

## **Leadership in multicultural virtual team environment**

Maarit Salla

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<p><b>Author or authors</b> Maarit Salla</p>	<p><b>Group or year of entry</b> GloBBA10</p>
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<p><b>Teacher(s) or supervisor(s)</b> Elizabeth San Miguel, Anita Pösö</p>	
<p>This thesis is about leadership in multicultural virtual team environment. The main purpose of the study was to identify the benefits and challenges of multicultural virtual teams and to give suggestions how to overcome them.</p> <p>The theory framework is about fundamental elements within the three key areas of the study: leadership, virtual teams and multicultural issues. The empirical study was conducted through an online survey with quantitative questions supported by few qualitative questions.</p> <p>The invitation to the survey was sent out to 47 professionals working in multicultural virtual teams in different industries, companies and countries. The final sample consisted of a total of 22 responses giving a total of 49% in response rate. The results were analyzed with the help of standard reports from the Webropol survey system. The results are focusing in the results of the whole sample but some cross tabulation between team members versus team leaders and members of permanent virtual teams versus project teams is also done. The results are presented both as percentages and as average figures.</p> <p>According to the study the biggest challenges in multicultural virtual teams are in communication, misunderstandings due to cultural and language barriers, spatial space between the team members, lack of understanding their current priorities and meeting practices.</p> <p>The thesis suggests the team to agree on rules on meeting practices and communication. Cultural differences should be taken into account in team building and managing expectations which vary widely among the team. It is important for the leader to catch these and align them with the team's vision and mission.</p>	
<p><b>Keywords</b> Virtual team, leadership, multicultural, team effectiveness, team management</p>	

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# 1 Introduction

The thesis is about leadership in multicultural virtual teams, the challenges within and about possible solutions for the challenges. The ever accelerating strive after more efficient ways of working has created a demand for more flexible co-workers who are able to work whenever, wherever and as long as it takes.

## 1.1 Background to the thesis topic

According to International Data Corporation's study from 2012, the amount of mobile workers will increase from 1 billion in 2010 to more than 1,3 billion people in 2015. United Nations (2013) projects the population of earth being at 7,3 billion by 2015 meaning that 18% of the population, including children and other non-workforce, will be working within some kind of virtual team. With virtual teams becoming more common, it is of high importance to ensure that the virtual teams are lead well and are delivering according to the timetables and budgets.

The Economist Intelligence Unit's survey from 2009 (1-3) collected data from executives that represented companies with revenues of minimum US\$ 100 million. Every third of these executives stated that virtual teams are not managed well. The report states that there are three common areas that are causing poor management when compared to traditional onsite teams:

- the virtual team has developed without proper planning
- difficult for the manager to lead without face-to-face contact
- team building in terms of camaraderie and mutual trust is insufficient

The technology development has been a vital element for creation of virtual teams with modern solutions for meeting online e.g. through teleconference calls. This in its turn has been a cost saving element for the companies in terms of travel needs. However meeting also face-to-face is seen as one of the most important items for successful virtual team. (The Economist 2009, 12.) The modern office and communication tools

can easily allure one to believe that leading a virtual team is easier than ever. In contrary, it has become more complex and demanding. The importance of understanding the differences between traditional and virtual leadership is a base for becoming an effective virtual team leader. (Settle-Murphy 2013, XVII; Hunsaker & Hunsaker 2008, 86.)

The author has a background of working in virtual teams since early 1990's and has seen the benefits and challenges in virtual teamwork. The virtual teams are becoming the reality for many of us but the companies the author has worked for have not offered any special training for working in nor leading a virtual team. The members and leaders of virtual team seem to be following the guidelines for a traditional team. The author wanted to study the previous studies on the topic but also to make a research through her professional contacts that are working in a multicultural virtual team.

## **1.2 Aim and purpose**

The thesis and the research are to study the current challenges occurring in multicultural virtual teams both from the leaders' and team members' perspectives. The theoretical part of the thesis contents findings from previous research, studies and publications. For the empirical part the data is collected through an online survey. The results are compared with results from previous studies to see the possible similarities and differences. Finally in the discussion part the author will present alternatives for development of a successful virtual team.

The thesis wants to highlight the characteristics of virtual team versus a traditional team, the challenges within and how to overcome these. It is essential to understand both the current challenges and benefits before making corrective actions for a virtual team. The thesis strives after to give recommendations for improvement for virtual team leaders but also for the members. The Economist survey from 2009 identified that many of the virtual teams have been built without a proper planning which is a likely phenomenon also in the virtual teams of today.



### 1.3 Research question

The research question (RQ) is defined as “What are the main challenges in leading multicultural virtual teams and how to overcome them”. The investigative questions (IQs) are:

- IQ1: What are the challenges in working in a multicultural virtual team?
- IQ2: What are the benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team?
- IQ3: How to overcome the challenges of a multicultural virtual team?

Table 1: Overlay matrix

<b>Research Question (RQ)</b>	<b>Investigative Questions (IQs)</b>	<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>Measurement Questions</b>	<b>Results</b>
What are the challenges in working in multicultural virtual teams and how to overcome these?	What are the challenges in working in a multicultural virtual team?	2.2, 2.4	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18	4.3
	What are the benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team?	2.3	7	4.2
	How to overcome the challenges of a multicultural virtual team?	2.5, 2.6, 2.7	15, 16, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25	5.2

## 1.4 Demarcation for the research

The thesis is for the field of Human Resources Management in terms of leadership in multicultural teams that are working dispersed in different locations and countries. The respondents are members and/ or leaders of multicultural virtual teams in different international companies on various industries. The respondents represent both genders and several nationalities in Europe, North America and Asia.

## 1.5 Key concepts

The thesis is having the key concepts with virtual teams, leadership, multicultural, team effectiveness and team management.

**Virtual team** consists of group of people working dispersed but together striving after a common goal. The team usually lacks face-to-face connection if not totally then almost totally. (Zofi 2012, 1.) It is typical that they do meet face-to-face rarely and are having most of their communication through various technological means, for instance with email and conference calls (Maznevski 2000, 1).

The core of **leadership** is about influencing. It is a process in which a person strives after to affect a team of individuals to reach the shared goals. Thereby the leader is influencing the followers to act accordingly. Describing leadership as a process does not demand a certain trait or characteristic of a leader but displays it as a set of interactions between the leader and the followers. The trait definition of leadership divides people between leaders and non-leaders with leaders having special, in many cases inborn qualities, which make them leaders. The process leadership sees it as interaction, available to not only the formal leaders but also the team members and as something that can be learned. (Northouse 2010, 3-5.)

**Multicultural** topics are tightly related to diversity and culture. Culture is widely understood as a learnt behavior in terms of e.g. norms, rules and traditions that make a certain group of people unique. The most common groups discussed are related to the

geographical background, e.g. European, African, American, Asian and Middle Eastern. Multicultural environment can also refer to subcultures like gender, ethnical background, age or sexual orientation. When applying multicultural behavior it means that one is paying attention to more than one culture in her actions. (Northouse 2010, 336.)

**Team effectiveness** is commonly related to team's ability to reach the common goals and deliverables timely and cost-efficiently with good quality. One of the main objectives of a leader is to create a work environment that supports the team on its way to reach the goals and deliver according to the plans.

**Team management** is about combining various managerial activities that are getting a group of people together making them work to achieve their common goals. (Management Study Guide 2013.)

## 1.6 Risks and risk management

The thesis will be done without a commissioning company relying on the author's professional network and their responses. The main risks on the thesis were:

- the respondents and their willingness to reply to the survey
- theoretical framework: to find the most suitable theories

Collecting a reliable amount of data needs to be secured. The respondents belong to the student's professional contacts, which is likely to give the respondents more will to participate. The survey needs to be formulated in a way that collects the needed information with the right questions. It is also vital for the questions and statements in the survey to be precise and as unequivocal as possible to avoid any misinterpretations.

The survey was sent using emails and social media in terms of Facebook and LinkedIn. The anticipated sample size was approximately 50 responses. The survey participants were encouraged to share the link to the survey with colleagues working in multicultural virtual teams in order to get more respondents, this is known as snowball sampling.

## 2 Multicultural virtual team environment

The thesis wants to list the most common challenges multicultural virtual teams face in their everyday life and see how to overcome these challenges. The theories used in the thesis are related to leadership and to multicultural virtual teams (figure 1).

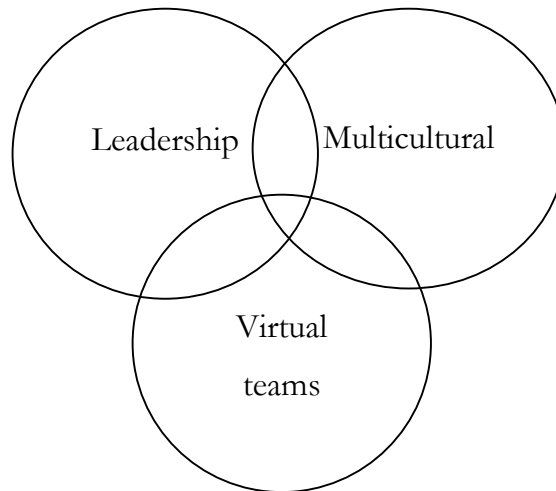


Figure 1: Theoretical framework

The following subsections are presenting the theoretical framework for the thesis. The survey results are compared with the theoretical framework in terms of benefits, results but also how to overcome the challenges of a multicultural virtual team.

### 2.1 Characteristics of virtual teams

Hunsaker and Hunsaker (2008, 88-90) describes a virtual team having two characteristics that distinguish them from traditional teams: spatial space and info, communication and personal communication. Virtual teams work dispersed and share the information and knowledge mainly through the diverse modern communication tools, for example emails, phone calls and teleconferences, whereas the traditional teams have the possibility for information sharing face-to-face.

There are several types of a virtual team. It can have one person working separated from the other team members or it can have all the team members spread around the globe on different time zones with different cultural backgrounds. The leader might be

working in proximity with some team members or he/she can be the one separated from the team. (Settle-Murphy 2013, XVII-XVIII.) A virtual team is typically either a permanent team or a temporary project team. In this thesis a virtual team is described as a group of individuals working towards common goals from dispersed locations having face-to-face meetings rarely and working either in a permanent or a temporary team.

## 2.2 Development of virtual teams

Development of virtual teams started with engaging people for assignments that did not require physical presence at the work place. These **virtual freelancers** were the pioneers of virtual teams in the early 80's and the first wave of the three waves in development of virtual teams. They were expected to deliver according to the deadline and frames given with often no other connections to the company than the subscriber. The freelancers often belonged to workforce not able to tie up to normal and traditional office hours and location, for instance due to family reasons or other personal limitations. The situation was considered as a win-win for both parties. The freelancer got control over his/her own work contribution in terms of working hours, physical location and the working processes. The employer was happy getting not only increased flexibility in resourcing but also an access to a wider talent pool that stretched outside his own region. Employer saved also in terms of office infrastructure, for instance office space and tools. (Gratton & Johns 2013, 68.)

Despite the general win-win situation for the first wavers, it brought some challenges as well. The freelancers were often independent contractors with no formal employment inside the company lacking thereby normal benefits an employee has, for instance healthcare arrangements and personal career development paths. Furthermore, lack of being part of a bigger mission was seen as a demotivating factor likewise the engagement to the company from the employer's aspect. (Gratton & Johns 2013, 68-69.) Employee engagement is widely considered to increase job satisfaction, innovation, performance and lower turnover and thereby a topic employers are very keen on increasing (Armstrong 2012, 172).

Technological development enabled the companies to ask their employees to work outside office hours and in international assignments. Terrorist attacks in 9/11 and fear of pandemics in the early 00's made companies to consider the sustainability of business from a new perspective and to make alternative plans for work models: to work remotely instead of from centralized locations. Despite the obvious benefits with the new way of working, both parts shared the fear of lower productivity and engagement of the virtual workers. British Telecom made a pilot project where the first challenges came with learning how to manage one's own work contribution and managing others' as a manager. Despite the starting problems the project started to pay off after a couple of months with an increase in productivity and decrease in staff turnover. The pilot project was taking advantage of technology development and was adjusting the company culture and managerial development along the way making the virtual working more prosperous. The second wave with **virtual corporate colleagues** was born. (Gratton & Johns 2013, 68-69.)

However, the companies could see some drawbacks also on this stage. While traditional teams can create new innovations for instance in a serendipity informal hallway discussion, the virtual teams are lacking this means of natural collaboration. The companies started also worrying about losing the tacit knowledge due to employee turnover. The employees were also missing the social contact and other benefits of collocation. This created the third wave that is called **virtual coworkers** that means gathering virtual team members from one or several companies in specific office venues. The venues benefit the virtual coworker with giving a physical connection with other virtual coworkers and having an up-to-date technology available. Characteristic to these places is that they are a modernized version of postmodern cubicle offices with easily adjustable office furnishment where employees have the freedom to choose where to sit and with whom. (Gratton & Johns 2013, 69-70.)

It is essential for today's employers to implement the new ways of working into its philosophies. The company needs to analyze the current ways of working and the future needs when starting the implementation. Virtual environment as a work model requires sufficient and efficient technological solutions to start with. Having a virtual

environment should also mean work task sharing across geographical boundaries using the talents and skills within the organization. (Gratton & Johns 2013, 70-72.) The company should understand the benefits and challenges within virtual teams likewise ensure the full usage of benefits and learn ways to overcome the challenges.

### **2.3 Benefits of a virtual team**

The benefits of any form of working are not likely to be highlighted in any research due to the fact that the studies are normally concentrating on giving solutions to problems, not on telling what is already working. Two books about leadership of virtual teams (Settle-Murphy 2013; Zafi 2012) are talking about the benefits as below.

One of the main benefits of a virtual team is its flexibility to work across different time zones enabling work task sharing accordingly. The team members often come from different cultural background with not only their specialization, skills and knowledge but also their personal network that can benefiate the whole virtual team. From the individual perspective, the career can get extra boost from successful virtual team achievements. (Settle-Murphy 2013, 1.)

Virtual teams are also benefiting technology development with their needs for better tools. The companies are saving money in terms of office infrastructure with lessened needs for office space and equipment for the virtual workers. The physical meetings of a virtual team are normally taking place rarely with decreased meeting costs.

Environmentally speaking remote working creates less gas emission and therefore a smaller carbon footprint. One of the main benefits of a virtual team for the employer is having access to a wider talent pool with no need for relocation. The employee is winning in getting increased possibilities of finding new challenges with personal development. (Zafi 2012, 3.)

### **2.4 Challenges of a virtual team**

Due to rarely happening face-to-face meetings, the challenges of a virtual team are somewhat different of a traditional team. A research “Five challenges to virtual team

success: Lessons from Sabre, Inc.” (2002, 69-74) made interviews about virtual teams with employees from all the levels of the organization. The end result were five challenges that the publication recommends to be paid attention to also in other organizations planning and/ or having virtual teams:

- Building trust within virtual teams
- Maximizing process gains and minimizing process losses on virtual teams
- Overcoming feelings at isolation and detachment associated with virtual teamwork
- Balancing technical and interpersonal skills among virtual team members
- Assessment and recognition of virtual team performance

(Kirkman, Rosen, Gibson, Tesluk & McPherson 2002, 69-74.)

Settle-Murphy (2013, 1-2) sees the same challenges one decade later and presents in addition challenges regarding communication, time zone difference, cultural differences and possible other commitments of the virtual team member. The communication needs to be extra well planned and managed due to many times deep going dependencies between different parts of the team and its mission. The time zone differences makes meeting planning more challenging with the team members having a different energy level at the same time. Cultural differences and language barriers can make the collaboration and communication more difficult due to misunderstandings. In case of project work, a virtual team member might be having other work assignments despite the project creating a possible conflict in terms of prioritization.

The Economist Intelligence Unit published a report “Managing virtual teams” in 2009 based on a survey to see how much European companies use virtual teams and how they are built and led. The survey was conducted by 318 executives who were currently working in a virtual team. One third of the executives had an opinion that the virtual teams were badly managed which report suggested to be the result of lack of planning when creating virtual teams. Likewise Settle-Murphy, the survey identified the biggest challenges in misunderstandings due to cultural or language barriers likewise the lack of being able to get the cues through body language (57%). Almost half of the executives saw challenges in leading the teams from distance and almost as many in building



camaraderie and trust between the team members. One third of the respondents saw difficulties in managing the productivity of the team and the information overload.

## **2.5 Effective virtual teams**

In order to succeed in any assignment, a certain kind of behavior is awaited both from the leaders and the members of a virtual team. A commonly acknowledged fact is that a good team member enjoys working together striving after the common goals but can also work independently. Expectations for a successful virtual team member and leader have some additional items when compared to those of traditional teams due to the lack of proximity of the team members.

### **2.5.1 Successful virtual team member**

Like the survey from The Economist (2009, 10) stated a leader is often given the virtual team with no possibility to select the members. Therefore it is important that the leader checks the coworker's capabilities for working in a virtual team and collects the development needs for the individual. A successful virtual team member has following characteristics (Settle-Murphy 2013, 6-8):

- Socially capable to connect: virtual team membership means stretching out from the traditional way of working with need to bond with others independently. It is important to be trusted but also to be able to trust others and that that is possible through networking.
- Excellent in self-managing and organizing: a virtual team member needs to be able to deliver timely and in good quality without team members or leader watching each step.
- Comfortable using the diverse technological team work solutions: the knowledge and work sharing are done not only through email and phone calls but also via team portals, cloud services according to the company guidelines. This means that a successful virtual team member has it easy adopting new ways of working.

- Extraordinary good listener: the lack of visual cues while communicating requires a successful virtual team member to be an active listener that can distinguish the verbal and written cues. Multitasking during meetings acts as an obstacle for listening in many cases.
- Knows what, how and when to communicate: an effective team member can pass the message in a way that it is understood right the first time. This requires the skills not only to put the essentials of the message into it but also to determine the most suitable channel for the communication.
- Has an independent way of working: a successful team member does not need daily guidance from the leader but has the courage to ask for help when needed. Being part of a virtual team means trust from the company's side but also responsibility for making things happen without proximity to the team and the leader.

### 2.5.2 Successful virtual teams

Zofi defines eight different categories that are found in a successful virtual team (2012, 251-256). According to her, the team members of a successful virtual team have a “**global mindset**” enabling them to see things from global instead of a solely local perspective. They **share the responsibility** and understand the dependence on each member on its way to reach their common goals. Their working environment appreciates the diversity of its members and encourages them to question things without a fear of punishment creating **trust among them**. A successful virtual team has agreed on **rules for communication**, i.e. what, how and when it communicates. The team members understand the normal working hours of the individuals and the pace they for instance check their emails. The information to team members comes through various technological means like team sites, intranet and emails. The **information flow is manageable** since it is rather pulled than pushed giving the team members the possibility to choose when to familiarize with the information. **Conflicts** in the team are **handled in an early stage** with the manager showing example and encouraging the team members to communicate one-to-one but also following up any tensions arisen inside the team. It is of high importance that the manager is leading by example building a culture of openness among the team members. **The systems and tools** in order to deliver are working well together and make following the deadlines and economical

limitations possible. The team members show **positive attitude** towards the work and the team in itself. In times of internal or external problems the team members see things within the big picture and work to find a solutions, not a person to blame.

### **2.5.3 Team leadership model**

One of the main objectives of having a leader is to build a team that works effectively and delivers according to its service promises. As Zofi (2012, 251-256) proposes, managing conflicts on an early stage is one of the key characteristics of a successful virtual team. Hill's Team Leadership model (Northouse 2010, 243-252) gives managers a tool how to solve any leadership problems, including conflicts that are to occur in any team, sooner or later. The model uses earlier theories as a base in order to create a simple toolkit to be used in diagnosing team problems and how to address them. The model stresses the key role of leadership when discussing team effectiveness. (Figure 2.)

According to the model, the leader has three decisions to take before acting. The first one is to decide if he/she should keep on monitoring the situation or proceed with taking actions to solve the topic. The second decision is to see if the team needs are in tasks or relations. Task focused actions are about supporting with completing the tasks while relational actions are about helping with interpersonal relations like collaboration and managing conflicts. The third decision is about seeing if the actions needed are of internal or external type. As an example unstructured meeting practices demand internal actions while technical solutions not offering the right kind of support to the team is an external matter. (Northouse 2010, 243-248.)

Further on, the model gives examples of what kind of actions a leader can take to solve the problem. Internal task related problems can be helped with for instance clearing out the goals and facilitating in decision-making while actions for relational problems can be in terms of coaching, conflict management and collaboration to mention few. The environmental leadership actions are for instance networking, negotiating support and sharing information. (Northouse 2010, 249-251.)

The model ends with the desired outcome of the teamwork and leadership actions: team effectiveness with team performance and team development. An effective team delivers in terms of quality, time and money while developing the skills of the individual's according to their own needs and company goals. (Northouse 2010, 251-252.)

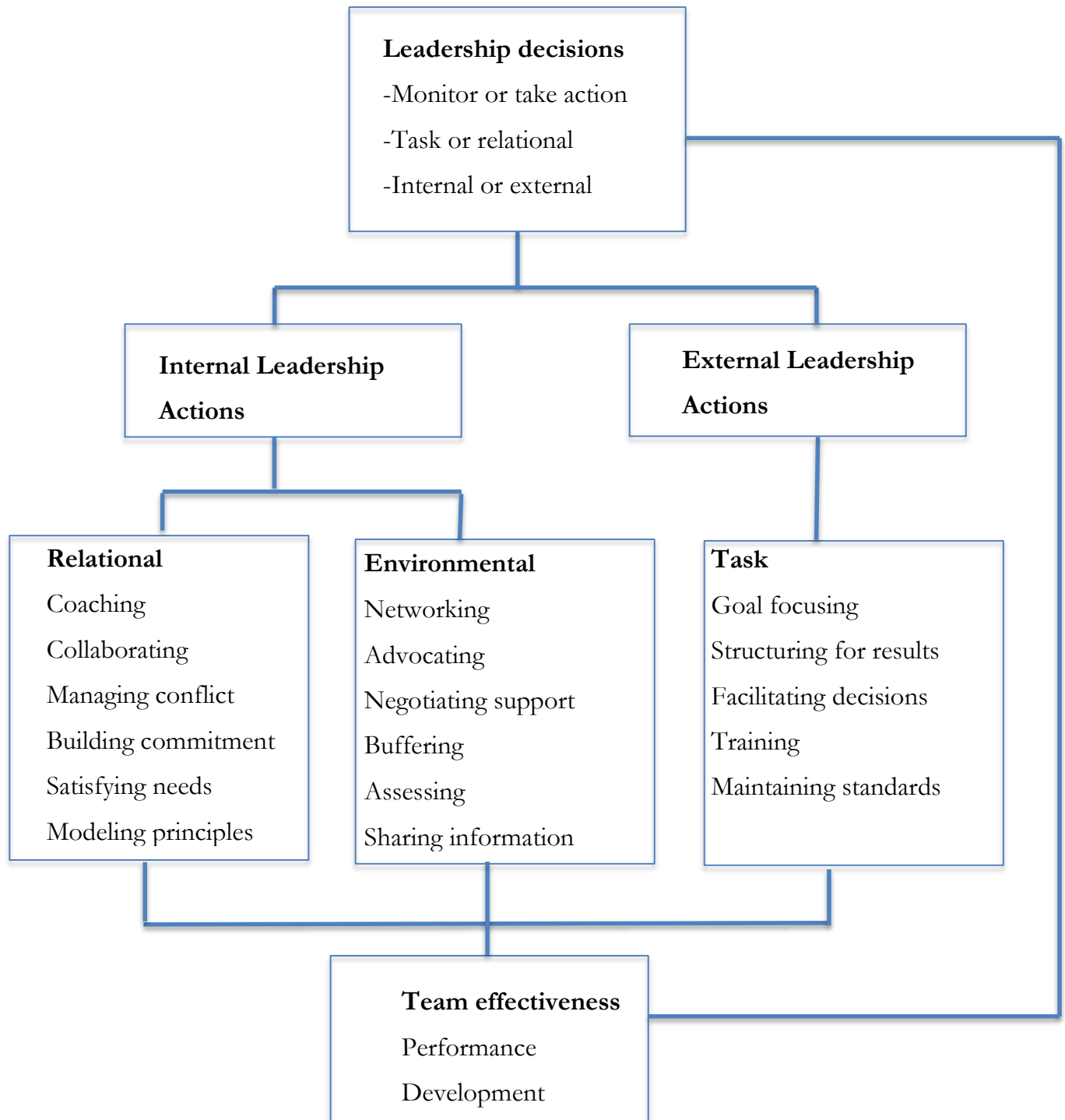


Figure 2: Hill's model for Team Leadership (Northouse 2010, 244)

## **2.6 Leadership in virtual teams**

This subsection describes the leadership from different cultural aspects and the leadership in virtual teams in itself. According to Zafi (2012, 54) there are four elements that need to be followed up during the life cycle of any successful virtual team. These are:

- Ensuring effective communication
- Creating accountability/ trust
- Managing conflict and handling misunderstandings
- Developing work systems to get deliverables out the door

### **2.6.1 Clusters of world cultures**

House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta made a study “Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: the GLOBE Study of 62 Societies” (2004) as part of a still ongoing research program the GLOBE. In general, the program has found several findings on the relationship between culture and leadership. This study is based on previous studies and the group’s own research and describes a total of nine cultural dimensions that are used in categorizing ten different cultural clusters globally. Hofstede’s findings built a base for the cultural dimensions. The data gathered for the research was divided into these clusters and information analyzed. The results proofed that each cluster was one of a kind. These nine dimensions were used as a base in the research of leadership in 62 different countries. The data gathered was put under ten different regional clusters in order to be able to find characteristics of each cultural cluster: Nordic Europe, Anglo, Germanic Europe, Latin Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe, Middle East, Confucian Asia, Southern Asia and Latin America. The researchers were relying on the the theory of implicit leadership (Lord & Maher 1991) which basically means that people view a leader through his/her own beliefs, assumptions and examples. (Northouse 2010, 339-348.)

Out of these clusters, Denmark, Sweden and Finland build the cluster of Nordic Europe. Characteristic for this cluster is looking far out in the future, equality between sexes, institutional collectivism and a preference to stick to the rules and agreed ways of doing things. The honesty beats assertiveness and power belongs equally to all levels

of society. Nordic people appreciate the power of co-operation and belonging to a group. Looking out for the cluster that collides most with the Nordic Europe you find Latin America that scores high in in-group collectivism and low in future orientation, humane orientation, institutional collectivism, performance orientation and uncertainty avoidance. According to the study, Latin Americans are family or other small groups orientated and rather stick to their own way to do things, on their own terms. (Northouse 2010, 344.) These two clusters acting as examples, it can be seen that expectations for leadership vary across regions and cultures making leadership in global multicultural teams more challenging than in teams with just a few nationalities.

Furthermore, the GLOBE project were able to present desirable leadership profiles for the ten cultural clusters. They also created positive and negative leader attributes for a leader that is appreciated by almost everyone. This leader has charisma, high integrity, interpersonal skills and follows values. (Northouse 2010, 349-357.)

### **2.6.2 Virtual team leadership**

Virtual team leadership is widely discussed in the study *Virtual Team Leadership: Perspectives From the Field* by Hambley, O'Neill & Kline (2007). The researchers interviewed team leaders and members of virtual teams in six different organizations in Canada. The study made four important findings among which were the importance of leadership in virtual teams, effectiveness, personalization and effective use of different media. The study emphasizes the need of developing trainings for virtual team leaders and team members and assessing their effect on team cohesion and performance. The author's current assumption is that the leadership and management trainings in companies are not offering any specific perspective for the leadership in virtual team environment.

The leader of a virtual team faces additional challenges on top of the challenges a leader of a traditional team has. According to Settle-Murphy (2013, 3) a leader needs to pay extra attention to:

- Building trust between the leader and the team members but also among the team

- Creating a team environment that prospers cooperation and camaraderie in the team's work towards its goals
- Gaining insight of the team members personal qualifications, skills and preferences and building a common base for a successful team collaboration
- Ensuring that the team members have a shared understanding of the team's deliverables, goals and mission
- Creating a working environment that gives the team members a feeling of being fairly treated and respected
- Building and implementing general guidelines to communication and collaboration as a team
- Developing performance assessment and coaching skills for the remote work
- Observing disoriented team member and intervening when needed in order to get back to the right course
- Developing virtual team meetings into focused and productive ones

Zofi (2011, 243) stresses that the communication in virtual and traditional teams is highly dependent on the virtual mindset of the team. The manager needs to help the team members of virtual teams in adapting a global way of thinking in order to keep up in pace with the competitors.

### **2.6.3 Pitfalls of a virtual team leader**

Talking about virtual leadership, it is good to think also about the pitfalls an experienced manager with a background in a traditional team might have. The first pitfall is to believe that the leadership style does not have to change when going into a virtual team. Settle-Murphy stresses the following points (2013, 130-132): micromanaging, commanding, holding the information to yourself, punishing for mistakes, not leading by example, setting up unrealistic goals and/ or timelines.

Virtual team members are generally speaking more tend to react negatively in **micromanaging**, it is a belief that more check-ups create more results. Supporting and coaching tone via phone, email or chatting are therefore a more appreciated approach in a virtual team. A military kind of leadership might work in a traditional team

environment but is not appreciated at all in a virtual team. Getting a common buy-in for the team's mission and common goals belongs to the essentials of a virtual team. Therefore also instead of **commanding**, guidance to the right direction with help from commonly agreed guidelines and deliverables on team and individual basis is a better approach. One of the main tasks of a leader is to make sure the team members have access to all the related information. It is better to let team members access to too much than too little information. A leader should not **hold the information for him/herself**.

Virtual teams have got limited means to share the actual situation and progress. Therefore it is also important to create an environment that allows the team members to communicate in an open and honest way, sharing the pain points and getting support from the team and its leader. To this belongs also the possibility to report mistakes without **fear of punishment**. A good leader should **show example** in everything he/she does. When in meeting a good leader shows up on time, does not multitask but concentrates on the agenda. He/ she apologizes in advance if late and does not await for a summary on the discussed topics when coming in late. Last but not least: **setting up unrealistic goals** and awaiting the team members to overexceed and overperform is giving wrong signals - not only to the team but also to the customers. The goals and timelines should be discussed and verified also by the team before a service promise is given outside the team.

## **2.7 Summary on the theoretical framework**

A team is as strong as its weakest link is. This stresses the importance of the contribution of every team member to the final outcome of the team. The special characteristics of a multicultural virtual team helps to understand the extra complexity in leading one. Hill's Leadership model (Northouse 2010, 244) emphasizes the leader's key role in team efficiency by monitoring the team and taking actions when necessary. The monitoring becomes more complex when leading a team from distance, over cultural boundaries and time zones. A successful team understands not only the vision and mission of its existence but also knows the roles of the individuals inside the team.



Building trust among the team is mentioned as one of the main challenges of a virtual team in (Kirkman et al. 2002, 69 ; Settle-Murphy 2013, 2; The Economist 2009, 7). The rarely, if ever, happening face-to-face meetings of a virtual team makes building trust among the team members and understanding the big picture more difficult than in a traditional team. The expectations for the leader may vary widely among the team members due to cultural differences. The feeling of isolation due to the spatial space between the team members needs to be worked with: how to ensure that the team members feel supported and safe despite the physical support from the team? One might get a feeling of not getting enough support from the leader while another might be enjoying the self management and not having the leader checking every step. A successful leader of a virtual team pays attention to the characteristics of a virtual team, understands the challenges of it and knows how to overcome them. Team building, creating a working environment that supports the success of the team and agreeing on rules how to act as a part of a virtual team belong to the key factors of a successful virtual team.

### **3 Methods of research**

The goal of the research was to gather information from team members and team leaders of multicultural virtual teams in various international companies. The questions in the survey were designed to follow the overlay matrix collecting benefits and challenges of a multicultural virtual team, likewise hear also suggestions for improvement both from the team members and leaders.

#### **3.1 Research method and design**

The potential respondents live a hectic time at the work places and therefore an online survey was considered being the most effective allowing the respondents to response when it suits them best. The author's own experience from the work life is that many of the surveys coming to a company from students are time-consuming and put the respondent on the driver's seat with many open questions. In order to avoid this the author put extra effort in getting a set of questions that should occupy the respondent for a maximum of 15 minutes. The survey was to be done through an online tool that is easy to use both for the respondent and the researcher. Other alternatives like paper surveys and face-to-face interviews were considered as both not cost nor time effective due to the no commissioning party and the proximity of the respondents.

The research used a set of quantitative questions as the main key method for the survey. There were a few qualitative questions to collect respondent's own ideas and meanings. All in all, the survey had a total of 27 questions out of which 15 were mandatory. The survey aimed to collect the respondents' opinion on the challenges and benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team. The questions were designed to collect respondent's opinions of her/his virtual team as a team and her/himself as a team member. The results were to be compared to the thesis framework as presented in the previous main chapter. (Figure 3.)

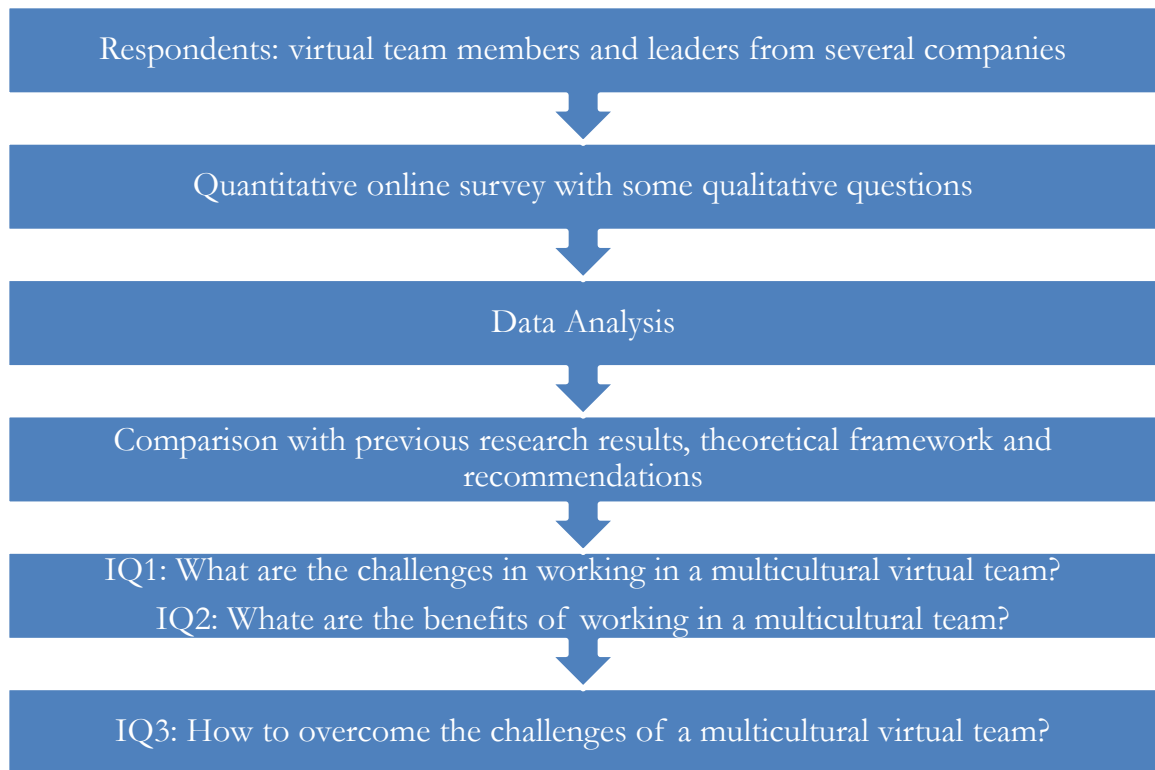


Figure 3: Research design

### 3.2 Survey content

The questions were divided into five different sections: background of the respondents, benefits of a virtual team, the effectiveness of the team, meeting practices and finally open questions. The background part was collecting base information of the respondent, e.g. the industry, specialization, size of the team and the country of location. These were to be used in the analyzing of the results: to see if there are major differences on the results depending on the background of the respondents. The second part asked the respondent to state the three benefits for working in a multicultural virtual team. The results of these are analyzed in terms of previous studies but also to see the possible differences between team members and team leaders. The effectiveness of the virtual team was divided into two subsections: the first part asking the respondent to determine his/her own experience as a member of a virtual team on ten statements while the second part is about the respondent's perception on his/her virtual team on seven different statements. The scale used here is from 1 to 5 (disagree fully- agree fully). The fourth part of the survey is on the actual meeting practices of the virtual team with a maximum of five questions depending on if the respondent has replied

“Yes” or “No”. The last part of the survey had two open qualitative questions collecting the respondent’s opinion on improvement and general about working in a virtual team.

The respondents who had identified themselves as managers of a virtual team received four additional questions about building a virtual team and training for leading virtual teams. The questions were marked with a text “Reply to these questions if you are a leader of a virtual team”. The questions were visible also for the team members. There were some replies coming from the team members but these replies are not paid attention to when analyzing the results. Finally the survey ended in the open question of giving feedback to the conductor of the survey and the respondents. The respondents were given a possibility to give their email address if they wanted to have the results of the survey sent to them.

### **3.3 Online tool and data collection**

The students of HAAGA-HELIA have an access to Webropol, a company who provides online survey solutions for companies and institutions. Data was collected through the online tool during two weeks in October 2013.

The invitations to the survey were sent out using three channels to the author’s professional contacts with a connection to multicultural virtual teams: emails, Facebook and LinkedIn. The author has been working in virtual teams in several big companies and has experienced both the benefits and challenges of working in a multicultural virtual team. Collecting the data from the professional networks from big international companies instead of one single company would give a broader aspect to the replies and in case a big sample size, some cross tabulation between industries and/or area of specialization could also be done. The author has 277 contacts in her network in LinkedIn with background in tourism, logistics, paper industry and retail. Most of the contacts who are working in a multicultural virtual team environment are from support functions like Human Resources and IT. The respondents collected through Facebook consisted of members of a HR community that was built during HRD specialization

studies that the author took in 2010. A common thing for the respondents is that they are senior professionals with a work experience of 10+ years.

The respondents received an email through the chosen channel with a covering letter explaining about the survey and its background with a link to the survey. The time needed for the survey was explained to be a maximum of 15 minutes. The respondents were also asked to forward the invitation to colleagues who belong to the target group of the research using so-called snowball sampling. According to the email addresses provided by the respondents snowball sampling gave three additional respondents outside the set of original respondents.

### **3.4 Method of analysis**

The data was first extracted to Excel format to be able to analyze the results in an efficient way. The data was categorized according to two different categories: team members and team leaders with the ones having both roles. The numbers were transformed to percentages and charts.

The results are considered coming from all respondents as one but there are also two other categories used: team members vs. team leaders and permanent team members/leaders vs. project team members/ leaders.

The results were scanned for possible errors through seeing the amount of replies in each question or statement. The survey had a total of 17 statements where the respondents were asked to choose one option on the scale 1 (disagree fully) to 5 (agree fully). Four of these statements had a sum of 23 responses instead of the 22. With a help of the reporting tool of the system the results were gathered into an Excel spreadsheet and the double responses on these four statements were deleted since the researcher could not possibly know what the respondent had intended to reply.

The respondents that had stated to be a manager or both a manager and a team member of a virtual team had an additional set of questions to be answered. The questions were not marked mandatory due to technical restrictions in the tool (if mandatory then

it needs to be responded by all the participants of the survey). The questions were marked with a text “Reply to these questions if you are a manager of a virtual team”. The replies were scanned with the help from the Excel spreadsheet to verify that the replies in the manager only section are coming from managers only. There were some replies that were submitted by team members and these were cleansed from the results. Furthermore when asked about the frequency the respondent would like to have a one-to-one with the manager, replies that indicated the respondent was satisfied with the current situation (for instance “as today”) were deleted because the researcher does not know the current practice of that specific team.

### **3.5 Research ethics**

The respondents were promised anonymity when participating in the survey. The results presented cannot be linked to any individual person or company. The results were looked into with scrutiny and some errors were found along the way: respondent choosing multiple options when only one was to be chosen and team members replying on questions meant only for the leaders. The responses described were deleted from the final results and are not presented in the results nor in discussion part of the thesis.

### **3.6 Reliability and validity**

The final amount of the respondents being 22, the data given by these two categories do have high risk for error and are therefore to be seen only as descriptive (HAAGA-HELIA 2012, 16). However, the questions concerning benefits and challenges of a virtual team are much in line with previous studies and thereby the reliability of the data seems to be good. The responses were scrutinized as described in the “Method of analysis” (3.4) and cleansed in order to avoid any indefinite and unclear opinions in the results.

## 4 Results

This chapter is about the survey results. Before starting to analyze the results, the author built tables and charts out of the results. The background information was gathered together with the respondents' information: country, industry, specialization, team size and role in the virtual team. For the quantitative questions there were two ways to work these: draw a figure based on the frequency of each option or to build a figure with percentages on answers given on scale 1 (fully disagree) to 5 (fully agree).

The chapter presents first profile of the respondents and follows after this the results according to the investigative questions (IQs):

- IQ1: What are the challenges in working in a multicultural virtual team?
- IQ2: What are the benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team?
- IQ3: How to overcome the challenges of a multicultural virtual team?

### 4.1 Respondents and their profile

The invitation was sent out to a total of 47 persons out of which 22 took part in the survey. This gives a response rate of 49%.

The respondents are working in three different types of virtual team: permanent virtual team (n=15), temporary project team (n=8) and under a dotted line manager in Bonn (n=1). The sizes of their virtual teams vary from small teams (2-5 members) to big teams of 16 or more members. All of the virtual teams of the participants to the survey have got the team spread over country boundaries. With these facts in hand, it can be stated that the survey participants belong to the focus group of the survey. (Figure 4.)

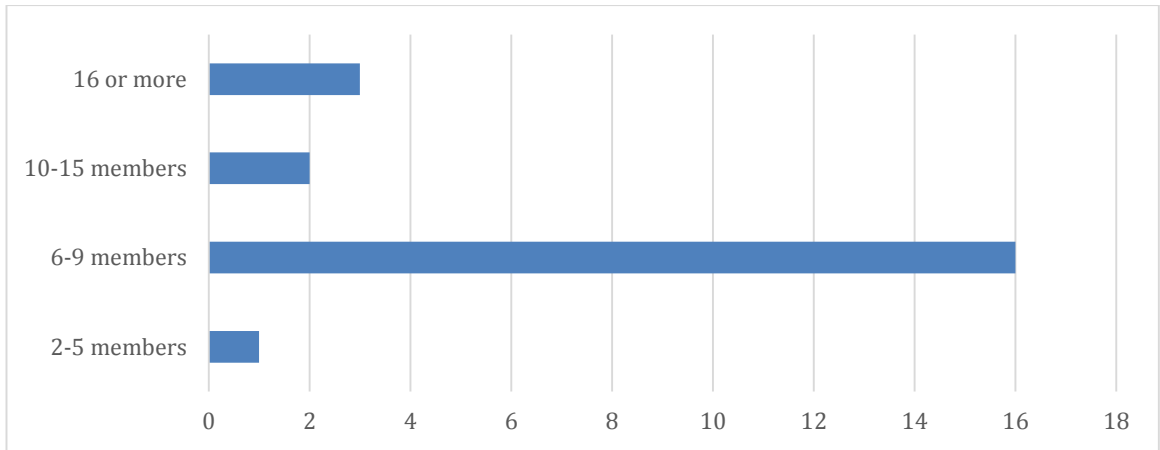


Figure 4: the size of the virtual team (n=22)

Out of the 22 participants to the survey 15 were team members while seven were either leaders or had both roles. The respondents having both roles are considered as team leaders when doing any comparison between these two respondent categories. 15 respondents are working in permanent virtual team while 6 are in a temporary project team. One respondent stated having a dotted line manager in Bonn but since there is no clarity to which type of virtual team this respondent belongs to, these answers are not counted when comparing these two groups. The respondents represented seven different industries (figure 5). Their area of professional specialization on four different areas: IT and Technology, Human Resources, Marketing and Logistics (figure 6).

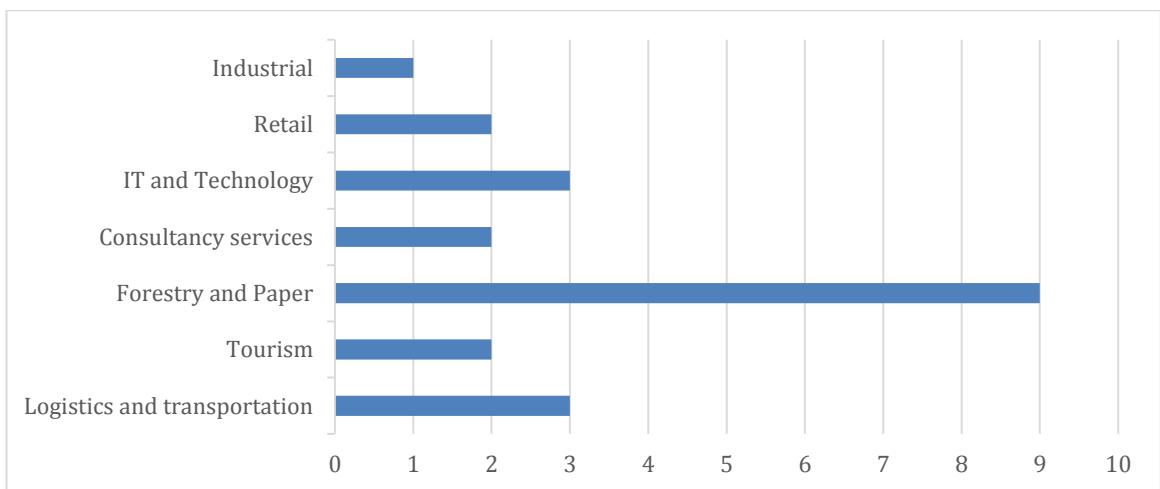


Figure 5: the industrial background of the respondents (n=22)



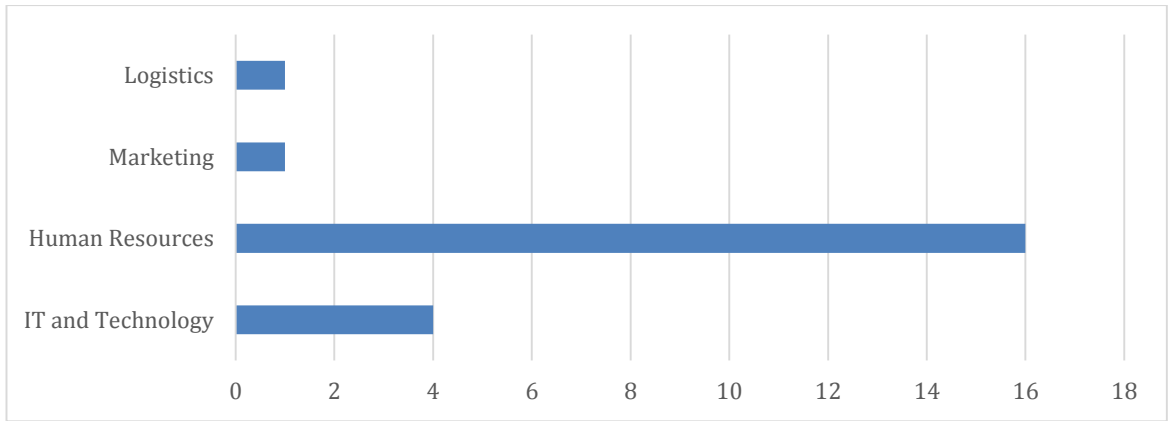


Figure 6: the specialization of the respondents (n=22)

The respondents are located in seven different countries with one third in Finland (7 out of 22), one fifth from Sweden (5/22), two respondents from Poland (2/22) and finally one respondent from Denmark, China, Germany and USA (figure 7). Thinking from leadership perspective, 60% of the respondents (13 out of 22) come from the Nordic Europe culture cluster (Northouse 2010, 344) with characteristics of future orientation, equality between the genders, sticking to the agreed ways of doing things and institutional collectivism.

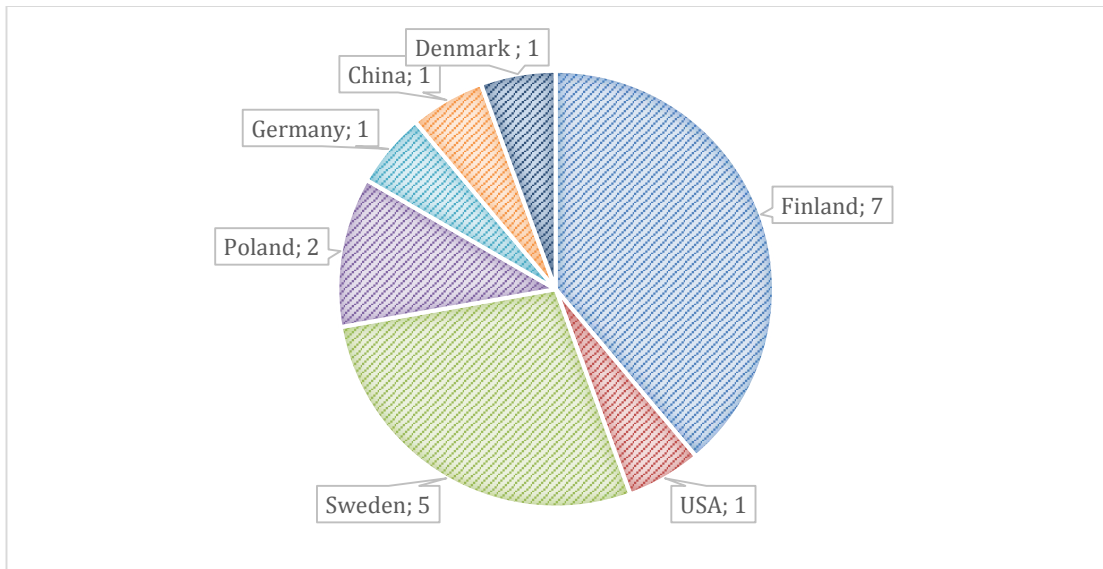


Figure 7: the country where the respondent is primarily located (n=22)

Culture clusters of Confucian Asia, Germanic Europe and Anglo score high in performance orientation while this scores low in Eastern Europe. Germanic Europe and Nordic Europe score high on the uncertainty avoidance while Eastern Europe, Latin

Europe and Middle East score low. High uncertainty avoidance refers to the culture's effort to avoid uncertainty with help from rules, laws and agreed ways of doing. The teams having this kind of opposite opinions on diverse cultural dimensions might have problems understanding the reactions coming from the other clusters.

#### 4.2 Benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team

When asking about the three main benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team, there were seven options to choose between and one additional option for something else. 16 respondents out of 22 (73%) saw knowledge sharing across country borders as one of the main benefits while half of the respondents appreciated learning about different cultures and ways of working. Wider talent pools without need of relocating the employees was seen as one of the main benefits by 45% likewise the lessened travel needs due to technological advancement and the freedom to work independently. The respondents did not give any additional benefit outside the list. (Figure 8.)

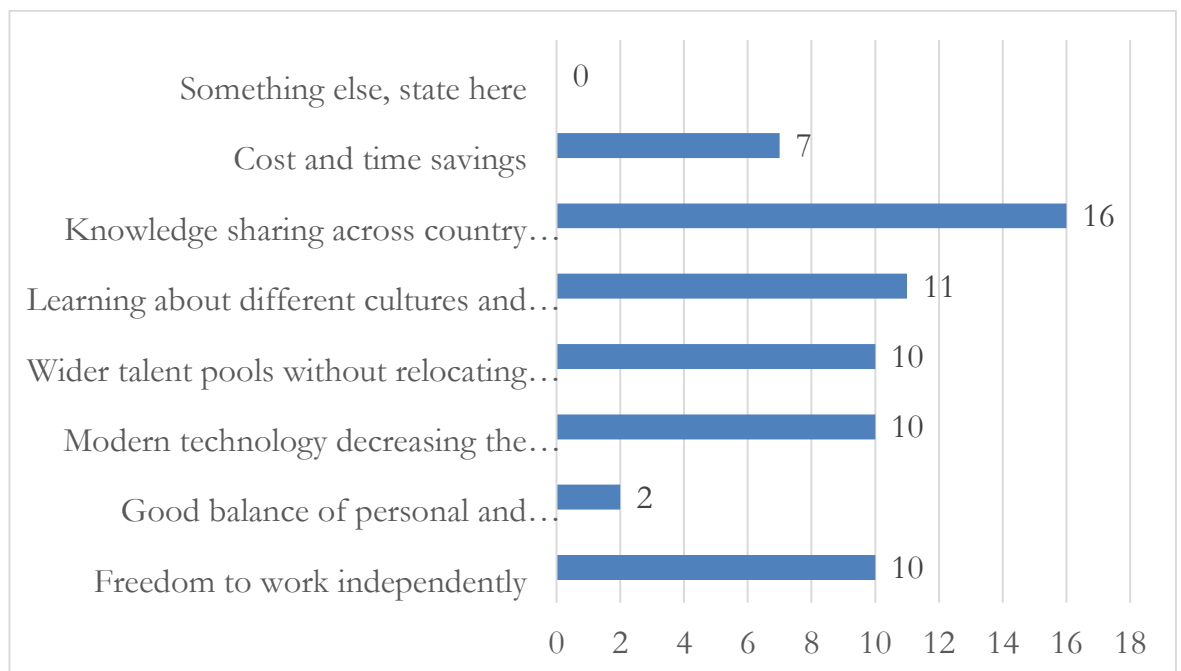


Figure 8: the main three benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team (n=22)

The data shows that the respondents evaluate the benefits of a virtual team mainly from the individual perspective with the main two benefits being learning by sharing

knowledge and learning about different cultures and ways of working. With the respondents being senior professionals with 10+ years of work experience it seems like the traveling with the work is not seen as a benefit that might be the case with junior professionals. Senior professionals often have stable living conditions and are not willing to relocate because of this. One of the original reasons from a company perspective for establishing virtual teams is cost and time savings. This option was picked up by seven respondents with four of them being managers of a virtual team. This gives an indication that the managers are more likely to appreciate cost savings since they are the ones responsible for the budgets. Having that ranked as one of the lowest on the list of benefits is a positive thing since the respondents have found more important things about virtual teams than the one related to costs. These are often considered as hard and unpleasant issues in work environment.

### **4.3 The challenges of a multicultural virtual team**

This subchapter summarizes the challenges of a multicultural virtual team according to the data given in the survey. The data was collected through taking stand on statements on a scale from 1 (fully disagree) to 5 (fully agree) and by replying “Yes” or “No” on questions concerning meeting practices. The last mentioned had three open continuation questions when giving the answer “yes”.

#### **4.3.1 The respondent as a part of a multicultural virtual team**

The survey participants were asked to assess their experience as a member of the virtual team on a scale from 1 (disagree fully) to 5 (agree fully). It was mandatory to take stand on each statement.

86% of the respondents agreed either fully or partially that they knew the vision and mission of the virtual team while 95% stated they knew the common goals of the team. Again, the respondents seem to be well aware of their role and the expectations: 96% either agrees fully or partially on the statement. More than three out of four thinks that the information they receive is manageable. 27% of the participants either disagreed fully or partially when asked if they were aware of the work situation of their virtual

team colleagues while 50% felt they had a good or very good insight on this. One fourth did not take a real stand on the statement. More than four out of five felt fully or partially safe to say if they disagree. 82% of the respondents either fully or partially agreed on that their performance is fairly assessed while 14% are in between the two extremities. Five percent disagreed fully on the statement. (Table 2.)

Table 2: Assess your experience as a member of the virtual team

	<b>Disagree fully</b>	<b>Disagree partially</b>	<b>In between</b>	<b>Agree partially</b>	<b>Agree fully</b>
I am aware of the vision and mission of our virtual team	0 %	0 %	14 %	18 %	68 %
I know the common goals of our team	0 %	5 %	0 %	27 %	68 %
My role is clear for me and I know what is expected from me	0 %	0 %	5 %	41 %	55 %
The information I receive is manageable	0 %	9 %	14 %	45 %	32 %
I am aware of the work situation of my virtual team colleagues (e.g. what they are currently working on)	9 %	18 %	23 %	27 %	23 %
I feel safe to say if I disagree	0 %	5 %	9 %	27 %	59 %
My performance is assessed fairly	5 %	0 %	14 %	23 %	59 %
I receive continuous feedback on my work performance	5 %	18 %	23 %	32 %	23 %
I have a feeling of being left alone without support from my leader and colleagues	19 %	33 %	29 %	10 %	10 %
I can manage my work time and work load	5 %	5 %	14 %	38 %	38 %

Almost every fourth (23%) disagreed fully or partially on receiving continuous feedback on their work performance with the same amount of people standing in between on the scale. This means that only half of the population agrees fully or partially on

that they get continuous feedback. Biggest variation in the answers was when asked “I have a feeling of being left alone without support from my leader and colleagues”. 52% disagreed fully or partially with that while every fourth either agreed fully or partially and 29% felt in between on the scale. When asked about if they can manage their work time and work load, majority of 76% agreed fully or partially on this. 14% did not take a stand and 10% disagreed fully or partially. (Table 2.)

This data shows that the team members are not fully aware of what their colleagues are currently working with. This together with a large variation in the replies on “I have a feeling of being left alone without support from my leader and colleagues” and “I receive continuous feedback on my performance” indicates that being unaware of the work situation of the whole team one might easily think that his/ her needs for support are neglected and the feeling of isolation might increase.

#### **4.3.2 The virtual team in scope**

The respondents were asked to assess his/her team on a scale from 1 (disagree fully) to five (agree fully). Every statement was to gather the respondent’s opinion on his/her virtual team and it was mandatory for the respondent to take stand.

The trust between team members is on fairly good shape according to the responses with 45% agreeing fully and 50% agreeing partially. 5% disagreed fully on the statement “The team members can trust each other”. The team communication rules are not totally clear for 14% (3 out of 22) with disagreeing partially while 23% (5/22) have their opinion waving between the extremes. Half of the respondents are either fully or partially agreeing with the communication rules being clear for everyone: what, when and how is communicated. One third of the respondents (7/22) disagrees fully or partially that the team has the right amount of face-to-face meetings. However, every second agrees fully or partially that the amount is right and almost one fifth (4/22) expresses to be in between. (Table 3.)

Almost half of the respondents (47%) agree fully or partially that there are misunderstandings caused by cultural and language barriers with 27% having their opinion in between. 36% disagree fully or partially with the statement. Almost three fourth (73%) feels that the conflicts are handled accordingly and help from the leader is available with either agreeing fully or partially with the statement. 10% are disagreeing fully or partially and 18% being in between the extremes. 16 out of 22 respondents (86%) agree fully or partially that the technical solutions are supporting their team work properly. 19% (4/21) are in between and 5% (1/21) disagrees partially. 81% (17/21) agrees fully or partially that the time zone differences between the team members are handled in a fair manner. 19% (4/21) did not agree nor disagree. (Table 3.)

Table 3: Indicate how you perceive your team on a scale 1 to 5 (n=22), \* n=21

	<b>Disagree fully</b>	<b>Disagree partially</b>	<b>In between</b>	<b>Agree partially</b>	<b>Agree fully</b>
The team members can trust each other	5 %	0 %	0 %	50 %	45 %
The team communication rules are clear for every one: what, when, how	0 %	14 %	23 %	50 %	14 %
The team has the right amount of F2F meetings	14 %	18 %	18 %	36 %	14 %
There are misunderstandings caused by cultural and language barriers	18 %	18 %	27 %	23 %	14 %
The conflicts are handled accordingly and help from the leader available	5 %	5 %	18 %	50 %	23 %
The technical solutions support the team work properly *	0 %	5 %	19 %	38 %	38 %
The time zone differences between the team members are handled in a fair manner *	0 %	0 %	19 %	33 %	48 %

Looking at the data on how the respondents sees the team communication, amount of F2F meetings and misunderstandings caused by cultural and language barriers are the ones that stick out. The virtual teams are definitely struggling with the proximity and

the fact of not being able to see the visual cues that the traditional teams see, the communication gets more complicated. This on its turn is likely to increase the amount of misunderstandings due to not seeing the body language. The importance of having F2F meetings, especially when building a new team, can help the teams to learn more about each other and the differences in ways of working.

### 4.3.3 Virtual team meetings

Majority of the respondents (20 out of 22) stated that they have regular virtual team meetings taking place. Out of them 45% are having meetings on weekly basis while 15% have them bi-weekly. Just more than one third are having meetings on monthly basis. 5% (one respondent) is having meetings on daily basis. (Figure 9.) This might indicate that the respondent's team has a hectic phase going on or there might be several team members in the same place enabling daily meetings.

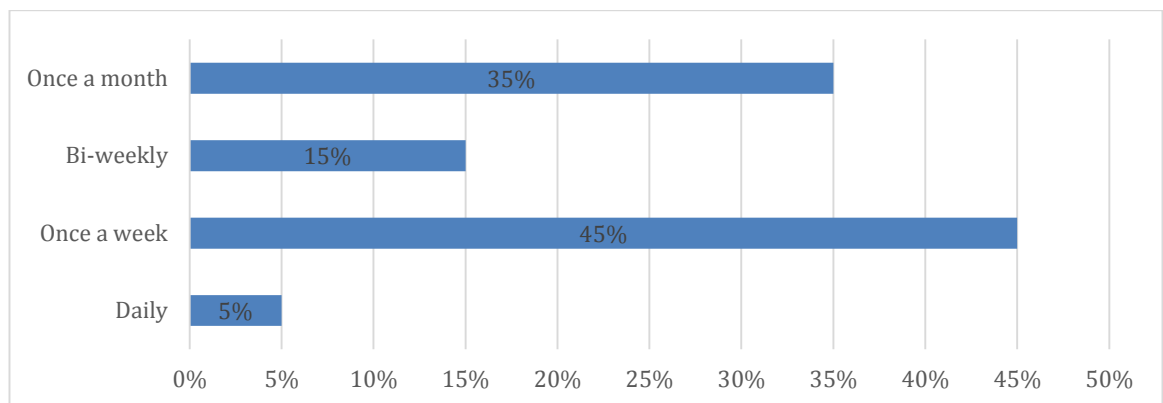


Figure 9: how often do you have regular meetings (n=20)

86% of the respondents (19 out of 22) always have an agenda for the virtual meetings. Out of them 79% (15/19) indicate that the agenda is followed effectively. Looking at the data it can be seen that 32% (7/22) either do not have an agenda or do not follow it efficiently in the meetings. More than one fourth (27%) of the meetings do not always prepare meeting minutes to collect the decisions and/or discussions. (Table 4.)

Table 4: virtual meeting practices

	Yes	No
Do you always have an agenda for a virtual meeting? (n=22)	86%	14%
Is the agenda followed effectively? (n=19)	79%	21%
Are the meeting minutes prepared of the meetings? (n=22)	73%	27%

Virtual team meetings being the major way to communicate simultaneously with the whole team and one third of the meetings not being effective with the agenda there is a big risk of losing team efficiency through participants getting passive and frustrated. Efficient meeting practices are especially crucial in project work with strict deadlines and limited amount of time and money buffers.

#### 4.3.4 One-to-one meetings with manager

More than one fourth (27%) does not have regular one-to-one meetings with his/her manager. What is interesting to see is that more than one third (36%) out of the respondents do not feel like they need to have regular one-to-one meetings with their manager. The no-sayers are both from the team leader (2/7) and team member (6/15) front. (Table 5.)

Table 5: one-to-one meetings with the manager (n=22)

	Yes	No
Have you got regular one-to-one meetings with your manager?	73%	27%
Do you feel that you need to have regular one-to-one with your manager?	64%	36%

The “no” might indicate that the respondent does not feel any straight benefit coming from having the one-to-one discussions. There might be mistrust for the manager in terms of the manager not able to support the team member due to not having the knowledge or knowhow. Whatever the reason for this is, it should be investigated thoroughly in any future research on meeting practices in virtual teams.



When asking the respondents that currently have regular one-to-one-meetings with the manager, the majority of 69% is having the meetings monthly or less seldom while the remaining 31% are having the meetings on bi-weekly, weekly or daily basis (figure 10). Looking at how these respondents would like to have the one-to-one meetings, 58% prefers to have them on monthly basis, 17% weekly and 8% on daily, bi-weekly or quarterly and less basis (figure 11). Since the variation of the needs coming from an individual is wide from daily to quarterly or less basis, it is clear that a manager needs to find out the needs from each individual and build a framework that supports each of them. Most likely there is no room for daily meetings but in that case the manager needs to empower the team member to act in a more independent way or to see other solutions for instance in terms of additional training or mentoring through a senior colleague.

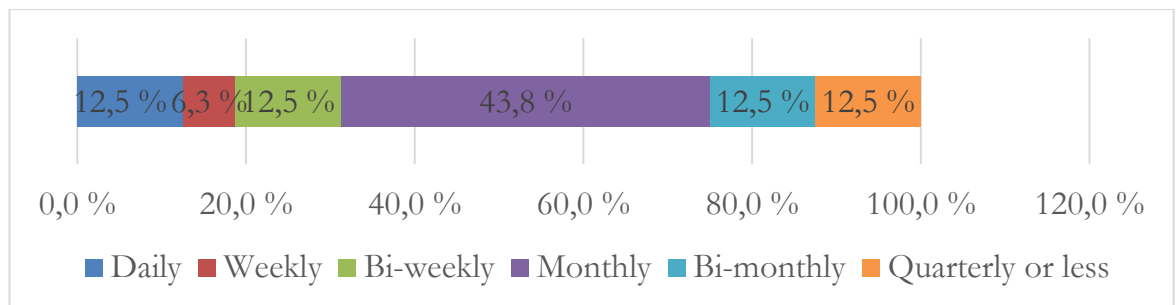


Figure 10: How often do you have one-to-one with your manager (n=16)

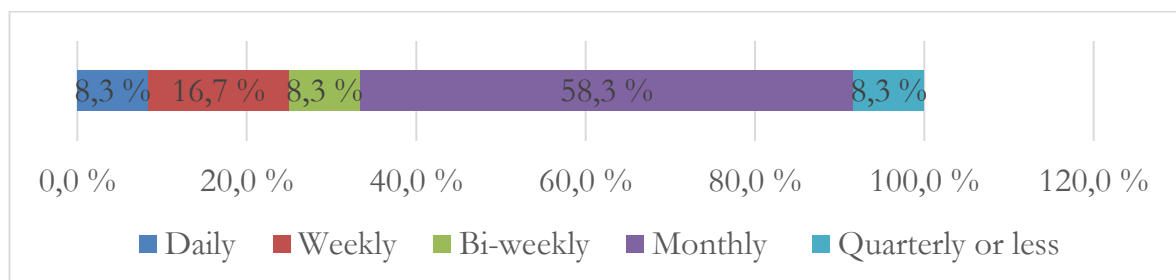


Figure 11: How often would you like to have one-to-one with your manager (n=12)

#### 4.3.5 Summary on the challenges of multicultural virtual team

Based on the data above, it can be stated that the biggest challenges in multicultural virtual team are: communication, misunderstandings due to cultural and/or language barriers, lack of proximity of the team members, understanding the work situation of

the virtual team colleagues and team meetings practices. The data proves also that even though there are misunderstandings due to culture and/or language differences these are not causing a major mistrust along the team. The team meeting practices and team expectations vary a lot with some team members requiring more attention from the manager and some less especially when it comes to feeling of isolation and feedback on the performance.

#### **4.4 Development suggestions from the respondents**

In the end of the survey there were additional questions of qualitative type to collect the respondents' suggestions for the future likewise their general insight about working in a multicultural virtual team. The answers were awaited to contain information about the pain points of virtual team environment.

##### **4.4.1 One day as the manager**

One of the open questions was about the respondents taking the manager's place for one day. 15 out of 22 respondents shared their opinion on what to change:

- two respondents totally happy with the current situation
- three respondents would increase the amount of face-to-face meetings
- three respondents would develop meeting practices
- five responses related to communication
- two responses about personal development

The amount of face-to-face meetings was suggested to be on monthly basis but at a minimum of four times a year. The meeting practices were suggested to be developed with following the agenda strictly, concentrating on the topics on it and delivering meeting minutes after each meeting. One respondent wanted to develop the meeting practices by rotating the topics of the meetings with "one topic per meeting with good pre-work" and including outside views in the discussion. Four persons mentioned communication in terms of clearer goals, better open communication and clearer strategies. Two comments were related to accountability and responsibility: "zero tolerance

for blaming” and “enforced accountability for tasks left incomplete”. There was one wish for getting more project work and/or assignments into subgroups as well as identifying a demand for personal development through interesting projects.

Looking at the development suggestions it can be seen that they are very much alike with the current challenges the survey shows: communication, lack of proximity and meeting practices.

#### **4.4.2 Additional comments about working in virtual teams**

The respondents were given the opportunity to write anything they would like to highlight about working in multicultural virtual teams. Seven respondents took the opportunity to write down their general impressions. The comments with a constructive aspect were:

- I think a multicultural virtual team can work great so long as the technology is in place and the team members are able to work on their own but also communicate effectively in a group. I am lucky to have all of this.
- Also face to face time is important when people are getting to know each other. Once the team is established and ground rules are laid out then it is easier to work virtually and effectively. If the team is not properly established virtual teams can be very dysfunctional.
- If communication do not work perfectly you are at the risk of double work, i.e. two members will start up the same task.
- It requires disciplin, agenda and minutes. Of course webex or other type of tool.
- Don't underestimate the impact of cultural differences in a company
- Allow diversity but also manage it. Open discussion is good but make sure you also other ways of gathering opinions, views and input (taking into account cultural & personal aspects).

One of the comments was criticizing virtual teams being both cost and communication ineffective:

- Highly ineffective both from a cost and communication perspective. When the common language is english and only phone calls and email are the methods, the messages are not always delivered. Cultural differences can sabotage the project.

The additional comments given above stress the importance of communication, cultural differences, regular face-to-face meetings and leadership. The criticizing comment had the same elements in a different shape highlighting the importance of having the right set of technical solutions and being prepared to tackle the cultural differences.

#### 4.5 Questions to managers only

One third of the respondents were managers or had both a manager and a team leader roles in a virtual team. This is a normal situation as a leader of a virtual team often belongs to another virtual team for instance through reporting line to his/her manager. The managers participating in the survey were seven which is a low number and thus the results presented here can be paid attention to as descriptive.

Five managers out of seven stated that they are visiting their team members periodically in their respective work environment (figure 12). The number can be considered as a good one since the employees tend to appreciate seeing their manager face-to-face and receiving coaching as part of a performance management.

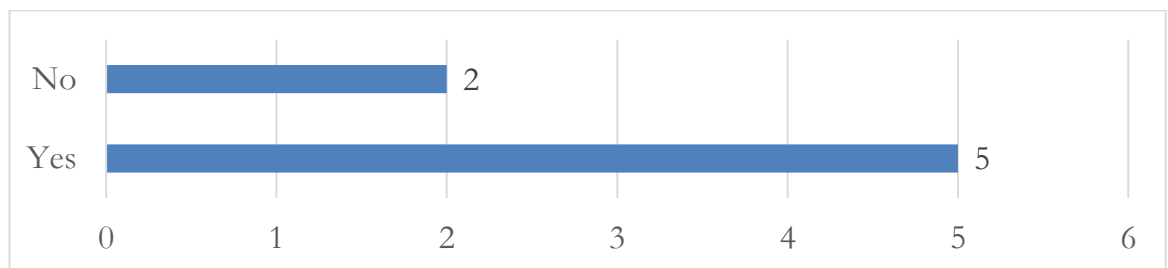


Figure 12: Do you visit your team members in their respective work environment periodically? (n=7)

Three managers out of seven had received training for leading a virtual team (figure 13). The training had been received through distance management training, various courses but also through 15 years' experience. Out of the course providers Krauthammer, an international training provider, was mentioned as one course provider (Krauthammer 2013).

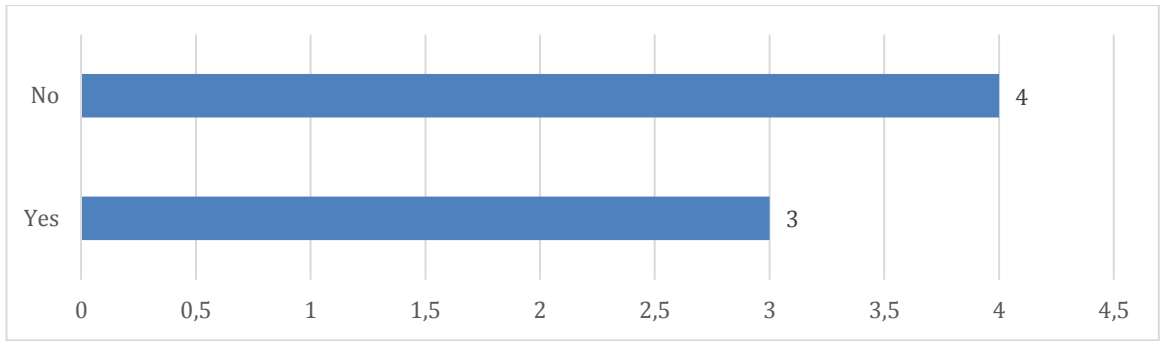


Figure 13: Have you received any training for leading a virtual team? (n=7)

Five managers out of seven had received the team with the resources while just two had been able to build the team and do the resourcing him/herself (figure 14). This confirms also the results from The Economist survey (2009) as discussed earlier in chapter 1.1.

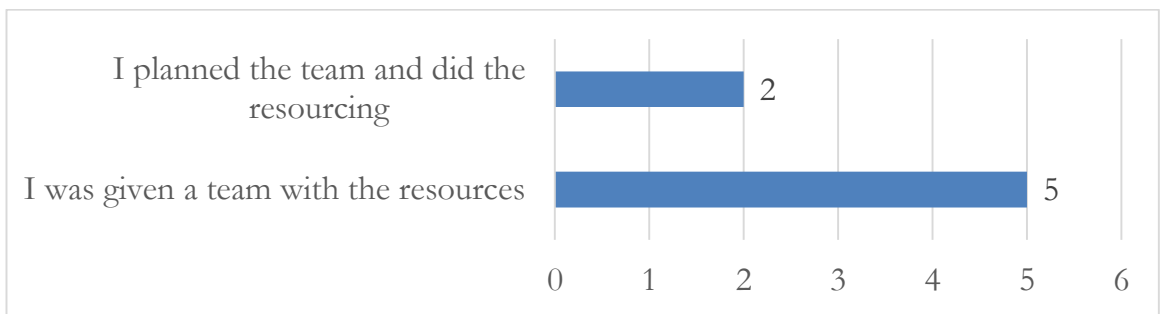


Figure 14: How was your virtual team built? (n=7)

The managers were asked what they would change in order to get a better efficiency in their team. Five respondents gave their opinion on this. One leader would increase the education of the staff while another one would seek for the right competence for the task. These two replies are close to each other and belong to the development of the individuals. One leader would cover all major countries and/or cultures in the team by adding Germany and China.

This data together with the fact that five leaders out of seven have received their team with resources gives an impression that the leader had resourced the team differently than it is today if he/she had had a chance for it. This indicates a need for better planning of virtual teams. However, many times the virtual teams are created as a result of bigger reorganizing needs and the resourcing of the team needs to follow the current

legal requirements. This might mean compromising in resourcing and not resulting in the best possible team. The manager of the new team is therefore to create the best out of the situation instead of being able to handpick the resources to the positions.

## **4.6 Results compared with subcategories**

The sample size being as small as 22, the comparison between any subgroups do not show any statistical significance (HAAGA-HELIA 2012, 16). However, the author wanted to see if there were any findings that might be of interest for any further research. The data was divided by two groups: team members versus team leaders and members/leaders of permanent teams versus members/leaders of temporary project teams. The following subchapters describe the findings between these groups.

### **4.6.1 Comparison of results between managers and team members**

The survey wanted to collect data both from the managers and team members or a virtual team. The final amount of respondents being 22 and consisting of answers from 15 team members and 7 managers or persons with both roles, the comparison can be seen only as directional. The respondents having both roles are referred to as managers in the following result presentation.

The main differences between the team members and managers are (table 6):

- team leaders are better aware of the work situation of their colleagues (average 3.57 vs. 3.27)
- team members feel safer to say if they disagree (4.53 vs. 4.14)
- team members are more satisfied with their performance assessment than team leaders (4.47 vs. 4.0)
- team members trust each other better than the team leaders (4.47 vs. 4.0)
- team leaders are less satisfied with the amount of F2F meetings than the team members (2.86 vs. 3.33)
- team members are most satisfied with the technical solutions at work (4.25 vs. 3.86)

- team leaders are less satisfied with how the time zone differences between the team members are handled (4.0 vs. 4.44)
- team leaders are always following the agenda (100%) while 60% of the team members feel the same
- 40% of the team members do not feel they need to have regular one-to-one meetings with their manager vs. 29% of the team leaders agreeing on that

Table 6: main differences between team members and team leaders

	Team members (N=15) average	Team leaders (N=7) average
I am aware of the work situation of my virtual team colleagues	3.27	3.57
I feel safe to say if I disagree	4.53	4.14
My performance is assessed fairly	4.47	4.0
The team members can trust each other	4.47	4.0
The team has the right amount of F2F meetings	3.33	2.86
The technical solutions support the team work properly	4.25	3.86
The time zone differences between the team members are handled in a fair manner	4.44	4.0
Is the meeting agenda followed effectively?	Yes: 60%	Yes: 100%
Do you feel that you need to have regular one-to-one with your own manager?	No: 40%	No. 28,57%

Looking at the benefits of a virtual team, the team members appreciated the knowledge sharing across the country borders (12 out of 15 respondents), freedom to work independently (8/15) and wider talent pools without relocating the employees (8/15) as the main three benefits. These three benefits can be concluded as following: a possibility to get interesting work opportunities with a certain independency with no need to move

while also learning from each other across country boundaries are the main benefits from the perspective of the team members of a virtual team. (Table 7.)

The team leaders appreciate the lessened need to travel due to modern technology as the biggest benefit (5 out of 7) and learning about different cultures and ways of working, knowledge sharing across country borders and cost and time savings as the other main benefits (4/7). None of the managers have chosen good balance of personal and professional life as a benefit of a multicultural virtual team. The manager results give an impression that team leaders are happy about the cost and time savings in terms of modern technology and lessened traveling and are enjoying the co-operation with a multicultural team. (Table 7.)

Table 7: the main three benefits according to the position in a virtual team on a scale 1 (disagree fully) to 5 (agree fully), (n=22)

	<b>Team member of a virtual team (N=15)</b>	<b>Team leader of a virtual team (N=7)</b>
Freedom to work independently	8	2
Good balance of personal and professional life	2	0
Modern technology decreasing the need to travel at work	5	5
Wider talent pools without relocating the employees	8	2
Learning about different cultures and ways of working	7	4
Knowledge sharing across country borders	12	4
Cost and time savings	3	4

An important thing to see here is that the team members seem to oversee the cost and time savings of a virtual team which is one of the main benefits of a virtual team from a company's perspective. The team leader is usually solely responsible for the budgeting topics of a virtual team and to author's personal impression, seldom sharing the budget overview with his/her team. Two managers out of seven have mentioned the access to wider talent pools as one of the main three benefits, likewise the freedom to



work independently. One of the most important characteristics of a successful manager is the ability to make decisions and work independently. Based on the results of the survey this is self-evident for managers. The labor market is currently following the rules of the employers due to the high unemployment rates and giving the companies the possibility to choose between the candidates when recruiting externally. At the same time many companies are doing reorganizing and resourcing the teams with the existing resources. These two factors might be the reason why only two managers appreciated the wider talent pools as one of the main benefits.

#### **4.6.2 Comparison of results between permanent and project teams**

The majority of 14 of the 22 respondents are working in a permanent virtual team while 6 are in temporary project teams. One respondent is not counted in the results because the type of the virtual team could not be determined trustworthy.

For the sake of clarity, the respondents are referred to as team members in this section even though they might have identified themselves as team leaders in the survey.

Looking at the main differences between these two groups it can be stated (table 8):

- team members of permanent virtual teams consider the information they receive more manageable than the members of project teams (average 4.13 vs. 3.5)
- the permanent team members can manage their work time and work load better than temporary project team members (4.17 vs. 3.67)
- the team members trust each other more in permanent teams than in project teams (4.47 vs. 3.83)
- the permanent team members are more satisfied with the amount of F2F meetings than members of project teams (3.2 vs. 2.83)
- misunderstandings due to cultural and language barriers more likely to happen in project teams than in permanent teams (3.5 vs 2.6.)
- project teams follow meeting agenda more effectively than permanent teams (83% vs. 60%)

Table 8: main differences between permanent teams and temporary project teams (scale 1 (disagree fully) – 5 (agree fully)), \*: N=14

	Permanent virtual team average (N=15)	Temporary project team average (N=6)
The information I receive is manageable	4.13	3.5
I can manage my work time and work load	4.17 *	3.67
The team members can trust each other	4.47	3.83
The team has the right amount of F2F meetings	3.2	2.83
There are misunderstandings caused by cultural and language barriers	2.6	3.5
In case you are always having an agenda, is it followed effectively	Yes: 60%	Yes: 83%

The differences can be explained with the more hectic timelines a project team most often have compared with the permanent teams. Project teams are following a master plan with milestones to reach before being able to proceed to the next phase. The buffer available is often restricted if existing at all. Therefore the project members are more likely to feel pressure and having time to put only on the tasks scheduled to be completed according to the deadline. Members in temporary project teams have often not been working together before and therefore starting the team building from scratch. Furthermore, the members of a temporary team are often having their normal work tasks in addition to the project assignments.

## **5 Discussion**

This part of the thesis discusses the data and results presented above presenting the author's conclusions. The conclusions are based also on the prior research on the topic. Since the multicultural virtual teams are becoming more common in the years to come, further research in the topic will certainly come. The author's suggestions for further research are also listed in this section. The discussion part ends with the author's own assessment on her professional development through the thesis work.

### **5.1 Comparison with the anticipated results**

The benefits of multicultural virtual teams had been listed as access to wider talent pools, cost savings and personal development by two authors (Settle-Murphy 2013, 1; Zafi 2012, 3). The data provided by the survey for this thesis had the access to wider talent pools as one of the main benefits while the others were knowledge sharing across country borders, learning about different cultures and ways of working, wider talent pools without relocating the employees and modern technology decreasing the need to travel at work. Knowledge sharing across country borders and learning about different cultures and ways of working belong to the area of personal development while the last one is connected to cost and time saving. The survey did not find any new significant benefits for virtual team environment. This verifies the correctness of the listing done by the two authors (Settle-Murphy 2013; Zafi 2012).

Prior researches were presenting the main challenges as building trust among the team, communication, cultural and language barriers, leading from distance and lack of proximity (Kirkman et al. 2002, 69-74; Settle-Murphy 2013, 1-2; The Economist 2009, 2-3). In addition to these The Economist (2009, 11-12) claims that the virtual teams have been built without a proper planning with the local managers doing the recruiting. The managers of virtual teams have not been trained in the characteristics of the virtual teams. The results of the survey were very much in line with the main challenges being in communication, misunderstandings due to cultural and/or language barriers, lack of proximity between the team members, understanding the work situation of the virtual

team colleagues and team meetings practices. The meeting practices had not been raised as a challenge in the prior studies.

The current meeting practices were criticized but in a constructive way with good development proposals like rotation of topics in the meetings and strict following of the agenda and time. The managers of the virtual teams had been receiving their teams ready resourced and almost half of them had received training for leading a virtual team. The last mentioned proposes that the increasing number of virtual teams have come to a stage where the training programs for managers are getting created ensuring also improvement in leading from distance.

According to my own experience the communication is always mentioned in the employee surveys: there should be more communication, the communication is not open, and the communication channels are not good enough. Hardly ever one can hear that the communication inside the company is good. In the survey the communication related questions were related to the virtual team, not to the company's internal communication as such. During my career I have noticed that many teams are satisfied with the communication within their own teams but not outside the team. The reason for this might be that team members are not likely to stain their own team and do reflect the problem with communication as "we are able to communicate but the others are not that advanced". The meeting practices I have experienced are varying hugely depending on the chairperson of the meeting: one might wait extra five minutes after the meeting has actually started in order to gather more participants while another starts the meeting punctually and the late joiners are to collect the information about discussed matters along the way. The meetings might be well organized or totally opposite with time stealers in terms of topics outside the agenda or allowing irrelevant comments.

## **5.2 Development suggestions**

The base element for a good and effective team work is to have a team consisting of individuals who work together towards same common goals in an environment that communicates in an open and honest way and shows trust towards the individuals. A

good team knows its mission and vision but also has agreed on the ways how to get there. This together with rules and guidelines agreed as a team build a solid foundation for a successful work. The rules should cover everything from meeting practices to how the team shares the information and knowledge, manages conflicts and follows up the deliverables and tasks.

### **5.2.1 Communication and cultural and language barriers**

As described in chapter 2.5 a successful virtual team has eight categories inside it. It has a global mindset, shares the responsibility and generates trust among it, has agreed on rules for communication, is able to manage the information flow, manages the conflicts on an early stage and has systems and tools that support their work efficiently. In addition to this it is also important to have general guidelines also for the collaboration as a team.

Creating rules for communication means agreeing on what, when and how is communicated. “What” tells if the information is a “need-to-know” or only a “nice-to-know”. “When” discusses the urgency of the information: does it need to be shared immediately without any delay? ”How” tells what tools to use for which information and how to ensure that it is understood right the first time. Nowadays emails and chats are the most convenient way of asking questions and sharing knowledge but they can be time stealers as well. Therefore it is important to agree rules also on email and chat practices: if an email marked “urgent” when can a reply be awaited? Is it accepted to send a copy of email “CC” to respondents from whom no action is required?

When talking about getting the information through right the first time it is important to communicate on the rules of the respondent. In order to be able to do that one should know the respondent as well as possible in terms of language skills and personal characteristics. The leader can support this through creating a team environment that prospers cooperation and camaraderie as discussed in chapter 2.5. Encouraging the team members to communicate openly and share learnings helps to build trust among the team members. GLOBE research and the ten cultural clusters help getting an in-

sight on how the cultural differences affect our behaviour and expectations on leadership. Learning about these would enhance the team's internal understanding on the peer and leader behaviour. A leader of a virtual team would definitely have advantage of learning about the different clusters in terms of understanding better the expectations coming from the team members as discussed in chapter 2.6.

### **5.2.2 Being part of a successful virtual team**

The feeling of isolation and not knowing the work situation of the colleagues can create a lot of dissatisfaction inside the team. What a leader can do in order to avoid this is to learn to know the team members as well as possible and create an environment that prospers cooperation and camaraderie as discussed in chapter 2.5. Knowing the additional expectations on a successful virtual team member helps the leader to follow the professional development of the virtual team member. The expectations can be discussed in the individual development discussions with the team members and added up to the development plan agreed in mutual understanding. For instance if a team member struggles with delivering on time and in good quality, the discussion should be not only on the reasons for this but also on how to overcome this. As important is to know the individual's expectations and manage these by aligning them with the team's vision and mission. This can decrease the feeling of isolation among the team members and increase the insight on the priorities of the team members.

### **5.2.3 Team meeting practices**

Team meetings can act as time-stealers if they are not facilitated efficiently. One third of the respondents in the survey stated that they either do not always have an agenda for the meeting or the meeting minutes are not provided after the meeting. There were good development ideas coming from the respondents in terms of rotating the topics of the meeting but also having a good pre-work prior the meeting. A good pre-work can be for instance sharing the slides that are to be presented in the meeting in advance so that the participants can go through them prior the meeting. Taking this practice in use would enable collecting more thoroughly thought reflections in the meeting. A team leader should make sure there are clear meeting policy inside the team and follow

these as an example: start the meetings punctually, follow the agenda, collect reflections and require active participation from the team.

As the chapter 2.5 describes, developing virtual team meetings into focused and productive ones is one of the main attentions of a leader of a virtual team. This can be reached through agreed guidelines for the meetings. Rotating the topics of the meetings and requiring good pre-work from the participants might bring good results. More importantly, the leader should show example on the desired behavior on the meetings. If the leader will be arriving late for the meeting, he/she apologizes the team in advance and does not do multitasking during the meeting.

The suitable amount of face-to-face meetings depends on the character of the virtual team. There should be regular face-to-face meetings where the team members can interact, exchange ideas and innovate like traditional teams do. Planning these face-to-face meetings thoroughly and mixing work with fun team building activities creates trust among the team making the further cooperation easier.

### **5.3 Further research**

The deeper the analyzing the data went, the more ideas for further research came up. To start with is the formulation of questions: even though the questions and statements were following the IQs and the Overlay matrix and were to be as self-explanatory as possible, there are some clear points that should be paid attention to with any further research. When using open questions (qualitative), ask the respondents to state clearly what they mean with their reply. Ask them to avoid replies “good as it is today” but rather reply why it is good as it is today. When using the assessment scale 1 (disagree fully) to 5 (agree fully) ask the respondents to avoid the 3 (in between) as much as possible and to choose that only if he/she cannot take a stand on the favor of one of the two extremes.

The statement “The team has the right amount of F2F meetings” does not reply if the amount should be increased or decreased. The question “Do you feel that you need to

have regular one-to-one with your manager” can be misunderstood and should be re-phrased with “Do you feel you get the support you need from the one-to-one meetings with your own manager?” or “Are the one-to-one meetings with your own manager needed?”. Currently 27% of the respondents do not feel a need of having regular one-to-one with their own manager. Even more worryingly, 40% out of these respondents are team members of a virtual team. This should be researched one more time to see if this can be verified in other virtual teams as well. If this is the case, it suggests that the team members do not see much benefit coming from having one-to-one with their manager. The reason for this might be mistrust for the manager’s capabilities to support or simply that the expectations for the discussion are different from what the reality brings. If the question is included in any future survey it should be ensured that there is a continuation question asking to explain why the respondent replied “no”.

Looking at the statements under “assess your experience as a member of the virtual team” it would be interesting to see any possible correlation between the statements “I am aware of the work situation of my virtual team colleagues” and “I have a feeling of being left alone without support from my leader and colleagues”. The author’s interpretation is that if you do not know what your colleagues are having their main focus currently on, it is likely to increase the feeling of isolation from the team.

The results of the survey proof that the leaders of virtual teams are receiving training on leading a virtual team in some extent. It would be interesting to see if the members of a virtual team have been receiving any training on working in a multicultural virtual team.

#### **5.4 My professional development**

Having worked in virtual teams since 1990’s without participating in any kind of specific virtual team training course, I was anxious to learn more about prior studies in the topic. I enjoyed reading material for the theoretical background and had to force myself to delimit the reading after a certain point. Gaining an insight on the challenges of virtual teams and how to overcome these was very interesting. Learning more about virtual teams will definitely continue for my part after the thesis as well. Any future



professional challenge is very likely to contain working in a multicultural virtual team and from that perspective this thesis has enhanced my ability to be a successful part of that.

The statistical study was more demanding than what I had anticipated. Even though Webropol is an easy tool to use I should have consulted the tool administrator to get the best out of it. Reading through the manual was not good enough since there were some double replies submitted. The basic report of Webropol was clear and building groups was easy. However, having a bigger sample had allowed doing more comparisons between different groups. With the relatively small sample the data is less reliable.

18 out of 22 respondents wanted to have a copy of the survey results after the thesis has been completed. This together with the comments that they found the topic interesting proofed how current the topic is. I sincerely hope that this thesis can give a summary not only on the complexity of leadership in multicultural virtual teams but also on how to overcome some of the most common challenges.

During the writing process I learnt a lot about academic writing. Creating the table of content was the first big thing to complete before the writing process could begin. I found the guidelines and manuals available at MyNet very useful likewise the feedback received from my thesis advisor. The support from her when building the research and investigative questions was very useful and taught me about the importance of talking out to someone when trying to find a solution. It was kind of a coaching session that helped me delimiting the topic and motivated me in the thesis process. Any additional courses on academic writing had been beneficial for me.

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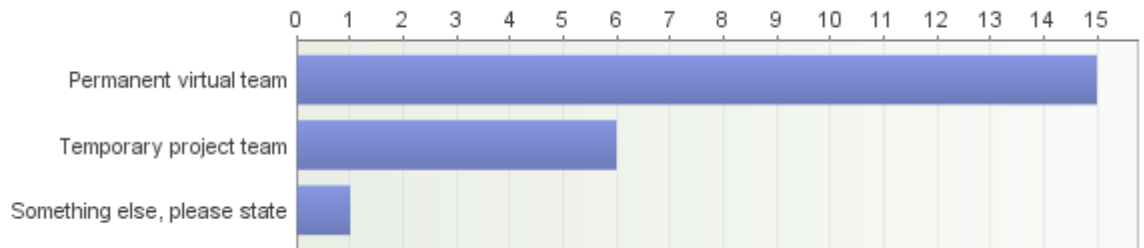
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## Attachments

Attachment 1: Survey questions and results based on the role in a virtual team

1. What type of virtual team are you primarily working in? Number of respondents: 22

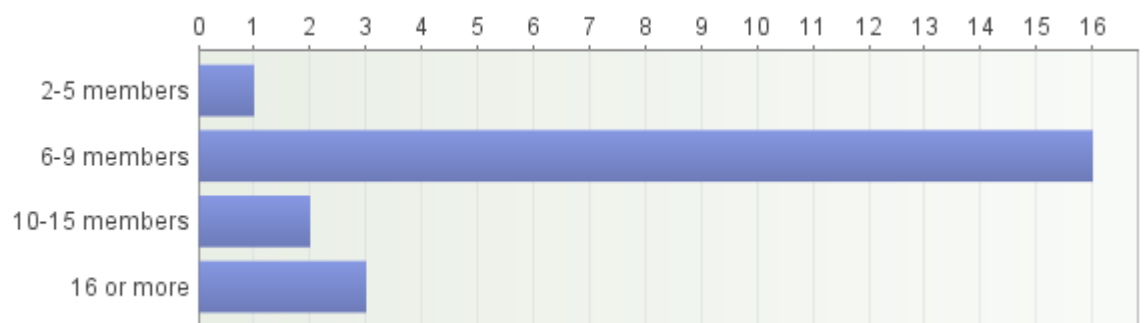


### Open text answers: Something else, please state

- dotted line manager in Bonn

2. How many team members do you have in your virtual team? If you are working in more than one virtual team reply according to your primary team.

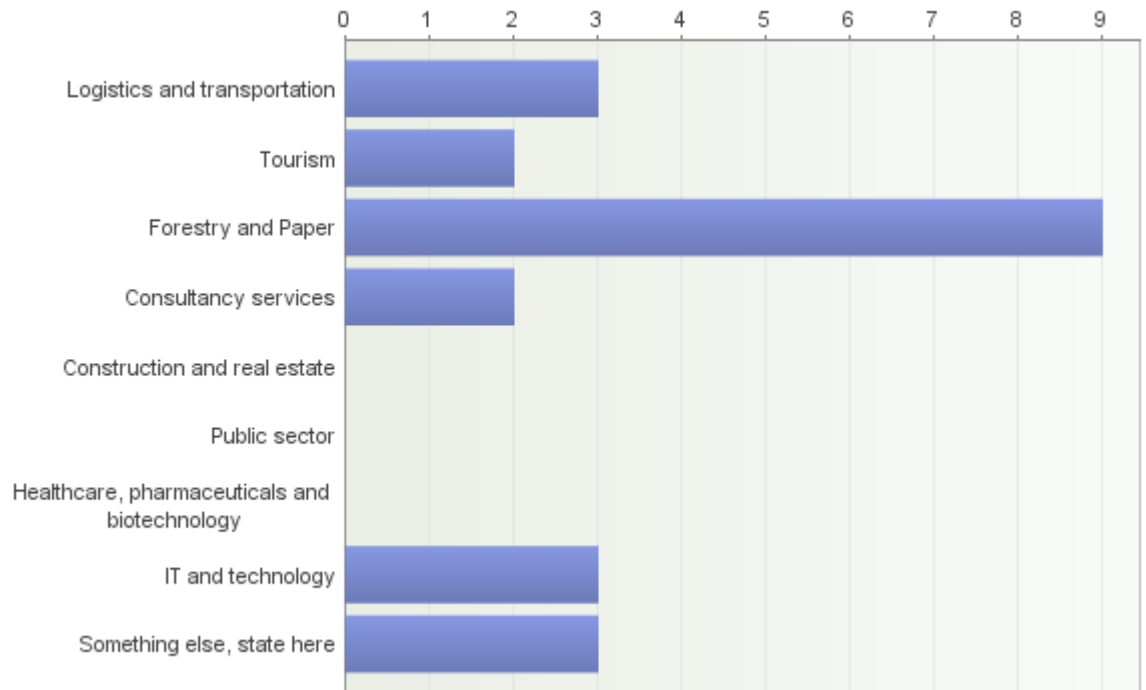
Number of respondents: 22



3. Is your virtual team spread over country boundaries? Number of respondents: 22



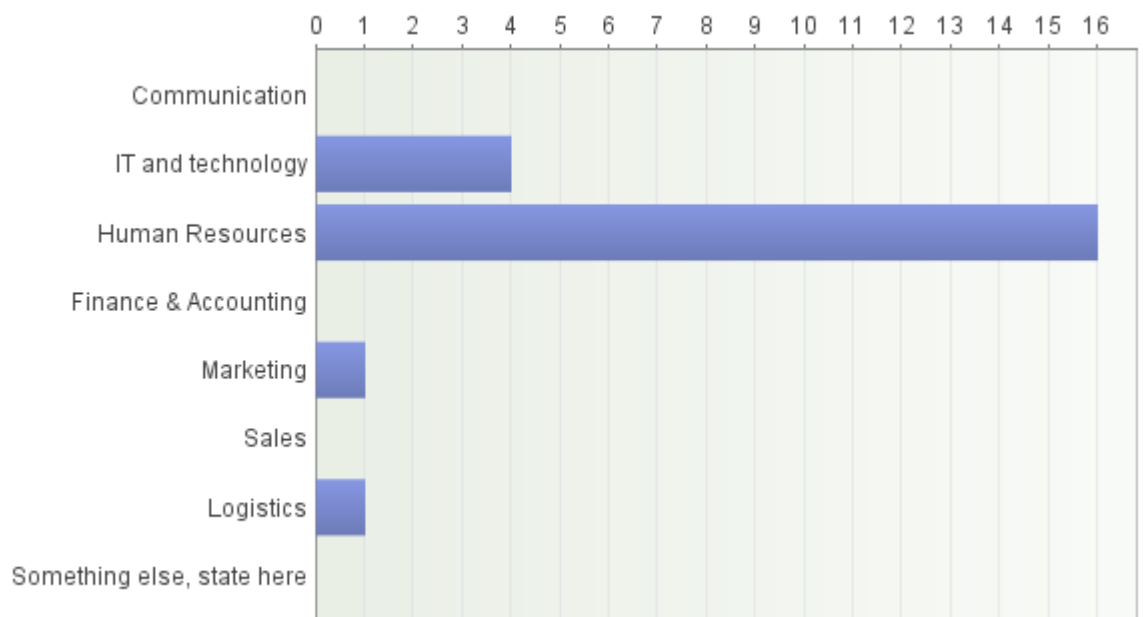
4. What industry do you work at? Number of respondents: 22



**Open text answers: Something else, state here**

- Retail
- Retail
- Industrial

5. What is your area of specialization? Number of respondents: 22

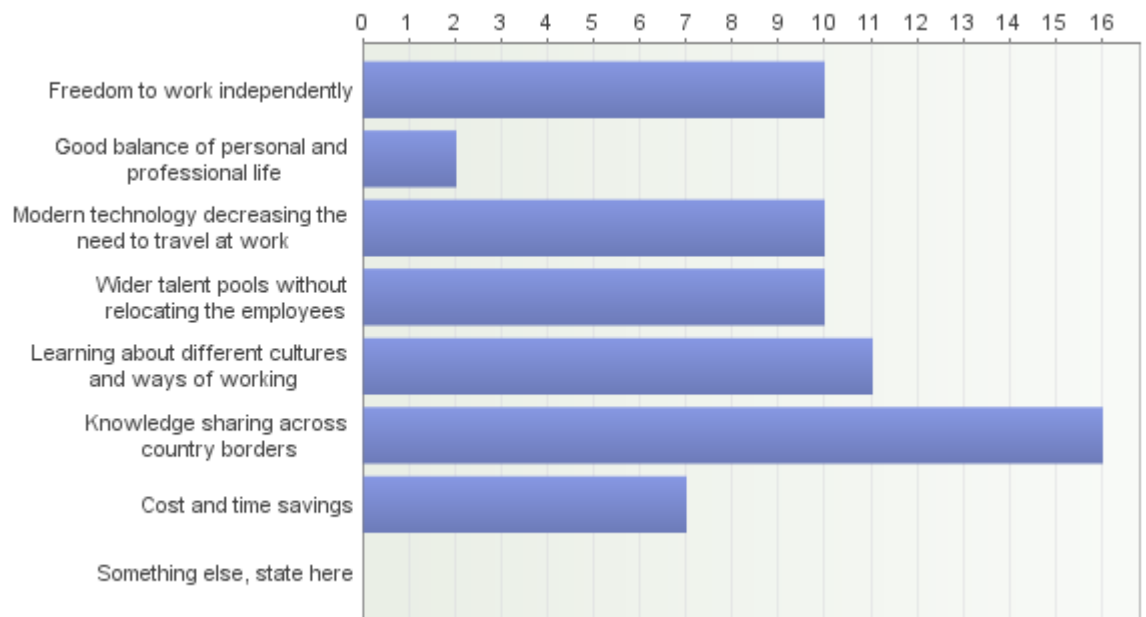


6. In which country are you primarily located?

Number of respondents: 22

- Finland
- USA
- Finland
- Finland
- Poland
- Finland
- Finland
- Sweden
- Germany
- China
- Poland
- Denmark
- Sweden
- Finland
- Sweden
- Sweden
- Finland
- Finland
- Finland
- Finland
- Sweden
- Finland

7. In your point of view, what are the main three benefits of working in a multicultural virtual team? Number of respondents: 22



8. Assess your experience as a member of the virtual team on a scale 1 (disagree fully) to 5 (agree fully). Number of respondents: 22

	Disagree fully	Disagree partially	In between	Agree partially	Agree fully	Total	Average
I am aware of the vision and mission of our virtual team	0	0	3	4	15	22	4.55
I know the common goals of our team	0	1	0	6	15	22	4.59
My role is clear for me and I know what is expected from me	0	0	1	9	12	22	4.5
The information I receive is manageable	0	2	3	10	7	22	4
I am aware of the work situation of my virtual team colleagues (e.g. what they are currently working on)	2	4	5	6	5	22	3.36
I feel safe to say if I disagree	0	1	2	6	13	22	4.41
My performance is assessed fairly	1	0	3	5	13	22	4.32
I receive continuous feedback on my work performance	1	4	5	7	5	22	3.5
I have a feeling of being left alone without support from my leader and colleagues	4	7	7	3	2	23	2.65
I can manage my work time and work load	1	1	3	9	9	23	4.04
Total	9	20	32	65	96	222	3.99

9. Indicate how you perceive your team on a scale 1 (disagree fully) to 5 (agree fully)

Number of respondents: 22

	Disagree fully	Disagree partially	In between	Agree partially	Agree fully	Total	Average
The team members can trust each other	1	0	0	11	10	22	4.32
The team communication rules are clear for every one: what, when, how	0	3	5	11	3	22	3.64
The team has the right amount of F2F meetings	3	4	4	8	3	22	3.18
There are misunderstandings caused by cultural and language barriers	4	4	6	5	3	22	2.95
The conflicts are handled accordingly and help from the leader available	1	1	4	11	5	22	3.82
The technical solutions support the team work properly	0	1	4	9	9	23	4.13
The time zone differences between the team members are handled in a fair manner	0	0	4	8	11	23	4.3
Total	9	13	27	63	44	156	3.76

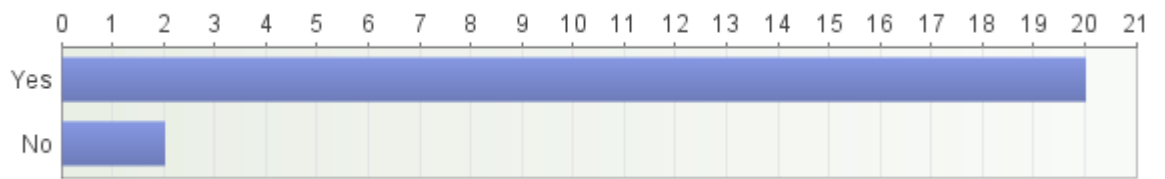
10. Anything else you would like to highlight related to the topics above?

Number of respondents: 3

- Most critical to effective virtual work is clear understanding of duties and responsibilities share
- More international we go - more spread people will be...  
Forcing one location would loose talents, and understanding of local business...  
end to ivory towers
- if there is possibility I would recommend that the team members get to know each other face-to-face before actually starting the virtual team. If the working practicalities and personality types are clear and known well by everybody it will give a better grounding to build a successful virtual team



11. Does your team have regular virtual meetings? Number of respondents: 22

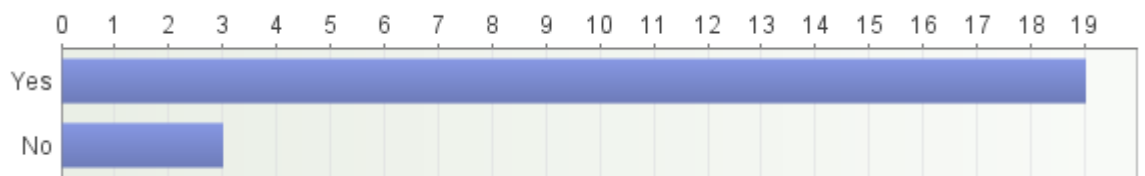


12. How often do you have regular virtual meetings? Number of respondents: 20

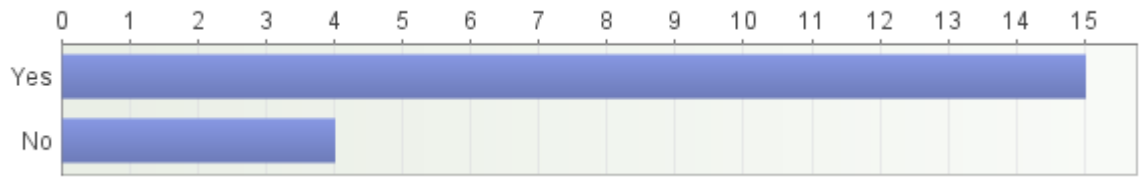
- Once a week
- weekly
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Bi-weekly
- once per week
- Weekly
- once/week
- appr. 200 meetings
- once a month
- monthtly
- Once a month
- once a week
- Every week
- once a month
- weekly
- 2 times/ month
- once a month
- Once a month
- every 2 weeks

13. Do you always have an agenda for the virtual meetings?

Number of respondents: 22



14. Is the agenda followed effectively? Number of respondents: 19

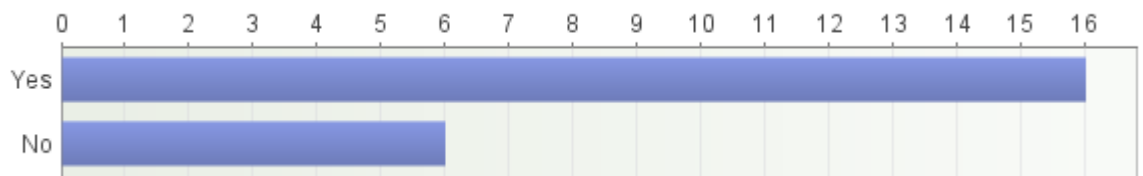


15. Are the meeting minutes prepared of the meetings? Number of respondents: 22



16. Have you got regular one-to-one meetings with your own manager?

Number of respondents: 22



17. How often do you have one-to-one meetings with your manager?

Number of respondents: 16

- weekly
- Monthly or as often as needed
- Bi-weekly
- 6-3 times per year
- bi-weekly
- approx. 200 a year
- once a month
- monthly
- 6 months
- When needed, at least once in the month
- daily
- 1 times in evert second month
- once a month
- Once a month
- Quarterly
- once a month

18. Do you feel that you need to have regular one-to-one meetings with your own manager? Number of respondents: 22

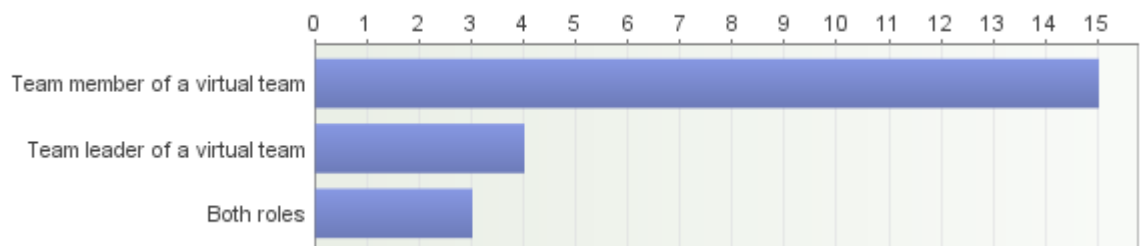


**Open text answers: Yes, state how often you would like to have these meetings**

- weekly for a short 30 min call is enough
- Monthly
- Monthly
- Monthly
- fine as now
- like today
- once a month
- biweeklye
- at least once per year
- once a week after every meeting with the team
- daily
- once per month
- once a month is good
- Once a month

19. What role/s do you play in your virtual team/s?

Number of respondents: 22



20. If you were the manager of your virtual team for a day, what would you change?

Number of respondents: 11

- Virtual Team meetings once a month  
f2f meetings at least 4 times per year
- better open communication within the group
- No need to change anything
- Introduce more project/assignment work into sub-groups
- More relevant meetings (no need for weekly virtual meetings) better to have them by subject and planned regularly
- Clearer goals and follow up.  
Personal development  
Clearer strategies
- Nothing
- more face to face meetings.  
enforced accountability for tasks left incomplete.  
zero tolerance for blaming.
- very strictly following the agenda of the meeting, in order to keep the schedule of the meeting. and the meeting minutes should be prepared after each meeting
- Rotate the topics in monthly virtual meetings. One topic per meeting with good pre-work. Include views coming outside the team also. Having the "outside in" view also.
- will have face to face meetings from time to time.

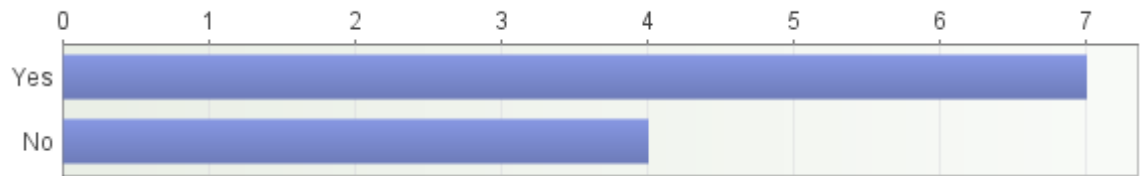
21. Anything else you would like to comment or highlight regarding working in a multicultural virtual team?

Number of respondents: 7

- I think a multicultural virtual team can work great so long as the technology is in place and the team members are able to work on their own but also communicate effectively in a group. I am lucky to have all of this.
- Also face to face time is important when people are getting to know each other. Once the team is established and ground rules are laid out then it is easier to work virtually and effectively. If the team is not properly established virtual teams can be very dysfunctional.
- If communication do not work perfectly you are at the risk of double work, i.e two members will start up the same task.
- Don't underestimate the impact of cultural differences in a company.
- It requires discipline, agenda and minutes. Of course Webex or other type of tool.
- highly ineffective both from a cost and communication perspective. when the common language is english and only phone calls and email are the methods, the messages are not always delivered. Cultural differences can sabotage the project.
- Allow diversity but also manage it. Open discussion is good but make sure you also other ways of gathering opinions, views and input (taking into account cultural & personal aspects).

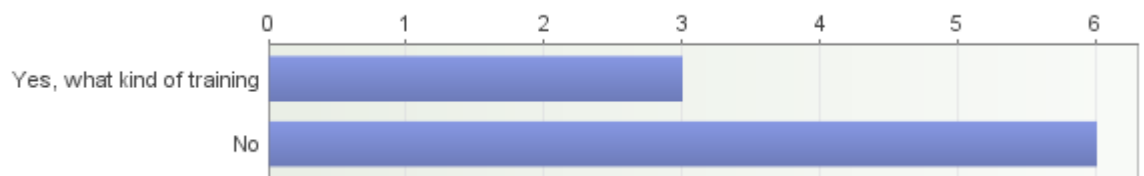
22. Do you visit your team members in their respective work environment periodically?

Number of respondents: 11



23. Have you received any training for leading a virtual team?

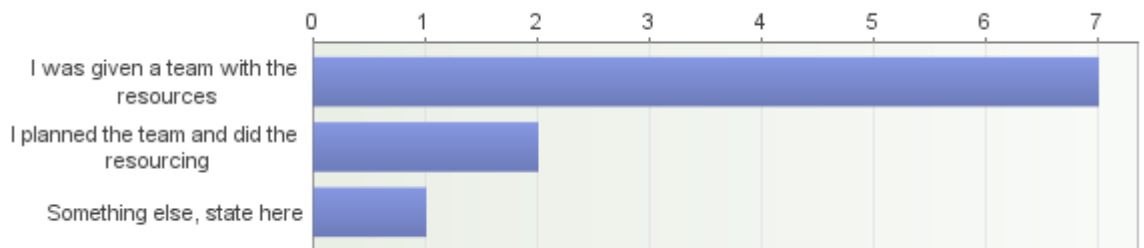
Number of respondents: 9



**Open text answers: Yes, what kind of training**

- 15 years experience, and some external (Krauthammer)
- distance management training
- some courses

24. How was your virtual team built? Number of respondents: 10



**Open text answers: Something else, state here**

- Not a leader

25. If there were no resource limitations what would you change in order to get better efficiency in your team? Number of respondents: 5

- Cover all major countries/cultures = + Germany & China
- ok like today
- Increase education of the staff
- face to face meetings
- Right competence for the task

26. The answers cannot be connected to the respondents and are handled confidentially. If you would like to receive a summary of the survey results please write your email address below. The results will be ready in December 2013. \*

Number of respondents: 18

<b>Email</b>
@upm.com
@solresor.se
@upm.com
@gavdi.com
@jysk.com
@upm.com
@jysk.com
@upm.com
@upm.com
@upm.com
@upm.com
@gmail.com
@upm.com
@kone.com
@fritidsresor.se
@gmail.com
@dhl.com
@telia.com

\* To ensure the anonymity of the respondents the complete email addresses are deleted and only the domain is left visible

27. Any feedback on the survey and/ or thesis topic is highly appreciated. Please feel free to comment here. Number of respondents: 5

- Good survey Maarit! Tsemppiä!
- Good luck with the Study!!
- Tsemppiä!

Lähes joulun odotusta :0)

- Good luck!
- Nice pattern of questions :) Good luck!