining an understanding of the human relation theories managers will be able to gain the most out of their employees while minimizing attrition.

Miles' human resource theory depicts all employees as vessels of unlimited resources. By resources he means both the physical skills and energy as well as the creative abilities and self-controlled behavior (Mueller, 1996, pp 757-785). Based on this theory the work environment should be encouraging employees towards innovation and creativity rather than convincing the employees on doing something just because they are told to. Porter's resource-based theory considers employees as rare and valuable, unchallengeable resource. He believes the employee should be nurtured and supported (Barney and Clark, 2007, p 31,51,72). On the contrary, in Hickson's strategic contingency theory, the approach is more task focused and employee is de-emphasized (Hickson et al. 1971, pp 216-229). Rensis Likert's participative decision-making theory supports Porter's view by remaining employee centered. Likert argues that managers whose employee's productivity is high focus on achievement and emphasize achievement. In his theory employees are seen as individuals rather than machines (Likert and Bowers, 1969, pp 585-592). Maslow, McGregor and Herzberg's motivation theories are also highly recognized theories from the human resource point of view.

2.4 Communication models

There are at least three well-known communication models: The linear, interactional and transactional. Shannon and Weaver presented the linear communication model in 1948 (J. R. Pierce, 1980, pp 41-42, 271; Shannon, 1948, pp 379-423). The model consists of sender, message and receiver. In the model the message is transmitted through a channel which is surrounded by noise. The Shannon and Weaver's model is quite limited as the original model suggests that the message is only moving to one direction. The sender is not receiving any feedback which creates a great danger of assumptions and misinterpretation. In the interactional communication model, the Shannon and Weaver model has been reviewed and its limitations have been recognized. The model was developed by allowing the receiver to provide feedback to the sender while both parties experience included into the process. The

communication is seen as an ongoing process rather than a process with beginning and end. Though, the sender and receiver's roles are seen as permanent rather than interchangeable during the communication process. The transactional communication model has developed the model even further and removed the limitation of the interactional model by calling both parties as communicators rather than sender and receiver. This model emphasizes the experience of both parties and stresses that the communicators will have to share at least minimal knowledge on each other's language, culture, or environment. The transactional communication model is seen as the basis of majority of the communication theory.

3 Methodology

The cohesion project had already been implemented. Due to this it had to be considered whether a questionnaire study would be appropriate. A pre-project survey could no longer be concluded and for this reason it was decided to prepare a questionnaire with questions concerning both the current state and changes perceived by the Team members.

3.1 Research methodology

The methodology consists of primary and secondary data. The primary data was a customised survey which was shared with the Team 2 members at the end of the team cohesion project. The secondary data consists of a variety of published articles and books and it was used to benchmark and review the survey results. The survey consisted of 26 questions which were split into current state questions and questions measuring change between the beginning and end of the team cohesion project. The questions were formulated in such way that the change could be measured and the three research questions regarding internal communication and motivation improvement as well as its effects on the work results could be answered.

Research shows that team cohesion is essential for a successfully functioning team (Salas et al. 2015, pp 365-374). Researchers are intrigued to study team cohesion while often enough team cohesion is not consistently measured during a team's lifecycle thus causing problems when analysing the research data. Team cohesion is by no means constant but in fact fluctuating force that strongly affects team performance (Stashevsky and Koslowsky, 2006, pp 63-74).

3.2 Limitations

A major limitation of the survey is that it was concluded after the cohesion project rather than completing two separate surveys, one before and another after its completion. The survey results regarding the state before the cohesion project rely on the employees own memory and perception instead of timely feelings and opinions. A better option would be to include a proper comparative performance assessment as an integral part of the project plan. Nevertheless, a follow-up analysis proved useful.

Also, the whole population data was very small. Thus it was studied as a whole, not sampled. On the other hand, the effects are primarily reflected against the same population, i.e. the same team that answered the questionnaire. But this limitation is important when considering the applicability of the same type of project in a different team.

4 Analysis of team cohesion project

The purpose of the team cohesion project was to improve the Team 2 employee motivation by establishing clear communication channels. By doing that the aim was to create a sense of ownership and belongingness thus increasing motivation which would reflect on the team success.

4.1 Working environment description

Team 2 consists of 13 agents covering the Nordic, CEE, Poland, UK and Irish markets. The team is very young as more than half of the team has been with the project for less than 6 months whereas the rest of the team has been employed by the Company for 2 to 5 years. This creates a noticeable gap between the team members.

The part of the team that has known each other since the time we worked at the office is more confident in their communications with other team members and teams. It has become evident that the newer members of the team are lacking the necessary and clear communication channels outside their own bubble. With the bubble we are simply referring to an agent's home office and their workstation within it. The bubble limits the agents from seeing the team as a whole, thus disconnecting them from the bigger picture, the team's objective. When the objective is lost, outside the bubble, the team starts acting in a dysfunctional way. Thus, in order to meet the team targets and objectives it is vital to provide the foundations of a successful team and guide the team towards a clear path where the team is able to function in a healthy and sufficient manner.

4.2 Team Development Plan

The first element of the cohesion project is a team development plan. The target of the plan is to improve the team cohesion and provide the team members with the means to an open discussion and an acceptance-based team culture. This should arguably improve the employee motivation and thus reflect on the team's results. The practical implementation of the plan consists of both communications tools and their intended uses.

There are multiple different communication tools available. As the general tools that are being used within the project are MS Office based, Teams will be used as the main communication channel. All team members have pre-existing access to the platform thus the use of the platform will not come with an extra cost.

Budgeting wise, the cost would be the working hours spent to carry out this development project. The working hours for 121s, personal development discussions, have already been allocated within the monthly working hours, though the discussions were never held by the previous team lead.

More team meetings are to be held in order to establish a transparent and flowing communication channel within the Team 2. The 121s are to be brought back in action to ensure the agents are fully aware of the KPIs and their current performance status. These discussion sessions are also very important in the sense that the agents are able to unburden themselves and to discuss about their improvement ideas. Virtual coffee breaks are to be brought into a weekly schedule so the team members can blend and get know each other better. This should support the employees to break their bubble and interact more with other members of the team despite of their seniority.

To implement the development plan, the team leader will have to commit to the plan, stay on top of the scheduling of the 121s and virtual coffee breaks. The team leader also has to promote transparency and trust.

The implementation of the development plan is on-going at the time this report is being written. The team leader will oversee the implementation of the plan. The project manager has shown green light to the plan as it has become evident that working from home does bring new challenges what comes to training new hires, team cohesion, communication, and team success.

4.2.1 Practical implementation of the plan

Microsoft Teams was first introduced in March 2020, the day after we all finished our last shift at the office before the indefinite Barcelona lockdown. A team chat was then created but

later down the road it became evident that the created group was not accessible enough in the sense that the notifications would not be easily visible on the chat screen. This then encouraged a different type of chat to be created. Instead of having the team chat within the group section, a chat with multiple participants was created so that it would be visible on the main screen and the notifications would be visible on the bottom banner of the screen making it easier to engage into the conversation. The chat has received a very positive response from the team members. Also, an agent help screen has been added within the chat with FAQs and important phone numbers easily to be found.

121s have become a monthly habit to look forward to. During the 121 discussions it has become evident that the agents are very interested in their own performance which reflects to their personal scores. They now feel that they are an important part of the team and that everyone's work is highly valued. This is a major step towards successfully functioning team with a healthy team culture.

Daily morning meetings have been implemented with the assisting team leader. According to the author's personal judgement, this has significantly improved the communication and task delegation. Now that the communication between the team leader and the assisting team leader is more transparent the daily operations run more smoothly as everything has been aligned.

Afternoon meetings have been implemented for the new agents. During this meeting the agents have the possibility to raise any questions they may have. This meeting has been implemented with the new agents in mind, to ensure they feel cared for and avoid them to get stuck inside their bubble.

Virtual coffee breaks are twice weekly 10-15-minute socialization sessions amongst the team. This is to encourage the senior team members and the junior team members to get to know each other. The meetings will be scheduled to ensure the line coverage. The schedule will be rotating to allow all team members to have a conversation with each other. Other companies have reported that video coffee breaks are much less effective in providing informal communication between people than actual, live coffee breaks. Especially several people trying to speak at the same time is very natural, but often makes it impossible for anyone to really get any message through. Trial and error will be necessary to optimize the number of people having a break together, and to find best ways to preserve informality when the communication channel doesn't really support it in the best possible way.

The final step is to implement an agent MBR, monthly business review, to ensure transparency. This will be done at a project level to ensure all of the 50+ agents will have access to the same information. The management already takes part in an MBR at their own level, but the topics and information covered in the meeting are not cascaded to the agents.

Surely the agents will not get much out of call data and contact volume percentages. Thus, the Agent MBR will be created in such a manner that it will support agent needs and interests.

4.2.2 Survey

The survey (see Methodology) was concluded through an anonymized electronic questionnaire form. While majority of the answer options were linear scales and multiple options, three open answers were also added to the end of the survey. The form was made accessible to all 13 employees of the Team 2. In the end, 10 members of the Team took the opportunity to participate in the survey. The survey maps the changes in employee motivation at the end of the team cohesion improvement project.

5 Results and interpretation

The most relevant questions are presented below in graphs. The aggregated results for all of the 26 questions can be found from the appendix I. One of the notable factors affecting the results is that half of the team members who had responded to the survey have been with the Project only during the working from home period, less than one year. The other half of the team members who responded have been with the Project for longer than a year and know each other from the office. This will impact the communication between the team members as half of the responders have already established a pre-existing communication network. Also, the short experience of so many employees makes reliable analysis of performance difficult.

5.1 Isolation

The current feelings regarding working from home seem to concentrate around the middle values. None of the team members felt always isolated or had difficulty in connecting with the team. The responses of two questions were combined (see

Figure 1), as they mostly represented similar aspects of working from home, and the results were similar.

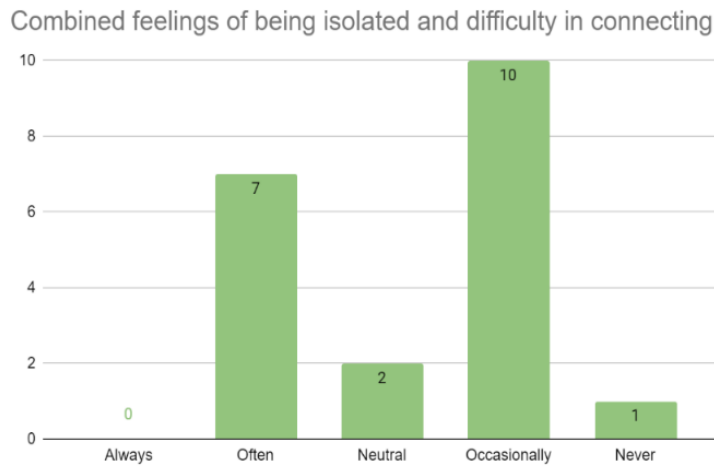


Figure 1: The responses to questions "I feel isolated from the team while working from home" and "I feel it is hard to connect with the team as everything is virtual rather than in person"

Although the perceived lack of connectivity and feeling of isolation were similar, the effects of the cohesion project in these aspects were quite different (see Figure 2).

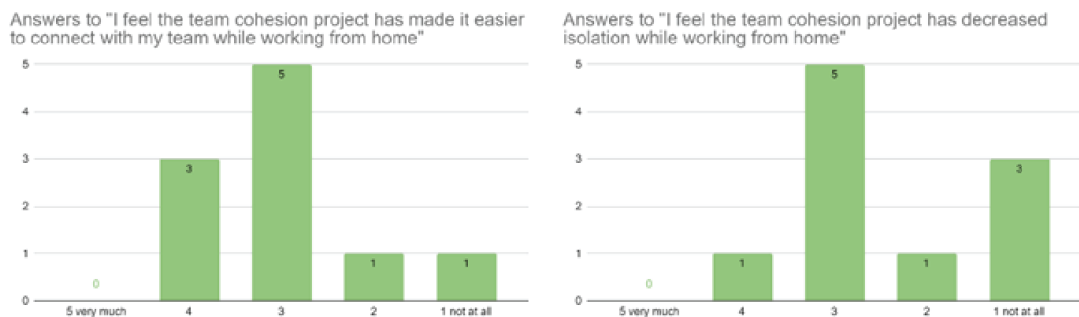


Figure 2: Effects of cohesion project to team connectivity and isolation

When measuring the change in connectivity within the Team after the cohesion project, it is inferred that the cohesion project has benefitted majority of the employees in the sense that they have been able to break out of their bubble and establish more functional communication networks with the other members of the Team. On the other hand, this did not show up as a notable decrease in the felt isolation. This could be interpreted so that the measures taken have been more efficient in formal communication than informal interaction.

One interesting aspect effecting the team cohesion is the fact that the Team is currently still working from home and has been doing so for the past year. Considering that half of the team members who answered the survey have only been working with the Project while working remotely. This half of the team members have only met the team leader once on their very

first day when they started with the Project and seen the other members of the Team virtually. This can create a communication barrier between the old employees who have been with the project for more than 1 year and the new members of the team. This communication barrier among other things can cause the employee to feel isolated from the team. Of course, the old team members can feel isolated as well as they have had the need to re-establish their pre-existing communication network among each other as the face to face communication is no longer an option. Only 1 employee out of 10 answered that they never feel isolated from the team. It is clear that majority of the team members are somewhat feeling like they are in a bubble which prevents them from feeling connected with the rest of the Team. Here the bubble is the home office where you are working on your own, unable to see the other team members. This makes it difficult to compare your workload with others for example and thus may cause a feeling to emerge that you are on this on your own.

5.2 Motivation

Based on the survey results the team members are motivated to achieve their personal goals at work (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Motivation to achieve personal goals

When asked about team goal contribution, it became evident that the answers were more deviated. While majority of the team members are confident about pitching in, one of the responders chose the other extremity (Figure 4).

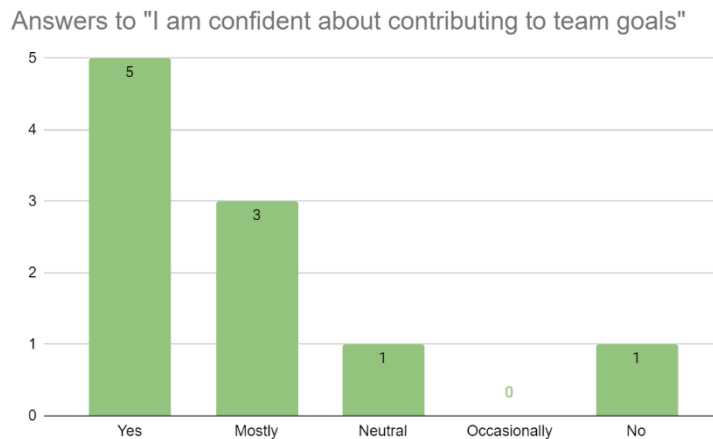


Figure 4: Motivation to contribute to team goals

This is very interesting when comparing with the individual goal motivation. Of course, confidence is very different from motivation, yet we can draw conclusions that it seems like one of the team members has become actively disengaged from the team as they are not finding the confidence, courage or motivation to come through. It is likely that there are multiple reasons why this one member of the team does not feel supported enough to fully commit but finding a reason for this is not one of the purposes of this survey, but rather a part of the daily job of the team leader. Working from home affects the perceived work motivation, but it is not seen as a major problem (see Figure 5).

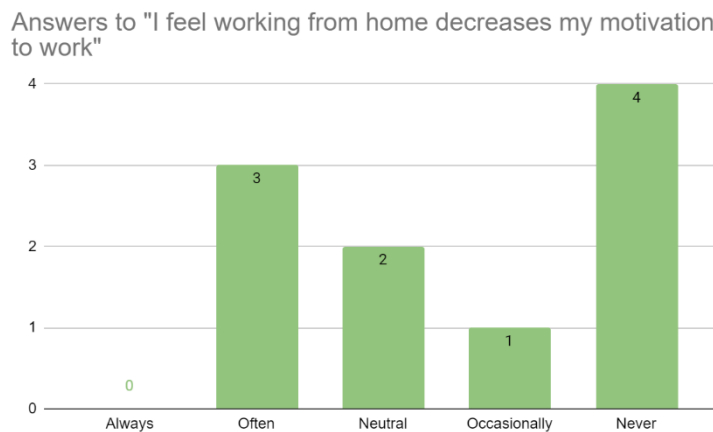


Figure 5: Effect of working from home on work motivation

Despite the above, the answers to the question measuring change (Figure 6) were all positive, some even at the top of the scale.

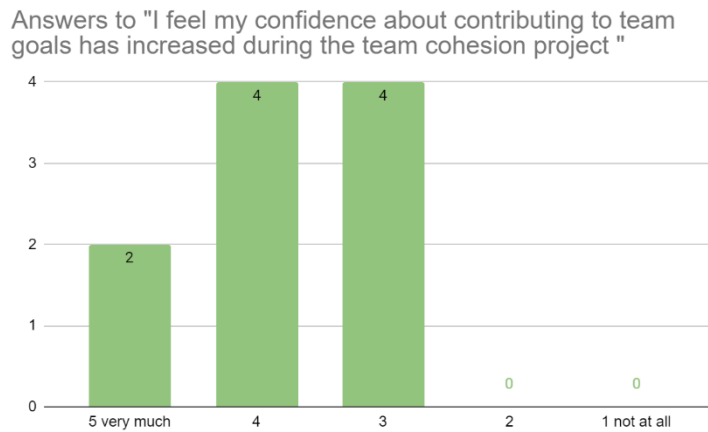


Figure 6: The effect of cohesion project on the confidence about contributing to team goals

This may indicate that the motivation and confidence about contributing to team goals has been on a low note before the cohesion project, but this, unfortunately, is difficult to measure reliably. Nevertheless, the project may be considered a success in terms of employee motivation.

5.3 Team cohesiveness

What comes to team cohesiveness, team member recognition is important as it strengthens the team and shows effectiveness and mutual passion towards team goals (Molnau 2013). Based on the survey answers (Figure 7) majority of the team members generally feel neutral or mildly positive about how the other team members recognizing their work.

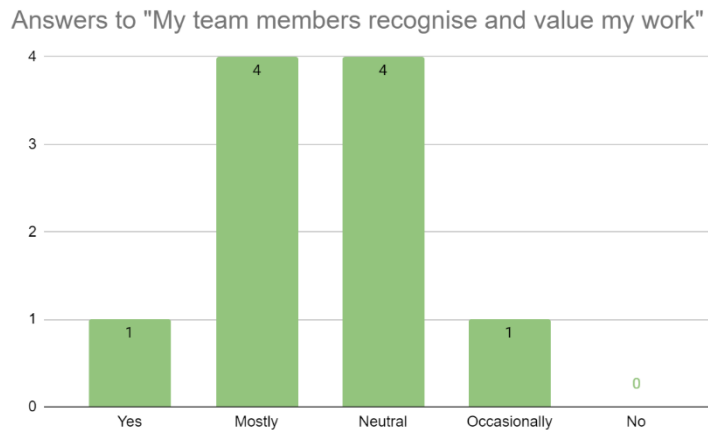


Figure 7: Recognition and valuation of the others' work within the team

When asked about the change, majority of the team members chose the number 3 on the linear scale while answering this question. Also here, the answer here could be seen as positive depending on how the team members perceived the answer options.

When working at an office, some employees find themselves motivated by their peers. As human beings we are all instinctively craving some form of a human connection. Working from home can reduce work motivation because the peer motivation or peer pressure is reduced. More than half of the team members said that they felt working from home has negatively affected their motivation to work, while 40% of the employees said that working from home has never decreased their work motivation. On a positive note, all of the team members had answered that their motivation has improved during the team cohesion project (3-4 on the linear scale 1-5).

Based on the results, we can say that working from home has had a negative impact on employee motivation. In light of the results, the team cohesion project was successful. The internal communication has improved and many barriers that have previously been blocking communication have been broken. With improved team communication the employees feel more motivated which directly reflects on the team performance.

5.4 Team manager's role

Looking at the team members' motivation and the overall team cohesion, the role of the manager cannot be ignored. It was considered necessary to include questions that would provide feedback regarding how the team experiences management in practical day-to-day support and whether they find their contribution was sufficiently recognized.

This proved to be very useful. In addition to the response for the overall support being very positive, well over half of the members giving the highest score (Figure 8), the correlation between the perceived support by the manager and the personal motivation was high (see Figure 9). The coefficient of determination (R^2) for this connection was 0,79.

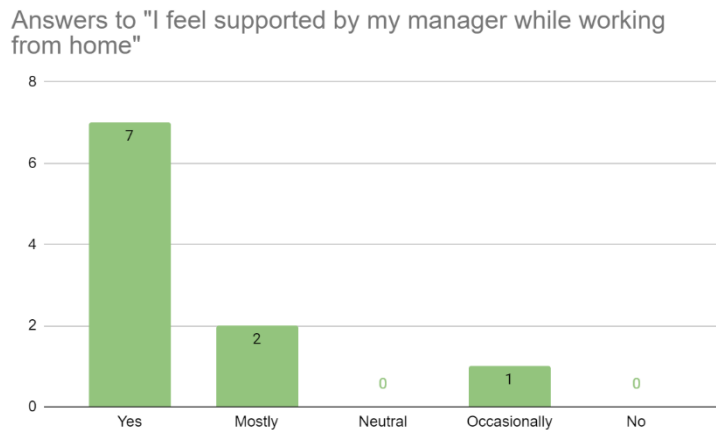


Figure 8: Perceived managerial support while working from home



Figure 9: Correlation between "I am motivated to achieve my goals" and "I feel supported by my manager while working from home"

The cohesion project has also increased the perceived amount of support, but the change is moderate - hopefully indicating, that the support has been adequate also before the project.

Recognition by the manager is perceived as very important by the team members, responses concentrating in the two highest scores. The employees also find that their work is quite well recognized (see Figure 10).

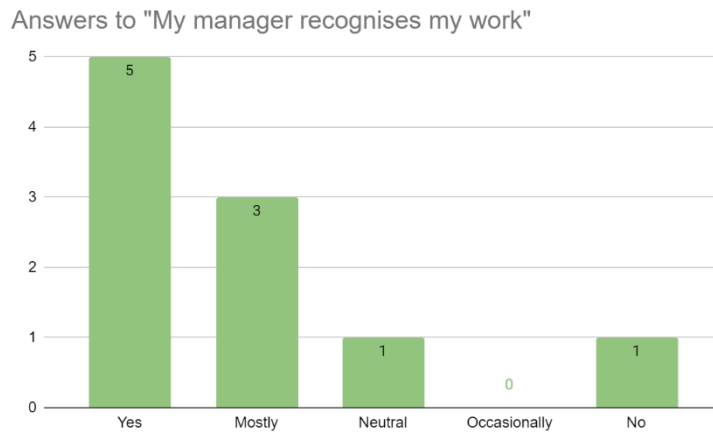


Figure 10: The manager's recognition of team members' work achievements

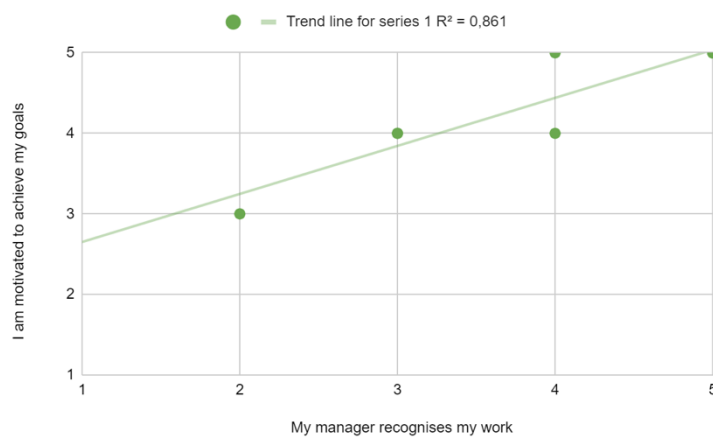


Figure 11: Correlation between "I am motivated to achieve my goals" and "My manager recognizes my work"

This importance is also highlighted by the notable correlation ($R^2 = 0.86$, see Figure 11) between perceived manager's recognition and personal motivation (questions 8 and 5, appendix I).

The cohesion project has increased the recognition, but only moderately. Again, the analysis is that there hasn't been a severe lack of recognition before the project, either.

5.5 Key Performance Indicators

As mentioned, due to attrition the Team as a whole is quite young, and several members have only been contributing to the KPI's after the cohesion project. This has a negative impact on the Team overall KPI scores due to mistakes that should be attributed to inadequate training and experience rather than motivational factors. Despite of this, the KPI scores have remained rather invariable. Once the new team members' understandable learning curve is disregarded, minor increases are detectible. Due to this source of uncertainty, strong arguments regarding the effects of improved motivation in team performance cannot be presented. Thus, the answer to the research question 3 remains open.

As the survey was only concluded at the very end of the cohesion project this means that there will be very limited, if any, comparative data supporting the above statements. And thus, the Hawthorne effect should also be taken into consideration when making these assumptions. There are multiple studies arguing for and against (Jones, 1992, pp 451-468) this phenomenon. The Hawthorne effect in general argues that once a person knows they are being surveyed they tend to answer what they think is right rather than what they actually feel at that very moment (McCambridge, Witton, and Elbourne, 2014, pp 267-277).

6 Discussion

Since the entire Project started working from home, we have encountered countless hurdles but it is safe to say we have found equally as many solutions to the stressing issues. Since day one we managed to make it look like business as usual from the consumer's perspective and keep the commitments to the Client. Nevertheless, this has been a very stressful time, especially to the agents. The communications lines were not working, the call voice quality was subpar, the VPN connection was constantly failing, we had to open more technical support tickets than the IT team could possibly handle. Some agents spent days offline due to connection issues. It has been a long journey to be where we are today.

It may be questioned why the issues with the team communication have only been raised now? It is very clear that the issues have always been there to a lesser extent and working from home has brought the issues up to a higher priority. As it seems we will be working from home quite a lot longer than anticipated, we need to make sure that the team targets are not met only at the expense of employees. To keep the employee turnover under control, some changes must be made.

In Team 2, these changes have been implemented with great success and positive feedback. This is something the author had been longing for as an agent and is grateful to be able to

provide these opportunities to the Team. Once the agent MBR has been introduced, the full team will be able to enjoy greater transparency and improved communication.

For Team 2 the results can already be seen in the monthly QA scores. The accuracy percentage has also improved. This can be due to either increased agent knowledge as the team members who started with the project at the time the development plan was implemented have stayed with the project, or due to the fact that they feel more confident about asking advice and support from other team members.

All in all, we can arguably conclude that there is a clear reason why communication is one of the foundations of a successful team. Without a clear communication channel, the team will run out of fuel and fall apart. Now that we are on the way to improve the internal communication and team cohesion, we are in the works of building a strong foundation for a healthy, well-functioning successful team. In a way we can consider working from home as a blessing in disguise, as it has allowed us all to step away from our comfort zone and reach out for better ways to doing the things that have always been done in a particular way in the past.

As the survey was concluded only after the cohesion project was implemented, the results of the survey are based on the employees' memory and perception, thus the results are very subjective. This raises a question regarding the current state analysis as the answers are simply recollections of how the situation had been. For example, when the employees are asked about changes due to the cohesion project, the result may be affected by their reflection of the past against their current knowledge, not how they felt at the time. Regarding the questions measuring change, as the answer options were presented on a linear scale, did the team members perceive the option 1 (not at all) as neutral? Or did they find the option 3 in the middle of the scale as the neutral option? In this case, can the option 3 be interpreted as a positive answer or does it simply present a neutral tone from the team member's point of view? It should also be noted that some of the employees have been with the Project for a shorter period than the team cohesion project has been on-going. If the team cohesion improvement project would become an on-going project, the new team members could retake the same survey after 1 year of seniority. Then the current survey would act as a comparative survey and provide greater knowledge on how the cohesion project succeeded.

As the results of the cohesion project have been quite positive, the project should be continued. The implementation is likely to be improved and more ways of engaging the employees are to be investigated. It should be kept in mind that once something is done to engage and motivate the employees the motivational factor decreases or diminishes. For this reason, a project such as this needs constant development and observation.

7 Conclusions

In this thesis, the team cohesion project which was earlier planned and executed as the team leader was analyzed. The project's ultimate goal was to improve team performance, but from the team management's perspective, reduction of attrition and improvement of employee wellbeing were important factors. The methods to achieve these goals were improvements in the team's communication methods and practices, as well as increased interaction with the management through business review sessions.

The project was successful both according to performance analysis and an employee survey. As the analysis was performed only after the completion of the project, there are more uncertainties than if it had been well prepared and built into the project as an intrinsic component. Nevertheless, the results strongly suggest that all three research questions do have a positive answer:

Research question 1: Does a cohesion project improve internal communication?

Communication has improved both according to the employee questionnaire and from the management's perspective.

Research question 2: Could improvement in communication affect the employee motivation?

Employees report improved motivation, and the current lower attrition rate may follow this positive feeling.

Research question 3: If the employee motivation would be improved, would that have an effect on the KPIs? The team's performance indicators have improved during the project even though the working conditions are far from perfect during the COVID-19 isolation if we account for quite understandable mistakes by new employees. Strictly looking at the data, a definite answer to research question 3 cannot be given.

Communication's vital role in working environment is a well-known fact. It is still far too often given little thought, even when problems arise. This project shows that a collection of relatively simple methods can make a notable difference both from the employees' and the company's perspective at a relatively insignificant cost. Analyzing the results helps further improve the communication channels, working practices and, eventually, business performance measures.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Survey questions

- 1) How long have you worked for the project?
1-4M/4-12M/13-24M/More than 2y
- 2) I like working in my team *Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No*
- 3) I am confident about contributing to team goals *Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No*
- 4) I feel my confidence about contributing to team goals has increased during the team cohesion project *Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much*
- 5) I am motivated to achieve my goals *Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No*
- 6) The level of motivation effects my performance *Yes/Neutral/No*
- 7) I feel like my work motivation has improved during the team cohesion project
Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much
- 8) My manager recognizes my work *Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No*
- 9) I feel the cohesion project has positively affected my manager's recognition of my work
Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much
- 10) I feel supported by my manager while working from home
Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No
- 11) I feel the cohesion project has increased the level of support I receive from my manager
Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much
- 12) Recognition by my manager motivates me to work harder
Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No
- 13) The recognition by my manager has improved as a result of the team cohesion project
Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much
- 14) I feel more motivated to work now that the 121s have been re-established
Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much
- 15) I feel isolated from the team while working from home
Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No
- 16) I feel the team cohesion project has decreased isolation while working from home
Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much
- 17) My team members recognize and value my work *Yes/Mostly/Neutral/Occasionally/No*
- 18) My team member's recognition of my work has increased as a result of the team cohesion project
Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much
- 19) I feel working from home decreases my motivation to work
Never/Occasionally/Neutral/Often/Always
- 20) I feel it is hard to connect with the team as everything is virtual rather than in person
Never/Occasionally/Neutral/Often/Always

- 21) I feel the team cohesion project has made it easier to connect with my team while working from home *Not at all 1-2-3-4-5 Very much*
- 22) I feel like there is a lack of work-life balance while working from home *Never/Occasionally/Neutral/Often/Always*
- 23) What challenges do you encounter in your work-life balance? What would make it easier to cope with them? *Open answer*
- 24) What is your biggest motivator to work? *Open answer*
- 25) How can the company increase your motivation at work? *Open answer*
- 26) Do you think another team would benefit from similar project concerning motivation? *Yes/Neutral/No*

Appendix II

Questionnaire data

	Highest				Lowest
How long have you worked for the project?	3	2	1	4	-
I like working in my team?	6	1	2	0	1
I am motivated to achieve my goals	6	3	1	0	0
The level of motivation affects my performance	8	0	2	0	0
I am confident about contributing to team goals	5	3	1	0	1
I feel my confidence about contributing to team goals has increased during the team cohesion project	2	4	4	0	0
My manager recognizes my work	5	2	2	1	0
I feel the cohesion project has positively affected my manager's recognition of my work	0	5	4	0	1
Recognition by my manager motivates me to work harder	4	4	1	1	0
My team members recognize and value my work	1	4	4	1	0
I feel more motivated to work now that the 121s have been re-established	0	3	4	2	0
Do you think another team would benefit from similar project concerning motivation?	6	0	3	0	1
I feel isolated from the team while working from home	0	2	2	5	1
I feel the team cohesion project has made it easier to connect with my team while working from home	0	3	5	1	1
I feel working from home decreases my motivation to work	0	3	2	1	4
I feel supported by my manager while working from home	7	2	0	1	0
I feel it is hard to connect with the team as everything is virtual rather than in person	0	5	0	5	0
I feel like there is a lack of work-life balance while working from home	2	2	1	1	4
I feel like my work motivation has improved during the cohesion project	0	4	6	0	0
I feel the cohesion project has increased the level of support I receive from my manager	0	5	4	0	1
The recognition by my manager has improved as a result of the team cohesion project	3	3	4	0	0
I feel the team cohesion project has decreased isolation while working from home	0	1	5	1	3
My team member's recognition of my work has increased as a result of the team cohesion project	1	1	7	0	1