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THE ROLES OF LEADERS IN VIRTUAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Case of company Globuzzer

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Spring 2020
International Business
Oulu University of Applied Sciences

ABSTRACT

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International Business

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Title of Bachelor's thesis: The roles of leaders in virtual working environment - Case of company Globuzzer

Supervisor(s): Sanna Oja

Term and year of completion: Spring 2020

Number of pages: 37

The purpose of the study was to understand the benefits and challenges of working virtually and the essential roles of leaders in the virtual working environment. The world is changing rapidly leading to the new trend of working, so-called remote working. Working virtually may cause some challenges, communication for example, which need the effective responses of a good leader. Therefore, understanding deeply the positive and negative sides of working remotely and the roles of leaders in an effective virtual organisation are no doubt a necessity.

The qualitative research is chosen as the study methodology to collect empirical data. The semi-structured interviews with some leaders in the company case was implemented based on the theoretical knowledge to evaluate the practical nature. The literature review proposes theories and concepts related to the study theme, virtual teams, and virtual leader. The references are mainly from books, reports, previous researches, journals and statistics from the internet, for example, some figures about the enlargement of the virtual working trend.

The results found are the combination of theories explored and the conducted empirical research. It highlights the benefits of cultural diversity and the cost-savings while reveals some challenges in communication parts and data security of the virtual organisation.

Keywords: leadership, virtual teams, working virtually, roles of leader

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1 INTRODUCTION

These days, technologies are developing significantly fast and changing completely our lives. As a result, the demand for working also expands. With the massive support of technologies and the internet in the communication and collaboration, the phrase "virtual work" emerges as the new approach and is becoming quite an extraordinary way of working in many companies (Konrad, 2014. Cited 21.09.2019).

Working virtually is predicted a vast expansion of the remote labour force over the next few years. The research demonstrates that over 70 percent of employees in the professional services work remotely at least one day per week (Hudson, 2019. Cited 21.08.2019). Another also illustrates the number of people participating in teleworking has risen for 140 percent within 15 years from 2005 to 2019 (Luu, 2019. Cited 21.08.2019). Those insights lead to the conclusion that having all the people working under the same roof is considered no longer a requirement.

Increasing people who look forward to working virtually, where they can actively stay at home or in a cafe to work, will drive virtual leaders to find ways to implement the work efficiently. Along with the advantages of working remotely, some challenges may make it difficult for team leaders to manage the team. Managing a virtual team is not as simple as having all the employees in the same place because employees are located in various countries, with different backgrounds and time zone. Understanding the insight of leadership and the importance of it is necessary for leaders to communicate efficiently among their remote team members. Working virtually, hence, even possibly leads to a more engaged achievement, driving the business growth strongly than operating within a conventional working environment, in an office, for example.

1.1 Objectives

The purpose of this research is to study the advantages and disadvantages of working virtually and the roles of leaders in the virtual working environment. This research aims at finding the best answers for two research questions "What are the benefits and challenges in working virtually?" and "What are the roles of leaders in leading virtually?"

The subject was chosen based on the idea of the researcher while doing the internship remotely for the company named Globuzzer, which is also a virtual start-up. Since working in the virtual

environment for a long time, the enthusiasm for working virtually has considerably aroused, which leads to the desire to discover features as well as the pros and cons of this working approach.

The researcher also recognised that without having a true leader, who can genuinely engage the team members' performances, the organisation would be put in the chaos and collapse as the normal symptoms of start-up companies. The researcher would like to gain a deeper knowledge on this subject, how the company leaders can lead the big team members with diverse cultures, backgrounds and locate in different parts of the world. Additionally, the researcher became curious about the opinions and techniques of the company leaders, how they manage to lead the team and keep in touch regularly with the project deadlines despite the distance.

1.2 Research process and methodology

The overall research strategy in this thesis is on the case study base. Typical features are many types of books. And the research method used in this study is qualitative method. Tim May states in the book explained about the significance of qualitative method that by using qualitative method, the method implementers acquire opportunities to reflect upon what worked and how this came about (May, T. 2002, 231). Moreover, when the outcomes are not sharply exact and more flexible in advance, qualitative evaluation is the most suitable to be used in research (May, T. 2002, 232). The analysis method for qualitative data number one used in the literature is qualitative content analysis. The theoretical background details are explained with the virtual environments and characteristics, as well as the knowledge of leadership, which allows the readers to understand more before forming the research questions for the interview. This grounded theory is generated with the references of some reliable academic sources, statistical databases concerning the virtual employees as well as the experiences of the researcher.

The primary resources used for the theoretical background are On Leadership, Managing Virtual Teams, Manager's Guide to Virtual Team and Business Leadership. Other references are internet journals, articles, and statistics.

The analysis method for qualitative data number two is finding themes based on interviews. The personal interviews are conducted comprehensively remotely via Skype. The participants are mainly those with leadership experiences, the heads of departments and the company founder, for example, to ensure the opinions are being expressed fairly.

The limitation still exists. The qualitative research method is used mainly in this study with interviews on the Globuzzer company, which may cause irrelevant opinions to some other businesses and industries, not mention the individual reflections of interviewees.

1.3 Case company

The case company chosen for theoretical identification is Globuzzer. Globuzzer is a virtual SMEs concentrating on developing a social network for ex-pats. The website provides guidance, useful necessary information for newly arrived travellers to cities, primarily in Northern Europe. The main responsibility members include around fifty team members in 15 different countries across the globe with diverse cultural and educational backgrounds.

Globuzzer is an organisation that operates fully online through the internet from communication to project management and human resources management. Although the company sometimes faces lots of challenges in working virtually, they co-operate peacefully and produce quite extraordinary results. The reason to choose Globuzzer as the case company is that this is the company where the author completed the internship and the author had the observation on how the company operates virtually.

1.4 Interview process

As the theme is considered not a sensitive subject, the interviewees are all eager to share opinions truthfully right after the author's proposal. Hence, the interview process is fluently conducted under a relaxed atmosphere and no miscommunication occurred. Only a small issue on the questionnaire was made during the interview because of the conversation flow. The author made the questions simpler for the interviewees to understand and easier to speak openly. All the questions asked during interviews are included in the Appendix section. (see Appendix 1). Each interview took around 40 minutes and was conducted via Skype.

The first interviewee was Nicki Cillie, who is the leader in the Community Management Department. This facility serves as the face of the Globuzzer website, taking responsibility for handling the smooth communication between website users and the company. Although the community management team does not interfere in the IT technical side, the content generation is the subject they are involved in. The community management team is the company ambassador engaging with potential website users while maintaining relationships with existing loyal customers. As the group

leader, Nicki takes very important responsibilities on both managing her team on working track and reviewing the working quality on the main website. This is the department where the author used to do intern so the author already knows how the team proceeds virtually.

The second participant was Rami Alfafos, the founder of Globuzzer. As the company CEO, he handles all the necessary issues related to work. He had an IT background as the website founder but he is also the person to manage all the departments in the company. When setting interviews with Rami, the author would like to collect opinions from a broader perspective and from a higher position leader.

The last team leader to be interviewed was Alvin Aquino, who is the leader in the digital marketing section. As for a virtual company, digital work is considered to be indispensable. The digital marketing department is in charge of managing online marketing campaigns to promote brand awareness and boost the company services. The reason why the author chooses to interview the Marketing team leader is that he is the closest division to work with the Community Management team.

2 VIRTUAL WORKING ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Virtual team

The term "virtual team" is applied when referring to the geographically dispersed team. The team members are not working for a mutual purpose under the same roof but remotely and technological applications are utilised rather than face-to-face approaches to communicate (Cohen, Gibson 2003, 3 - 4).

According to Cohen & Gibson (2003), to be called a virtual collaboration, a team needs to have three features:

- The team is a functional and working for specific outcomes.
- The team members are operating geographically.
- The team members communicate through electronic means of collaboration.

A virtual team is constituted by a group of people who are engaged in taking responsibilities for interdependent tasks towards shared outcomes. The team is functionally operating with real task performances by core members, not some randomly unintentional people (Watkins, 2013. Cited 11.02.2020).

With the rapid development of the global economy, it seems not to be obligatory to have employees working under the same roof. Team members may live in different streets, cities, nations and even continents. They are possibly located in Europe, Asia or America to achieve a project in Africa. In this phase, the contribution of technological applications is significant. People in different countries use their primary worksites to access and team members are not co-located.

Electronic means are the main channels of communication to the virtual team as there is no other choice to discuss. Computers in a table and meeting in a specific room are not necessary; instead, a wide range of technological collaborative tools are highly promoted. Telephone, email, design-for-communication applications, video conferences are some primary examples. A huge number of convenient appliances on the internet, free or paid, are ready to serve towards the business achievement in the end.

2.2 The features of an effective virtual team

The virtual workforce may differ not only in geography but also in the background expertise. As today's global economy requires higher demands at the international level, companies are relying more on virtual employees that have appropriate local knowledge, work experiences along with different strategic perspectives in their targeted markets (Neeley, 2015. Cited 11.02.2020). When the employees are working out of the office, the management task is not easily handled with conventional strategies leading to the differences in selected skills and needs for the situation between those two. Hence, five primary characteristics of team players in a virtual working environment are highlighted by Lu Ellen Schafer (James-Tanny, Huettnner & Brown, 2010): Having shared goal among team members, having knowledge on the work, having shared communication applications, having the ability to work on assigned tasks and having the desire to achieve the mutual outcomes.

In the first place, not only conventional teams but also virtual teams must have a shared objective and vision among team players to function properly. Since members are not co-located, it seems to be more challenging to virtual team cooperation than in a traditional organisation. However, it is utterly important to draw the team targets to every member of the team. Without understanding the shared objectives, it is not easy to keep the team multi-disciplined, which may lead to team project failure as a consequence.

Secondly, the team leader plays the central role in clarifying the common objectives of his team members. The SMART goal approach, which is suggested by George T.Doran in November 1981 in a published paper "There's a S.M.A.R.T Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives", is one of the recommended methods the team leader possibly implements for this purpose. (Hauhey, 2014. Cited 14.02.2020). Each letter stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound.

First is Specific. The team goal should address a specific problem in an area, which is understandable enough to allow every member of the team to follow. For example, instead of targeting "I would like to be rich", a more specific approach should be identified like "I would like to work full-time five days a week and no rest to gain more money."

The next letter is M-Measurable. The goal should be measurable so that the team stays on track and be motivated to go forward. It would help the virtual team to stay focused and meet the deadlines.

Attainable is the next one. The goal should be at least realistic and achievable in a period, regardless of the challenging level it is. Some researches on resources, opportunities, as well as

the competitiveness on the business market, might be conducted to determine this "A" letter, for example.

Relevant means that the goal should be ensured to be under the control of the overall team, or the team leaders. It somehow needs to be appropriate with the general company vision and strategies. Time-bound is the last letter but not the least important. The goal should have a deadline, not only the project itself. Putting a target date onto the shared goals to encourage team players to prioritise it.

The next feature is the knowledge of each individual about the team. The team acts as a small organisation, or a society in a broad context. Hence, it must have its regulation, expectations, rights and other resources to build a quality team. As a member of an organisation, ones should acknowledge their rights, what kinds of benefits they derive from being part of the community, for example.

The third characteristic to be mentioned is the power of collaborative technological equipment for team communication. With the increase in the virtual workforce in recent years, approximately sixteen percent of the labour force, equal to more than 26 million American citizens in the United States are now favourable to work remotely (Greenbaum, Z. 2019. Cited 15.02.2020). Communication technologies also follow up with the trend. Multiple promising choices of application on the internet for virtual teams to manage the workflow and to keep in touch with co-workers, ranging from messenger workspaces to video meeting conferences application. They are all designed to be convenient for the facilitation of the teleworking. Hence, choosing the most appropriate communication channels seems to be the essential features.

The team player's abilities to work on the project is vital. The integration of background knowledge, technical expertise as well as local cultural awareness will bring plenty of advantages to the organisation in their business market. According to Kimbal Fisher and Mareen Fisher, there are some criteria for the virtual team leader to recognise an individual when selecting his members:

- Having the ability to work independently and self-disciplined to meet the deadlines.
- Enjoying the teamwork atmosphere and able to communicate remotely with colleagues.
- Having the ability to produce excellent work outcomes with high responsibilities.
- Indicating some potential interpersonal skills such as collaboration, problem-solving.

Those criteria may change depending on the organisation itself besides having a good educational background and prior work experiences. However, it can be concluded that the ability to work is critical in any situation.

Last but not least, a desire to work is the last feature. "Attitude determines how well you do it." (Brown, M., James-Tanny, C. & Huettner, B. 2010). It is quite a challenge to perceive the

engagement and motivation of a person when working in the distance as there is no more than to examine the productivity way to observe these features (Watkins, M. 2013. Cited 15.02.2020). The desire to work, in other words, eagerness should come within a person, not particularly being pushed by some bystanders.

2.3 The benefits and drawbacks of working virtually

Many companies in the world today enjoy the substantial benefits by facilitating to work out of office, yet face a great deal of drawbacks in many perspectives. The author will explain both the advantages and disadvantages from different aspects such as culture, communication, project management and personnel management that virtual organisations may experience in the operation.

2.3.1 Culture

International variation with the diverse cultural background is common in a virtual team that may bring people together as well as create organisational challenges, especially for leadership management.

Firstly, the company can observe different business angles in the targeted market from the talents beyond their countries borders. This international recruitment may bring many local specialists to work for a project virtually. Better innovation and outcomes are achieved as the organisation has a rich human capital that is willing to share their expertise for the best business practices.

On the other hand, the virtual organisation may cope with some difficulties when dealing with the cultural differences among virtual employees. The diversity of cultures brings knowledge, yet a lot of conflicts and lack of collaboration may happen. The cultures in Western nations and Asian countries are likely to be in the North and South poles. It contrasts from the working manners, attitudes toward success to the ways of solving problems. For example, Americans consider timing is everything. It is punctuality and one of the most important features of any negotiation conference. It means if even you are late for five minutes, it is your responsibility to inform the business partners otherwise you are making a really bad impression on them, especially during the first meeting (Garg, 2016. Cited 18.02.2020). It may lead to the failure of negotiation, not necessarily but possible because of the time disrespect. Meanwhile, it is considered normal for Indians to be late at work although they might stay up late at night to cover up their work, catching up with the deadlines.

They believe that their personal life should be equal to the work, and would give work the priority when it is needed. Through the example above, it means that when there is a cooperation between different cultural backgrounds, conflicts may happen, sometimes a lack of trust between people. Hence, some solutions should be clear out from the start, and the role of the leader to harmonise the situation is indispensable at this stage.

2.3.2 Communication

Communication plays a contributing factor in the operation of the virtual working business.

Communication in the virtual environment is less in frequency, yet engage a more productive work in such a convenient way with the help of technology. The collaborative activities are likely to be the "secret sauce" that inspires innovation (Ferrazzi, 2012. Cited 02.03.2020). Communication between every team player is crucial like the key to open the door while dealing with different cultural backgrounds in the virtual team. With the convenience of e-services, communication is never easier with various choices of collaborative tools. It ranges from video conversations, audio to file sharing, cloud storage that human cannot imagine in the 90s. They are born to serve virtual work.

Despite the convenience of technological tools, tele-communication remains the major challenge. According to James-Tanny, Huettnner, and Brown, there is approximately 70 percent of the information exchanged is non-verbal when face-to-face conversations are conducted. It reveals the value of non-verbal language, which almost lost when people communicate through the internet. The body language or facial expressions, so-called visual cues play crucial roles in helping people to understand each other and more importantly, to establish trust. Regular meetings and some collaborative activities should be promoted to help people close to each other, despite solely through digital equipment; not mention the management skills of the team leader is important at this stage as well.

Another disadvantage of working virtually is the social isolation. Task-oriented is by far the most messages people are trying to convey through virtual communication. While virtual team players focus more on achieving the digital tasks, they might forget the society around them, even the mission to communicate with the real people, not just the computer with an internet connection. This is a severe downside of communication for virtual teams.

2.3.3 Project management

The role of virtual project managers who take the main responsibilities to leverage the best communication in the team and encourage the contribution to the team is undeniable. Firstly, with virtual management, the product development time is shortened and the company responds quickly to the demands on the marketplace both globally and locally thanks to the collaboration of different people in different time zones. The overall team can take advantage of time and move on the same project for 24/7. For example, while the project team finishes the outline in Europe, the IT team in India would continue working while it is night time in Europe. On the next day, some results can be ready to be approved on the table of the project team manager by the time they arrive at work. Therefore, taking the advantage of time zone may boost the work productivity generating substantially higher profit for the virtual company.

Secondly, the virtual organisations can fully enjoy the benefits of cost-savings. Companies do not need to worry about budget spending on real states, office building, utilities, etc. Many companies also outsource their production to lower-cost locations. By doing so, they can lower the income material cost, operational cost as well as smaller budget on employees' salaries in these areas. It contributes to a significant decrease in the production cost. A survey conducted by Tara Powers reveals that by shifting the operation to virtual work, two-thirds of team leaders confirm that the cost saved is equivalent to 16 to 25 percent of their company revenue. It might be a small number for SMEs; however, in large organisations, these numbers can exchange to millions even billions of dollars (see figure 2.3.3).

| <i>Cost savings as a percentage of revenue</i> | <i>Team leader estimate of cost savings</i> | <i>Executive estimate of cost savings</i> |
|--|---|---|
| 0% | 6% | 7% |
| 1-5% | 17% | 7% |
| 6-15% | 11% | 27% |
| 16-25% | 67% | 53% |
| 26-50% | 0% | 4.3% |

Figure 2.3.3. Cost savings as a percentage of revenue (Powers, T. 2018)

Despite the definite advantages of working in the mobility for project management, there are some minor drawbacks. Firstly, it is the cost of technology. Technologies support efficiently the use of virtual team players, yet not many tools provide complete support in function. Multiple collaborative technologies include messaging, video meetings, data storage. The cost of having the full, unlimited function of those tools is somehow still high for start-ups. In addition, maintenance and technological problems are unavoidable issue leading to the instability of usage while working on those sites.

The possibility of leaking company data exists in the teleworking environment. Living in the big data era, it is crucial for any organisation to collect data for market penetration. However, it is reported that the cyber-attacks have raised to be the most alarming issues for companies working virtually, with around 43 percent of the data breach are targeted at small companies (Newsflash, I. 2019. Cited 02.03.2020). It explained why companies nowadays are trying to leverage technological choices to better secure company data, protect the employees and their innovation.

2.3.4 Personnel management

The major challenge for personnel management in distance is the difficulties in managing the team player's capabilities and job performance, which can be easily handled by walking around in the conventional organisation. Virtual leaders also face obstacles in controlling the situation out of office; at least it is more challenging.

Provided that taking the advantage of the virtual convenience, employees can illustrate the outcome quality more productive than those operating in conventional organisation. The traditional working environment may have some distracted factors such as politics, travelling time, office distractions, gossips, etc. that interfere the managerial job.

All the benefits of mobile working are being enjoyed by employees all over the world although the downsides are there to be resolved. Nevertheless, disadvantages can be overcome by following a different managerial approach with efficient communication strategies.

3 CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

3.1 Leadership definition

According to Forbes, an American business e-magazine, leadership is a complex process of the team leaders who exert social influence to enlarge the efforts of its members towards the team achievement (Kruse, K., 2013. Cited 09.03.2020).

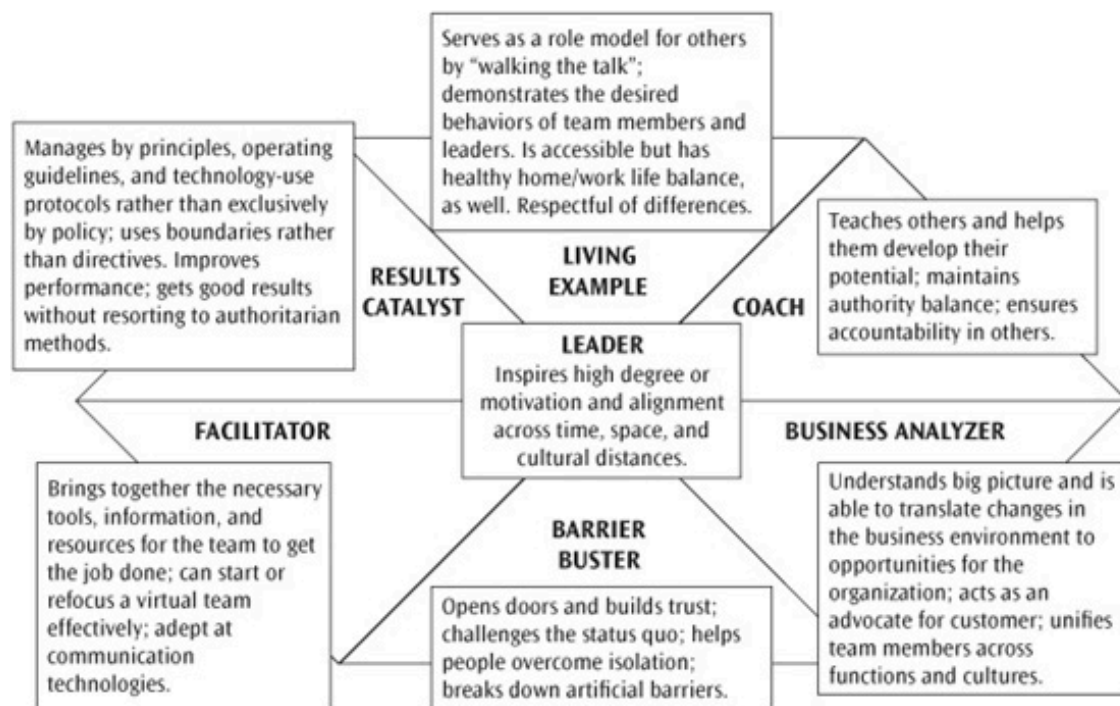
Leadership derives from the social influence, whether in a small team or the public. It always involves adaptable changes with the flexibility (Jossey-Bass, 2008) as the leader is the person to acknowledge opportunities, seize the circumstances, instruct team members as well as promote team spirits.

The word "leadership" is used in the most common workplace as it is an integral part of any human system-like, to be performed certain essential tasks for a group to achieve its purpose. If the term is invoked frequently enough with devotion, the team can ease the sense of unaccomplished or unfulfilled duties (Gardner, J.1993). In many cases, leaders demonstrate the ability to encourage his people to stay on the line and overcome challenges towards the common goal. From time to time, the leader's life principles are being taken into consideration to set a strong example for the rest of the team.

"Leadership requires major expenditures of effort and energy" (Gardner, J.1993). It is not about the seniority in the company hierarchy or the authority or power but implies the social influence. In the virtual environment, the team leader influences by actively encouraging team players without official roles to contribute as people tend to be motivated when their contribution matters (Huettnner, B.,James-Tanny, C., Brown, M.K., 2010). As the world is shifting the way of working from tables to over the internet, the leader should take a different approach to overcome obstacles in leading his people remotely. Good leadership concerns emotionally compelling (Gallos, J. 2008) and it is extremely true to highlight in the virtual context. Not the authority lead of ordering or commanding the virtual team members to do this and do that, the leader's mission is to foster the organisation growth both physically and intellectually.

3.2 The leadership skills needed in an organisation

Leaders are rather made than born. One can develop their skills and ability during the process to become an admirable team leader. Under some circumstances, when someone is truly leading a project or become the leader trying to manage his team, it is the time when solid leadership skills are required. The seven competencies are introduced to evaluate the leader's job (Fisher, M. & Fisher, K., 2011). Those are "leader", "results catalyst", "facilitator", "barrier buster", "business analyser", "coach" and "living example". Each feature functions the core competency of an effective successful leader. It is vital to cultivate those aspects to develop a unique leadership style that works for the specific team. Nevertheless, in the traditional company and virtual organisation, there are some similarities as well as differences since the approaches of each managing ways are not the same either. The seven competencies will be analysed respectively and put in the traditional and virtual organisation framework depending on its importance (see figure 3.2). Obviously in the case that there are important features equivalently for both sides, it will be demonstrated only once in the virtual organisation section.



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FIGURE 3.2. The seven competencies of an effective team leader (Fisher, M. & Fisher, K., 2011)

3.2.1 In a traditional organisation

In the traditional organisation, "leader", "business analyser" and "living example" are the three most critical features for the team leaders.

Being a true leader is certainly one of the significant features in any team leadership, including the virtual context. Research demonstrates that 21 percent increase in the employee's productivity is due to higher engagement in the workplace (IMD. Cited 11.03.2020). Therefore, having the ability to build good employee relationships and fully engage the happiness and eagerness to work is essential for the leader to earn respect from other people. This is one of the must-have features in leadership skills. After all, the leader is the one to motivate as well as remove obstacles in the employees and company development. The leader would rather choose the education process than favour disciplinary process (Fisher, M. & Fisher, K., 2011). Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electric in America, formulated the idea of a "boundary-less organisation" where everyone has equal right to brainstorm freely to drives efficiency and growth (LaMarco, N. 2018. Cited 14.03.2020). However, in such organisation, where are the leaders being put? They stand behind and take responsibility to encourage the core competencies of the organisation whom are employees.

The leader in on-site workplaces acting as a business analyser is vital. The leaders should understand the big pictures and find opportunities for their employees and the company while facilitating team development simultaneously. Flexible meeting with the team is required to ensure that the business goes smoothly. It is easier to set a meeting physically in one place at a specific time in one location other than for the remote meeting as they do not need to encounter the challenges of time zone, cultural differences or the connection stability. It aligns with the effort to unify team members across functions and cultures that are the promising factors contributed to business success.

In today's business, employees are doubtful about management (Fisher, M. & Fisher, K., 2001) as they rather believe in actions than words. Hence, being in a leadership position, the leader is responsible for the team to trust. They must set an example for the team behaviours. Nowadays, those companies follow the philosophy "Do as I say, not as I do" will not take the good result like having a responsible leader with a good leading path. As the leader, inspiring employees to promote the innovation is part of their accountability. So to do it successfully, the leader must show them the way by doing, not just saying. If the team leader can fulfil his obligations, they gain trust among the team members. The team leader also strikes for the balance between work and personal life by taking actions themselves toward their team members. In the leadership position around the

world today, we have witnessed plenty of leaders setting positive examples for being perfect work-life balance examples. Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Facebook, has been well-known for voluntarily taking two months of paternity leave to be with his wife and the new-born (Leadem, R. 2017. Cited 14.03.2020). Another primary example is the action of website platform Weebly's CFO Kim Jabal. Despite being in such a decisive position, this CFO always starts working at 9 a.m. and leaves work at 5 p.m. spending time with the family (Leadem, R. 2017. Cited 14.03.2020). They have a certain good leadership by doing themselves for other benefits; that is when they are becoming the true leader.

3.2.2 In a virtual organisation

Although being a leader in a virtual companies needs those above features, being a "barrier buster", "coach", "facilitator" and "result catalyst" contributes significant function in leading virtually effectively.

First, leading from a distance is not completely unlike leading on-site business. However, there is a factor that is far more important to consider in the teleworking environment, so that leaders need to further acquire to lead with the same success as on-site people. It is barrier buster factor. The virtual leader plays a role as the motivator nowadays. The leader should be able to handle the most difficult challenges such as conflict, untrusty, policies, etc. Those invisible barriers might stop the creativity, innovation, and performances of virtual employees, along with causing the projects to be inefficient. It is believed to be more critical in the virtual context because through the internet, they might not be apparent. That is the reason why the leader should acquire the ability to find out and resolve.

Negotiation skills and relationship building are valuable skills. In some cases, being a barrier buster requires virtual leaders to negotiate flexibly in touch situations to guide the projects along the path and ensure team players are on track. Human nature tends to trust people who are members of our own social group more than outsiders (Kramer, R. 2009. Cited 11.03.2020). Giving the teleworkers trust will boost their dedication to work more productively because they know where they belong to. It is also apparent that the word "trust" plays a huge role in social success (Zheng, Yan. 2010. p478). The important note for the virtual leader is helping people to overcome isolation or disconnection from the business so that team members can start to build trust and a sense of belonging. Sometimes, the sensitivity of a leader can help to react to the situation smoothly but the skills acquired will demonstrate. A leader with good leadership will not stop and refuse to say

"no" when there is still hope but they would pledge support and resources instead. It is an important feature of a leader in the remote context because if the leader could not deal with obstacles, it might prevent the team from reaching the highest possible performance.

Second, the leader also acts as a team coach. Many businesses are now acknowledging the benefits of coaching for both employees and organisations (Chinn, K. 2018. Cited 11.03.2020). Effective coaching generates positive experiences and inspiration for team members to work on the quality. Comparing to the on-site organisation, coaching in the teleworking environment probably goes beyond the importance because remote workers need an efficient amount of coaching to succeed (Fisher, M. & Fisher, K., 2011). The need for individual attention is always essential among the team. Acknowledging the differences in each team players is a leader must-do job so that they create individual opportunities for them to develop their potential, embrace the strengths as well as fix the weaknesses. Coaching is the leadership skill that requires a lot of communicative techniques, especially in the virtual context where people could not touch each other physically like in the traditional organisation.

Third, the team leader plays as a "facilitator" for the team members by taking accountability on providing all the necessary resources to accomplish the work. For traditional workplaces, those assets could be budgets, applications, information. For a virtual organisation, above all those resources, the smoothness of team collaboration is more important. The team leader is advised to provide effective team meetings via the technological application for every team member in order to connect people together. In the virtual context, many technical errors might occur in terms of the technology touch. Hence, the leaders need to make sure to facilitate appropriate tools for specific purposes such as communication, teleconference, data storage, etc. Leaders could also try to cultivate themselves skills and experiences in dealing with technical problems to assist the work effectiveness at the bottom-line results.

The last feature is the "result catalyst". It means that the virtual team leader manages in the way that the team produces considerable achievement. In the conventional leading method, the borders on both horizontal and vertical planes and hierarchies are seen (LaMarco, N., 2018. Cited 14.03.2020), which is not recognised to be effective anymore in the virtual context. Hence, rather than using authoritarian leading methods, a true leader nowadays commonly utilises more facilitative and advanced techniques. The "boundary-less organisation" is one of the recommendations mainly for teleworking companies. Instead of commanding assigned tasks to team players, leaders may choose to specify the limitations for employees to consider before the group takes determination. The employees would feel like gaining more respect and make it easier to accomplish assigned tasks efficiently. It is so-called the shared leadership.

Seven competencies of good leadership have been demonstrated in details. Nevertheless, the roles of a leader in leading a virtual team can also be illustrated in how they communicate, manage people and project. It will be divided into the following chapter.

4 THE ROLES OF LEADER IN LEADING VIRTUAL TEAMS

4.1 Communication

"Communication is everything for your virtual team" (Powers, T., 2018). It seems that the word "communication" is the indispensable element of any social-related factors, especially in distance working. If communication is done efficiently, it is possible to build influence, trust, and empower distance workers. Hence, the virtual team leader plays a central role in connecting team members and the company. Effective communication is inextricably intertwined with effective leadership in the way that these two aspects are twisted together. In the virtual context, without having the communication done thoughtfully and considerably, it may cause frustration and confusion between every team member involved. That is the cause of bad leadership.

According to a study by Center for Creative Leadership, there are three main categories, so-called "the 3 C's of change" to help a leader having good leadership in their team players' eyes (Center for Creative Leadership. Cited 11.04.2020). Those criteria are Communication - Collaboration - Commitment (see Figure 4.1). It reveals how important is the roles of virtual leaders in the communication part of leading a teleworking team. Communication means the mutual exchange of information on both sides, including explanations, opinions, views, etc.



FIGURE 4.1. The Three C's of Virtual Leadership (Microsoft PowerPoint 2013. Cited 11.04.2020)

This issue relates to the way leaders communicate with the team members. Successful leaders tend to concentrate on the "why" more than only the "what" when faced with their team issues. It is to find out the root of problems so that it will never repeat with the same concerns. As a leader of the role model, he needs to ensure to have a high performing and cohesive team to work (Powers, T., 2018). Powers also highlighted a few tips that may help the remote team leader become the person that everyone chooses to follow. It is basically about having conversations with an open-minded attitude to make sure that the team players feel like having opportunities to learn from mistakes, not the guilty feeling. Being a skilful listener is crucial not only for the team but also for the virtual leader. The purpose of effective communication is to connect the organisation's values and human elements.

4.2 Team management

In the virtual company, it is common that many remote workers work in an automatic spirit without acknowledging the connection with the larger entity and their impact on company performance. While being members of a virtual company, many are confused about setting the goals and priorities, which cause the discouragement to work and contribute to the mutual team target. The leader's skills in management should be pointed out at this stage. Consistently achieving desired results with an effective strategy on managing both human factors and projects highlight the name of an effective virtual leader. In the virtual business environment, team players are separated by space, time and culture making it more challenging for the leaders to manage. Fisher, K. & Fisher, M. (2011) introduced the six-step goal-setting process paradigm that helps the leaders to manage their team players more efficiently and assist in solving the managerial process smoothly (see Figure 4.2).

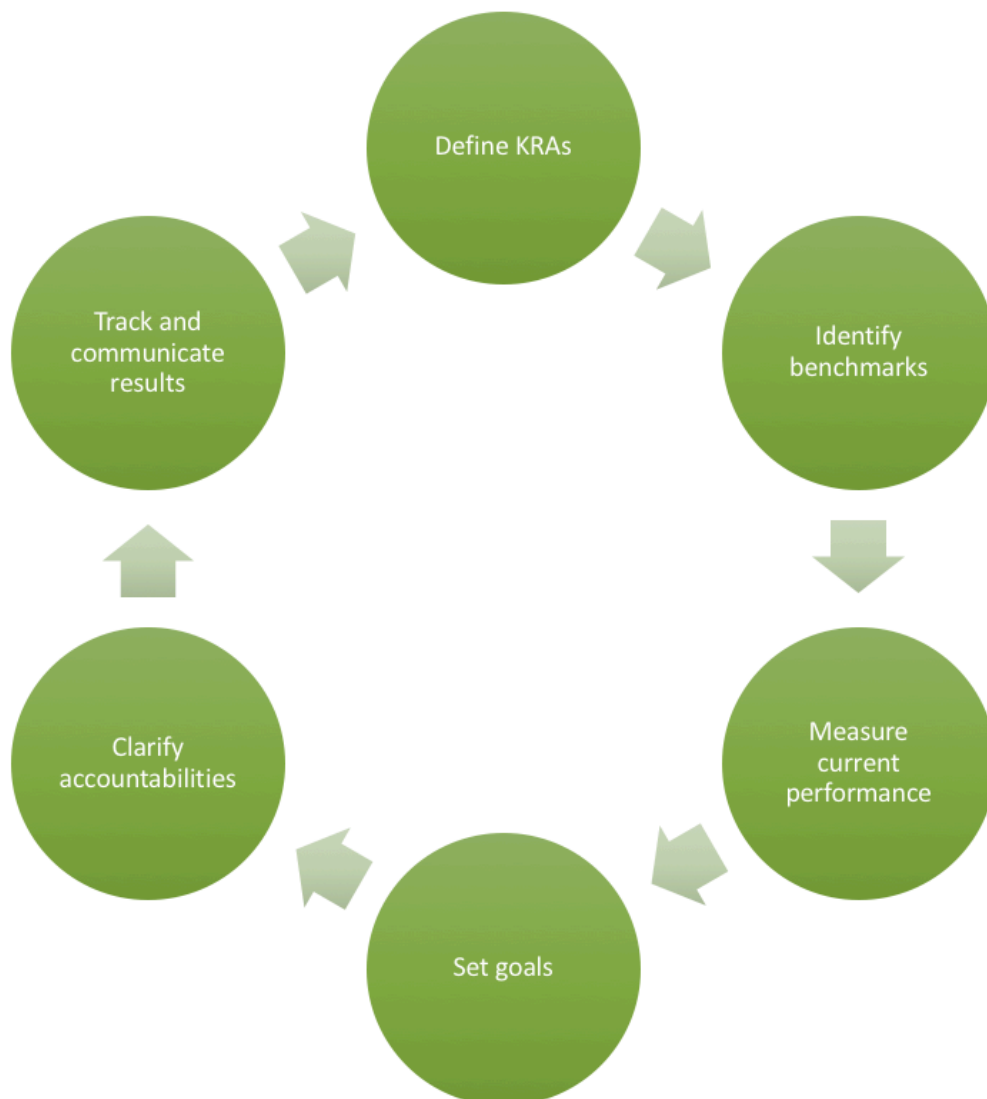


Figure 4.2. Six-step goal-setting process (Microsoft Powerpoint. Cited 11.04.2020).

The first step is called "define key result areas". It means that the virtual leader should identify the specific areas where the team concentrates its energies for the accomplishments. The managerial phase will be ultimately easier for the leader to handle all the related affairs when an issue arises. It needs good communication to integrate with the employees.

The second factor is the organisational benchmarks identification. It is the one-more-time repeat of phase one, the best practice of defining the specific areas to focus on. When coping up with challenges, the virtual team leaders can find the standard to determine how to measure the problem. It again relies on the cohesive communication.

The next step is to measure current performance. In this step, the team leader can compare and consider the gap between the benchmarks on the previous step and the current team performance. By acknowledging this gap, virtual leaders know where our team is currently so that he adjusts the way to manage people and the workflow to promote continuous team improvement.

Setting goals is the next step when the team aware of what they need to boost their performance surpass the benchmark. In the setting goal phase, the role of the leader is very crucial. Without having a capable leader, the goal would not be realistic and achievable.

The fifth stage is to clarify accountabilities. The team leader should be clearly aware of his team members and their responsibilities so that the management phase would be beneficial. The most essential factor is to decide the responsible person, on what to take accountabilities and the time frame (Fisher, K. & Fisher, M., 2011).

Last but not least is the results reviewing and tracking. After clearly setting goals and proceeding with it, the virtual team leader always needs to reviewing the process and receiving feedback on the measurement. A good-setting goal is the one to be usually tracked. By doing the usual check-up, the team leader understands where the team is in the goal achievement and promptly accustom according to the situation.

Having a good plan and set up the workflow effectively on a project, the team leader can master the managerial skills. If a virtual team is led by a skilful person with an effective managerial job, the results achieved are better overall (Suleman, R., 2013. Cited 11.04.2020). Leaders need to understand the insight of their virtual team to make better human capital decisions and move the business toward its goals.

4.3 Adaptability

The roles of a leader in adaptability mean that besides professional stuff, the cultural diversity, the gender differences and more social-related issues raised in the team members should be acknowledged by the team leader in order to draw flexible arrangements in many urgent situations. A virtual team would need a leader to understand and accustom the situation, create collaboration to break down the existed barriers.

One of the main characteristics of virtual teams regularly face is cultural diversity because of the broad international mobility. It allows the team players and the company to enjoy a great number of benefits, yet raise many challenges. Understanding the advantages and managing the challenges of cultural diversity is crucial to the team leader. It helps a virtual leader to address problems appropriately in some perspectives at work (Fisher, K. & Fisher, M., 2011). The vacation schedules or special requests would be arranged properly when understanding the geographic differences of team members with religious celebrations for example. Some other stuff such as work coverage, morale can be adjusted through sensitive communication and therefore avoid misunderstanding.

Besides, the moral in an organisation may be unified by discussing directly based on cultural requests. For example, based on different demographic and geographic team members, one person may see the timing manner not the same as others. Some would appreciate a few minutes late for the group meeting while others could not stand even for one minute late. The leader should be the person to modify team behaviours to the norm and regulation of the organisation.

The gender gap is also an issue in many companies, both traditional and virtual in the world, raising many challenges that cause conflicts and miscommunication within a team. The leader, hence, should take into consideration the way men and women contribute differently to the group and along with that, assigning appropriate tasks. Powers have discovered some common differences in behaviours at work between men and women (Powers, T., 2018). For example, while women have the intention to build trust through relationships, men would choose results as a means of building trust. Women would appreciate team rewards when men tend to see themselves as an individual reward. Men are usually independent to solve problems on their own; women enjoy sharing and do-it-together spirit in contrast. Each person would choose their ways to contribute to the team differently so everyone should respect their colleagues and their differences. That is the reason why the team leader should eradicate gender bias and be flexible in creating a comfortable environment to innovate.

Given the context that the team members co-operate and own great leadership, it would be outstanding teamwork to enjoy the benefits of diversity to the fullest. Good decision-making, greater flexibility, creative innovation, and expected high-result achievement can be generated in anticipation. And most importantly, building trust in parallel with creating good relationships in a diverse group is the valuable intangible assets of any virtual team.

5 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: FINDINGS ON CASE OF GLOBUZZER

This part will include all the findings during the empirical data collection process explained along with the theoretical background in the previous

5.1 Features of effective virtual team

Mentioning the characteristics of a successful virtual team, the company CEO highlighted the importance of the team members' attitude towards achieving targets. This view integrates with the concepts by Lu Ellen Schafer about five primary features of virtual team players. He quoted that human is the centre of everything. When the team has a common positive attitude, the success of a virtual team is relatively assured at the first place. This is because of the effect of putting effort together. The CEO once experienced that when the entire team has the spirit and tries to make things happened together, then everyone will get the idea and actively push themselves forwards so that they are not left behind. The team eventually was able to solve problems quicker by together looking at the big pictures and contributed significantly without hesitation.

Team members focusing on the goals set is also another opinion of the company CEO. The S.M.A.R.T model of setting goals is an outstanding idea to keep the goals clear and comprehensive. Because of working virtually, everything is not transferred easily like sitting all together in an office. He stated that it is crucial for all the team members to understand the common goal. Each member can dedicate their efforts as well as resources to the team acknowledging that they are on the same track to other members.

On the one hand, the Lead of Community Managers saying from a different perspective stated that having a properly-organized team is her expectation on a perfect virtual team. This view also matches Le Ellen Schafer's idea on the effective virtual team, the forth characteristics of having knowledge of the work. She believes that a team with high-performing members generates more meaningful results. Those having the ability to work are often self-motivated, responsible and able to work in an interdependent environment. The work will be done perfectly and the process goes smoothly. The team leader can fully trust those selected individuals when building an ideal virtual organisation.

5.2 The advantages and disadvantages of working virtually

All the interviewees mentioned some certain same advantages and disadvantages when being asked about their opinions.

The Digital Marketing Leader once pointed out that working virtually can benefit the entire team by the richness of human capital from all over the world. In the theoretical background, the author also specified the advantages of having high scalability in the culture. The international workforce will bring more opportunities for the virtual business to observe different business angles from many cultural perspectives. Especially for the Marketing department, the leader highlighted that a cultural diversity team delivers absolute business advantages in terms of marketing the product in the local market. He believed that it is better for personnel management because team members do not need to deal with office things like gossip. Every individual grasps the opportunity to learn different knowledge in different ways so that their careers can be pushed forward as they are confident to be in a multinational team.

The shifting from working under the same roof to the virtual environment helps the company save a lot of costs. It lowers overhead costs for the business. The cost of leasing office, utilities, real estate, etc. is no longer the concern of the company even though the company does rent a small place to make company headquarters. Even in this situation, the CEO said that it is quite a relief that he does not need to run after the operating fee but spending more time on the work quality and handling his employees online. On the other hand, making everything virtually also quite a challenge to the company because of the data security and compliance issues. The company goes completely online with valuable IT information stored remotely, he is still trying daily to protect the safety of the company and avoid some serious repercussions.

The communication part of the virtual team was found to weigh more challenges than benefits. Despite the convenience of technology that makes the communication process easier, some other issues related raises. For example, according to the CEO, when interacting virtually, less cohesiveness is produced than communicating face-to-face. This is relatively coherent to the study of James-Tanny, Huettnner, and Brown that approximately 70 percent of the information exchanged is non-verbal. Sometimes, virtual employees do not understand each other and show no indicators to build relationships together. The research in the theoretical framework shows that trust establishment is created when they find the feeling of trust to the partners. However, it seems so hard for virtual team players to find this as almost all the meetings conducted are to exchange business purposes. Another disadvantage pointed out was social isolation. Lack of team spirit leads to the lack of trust in each other, stated by the Community Manager. Because everything is virtual,

there are not so many opportunities for employees to gather for such coffee table conversations that effectively boost the human collaboration.

5.3 Skills of leader in the virtual environment

All three participants are addressed by the question "What are the skills needed in a virtual company?" and got quite expected answers. Although in the theoretical background, the author divided into two different parts: traditional organisation and virtual organisation, all the interviewees are working in the remote and their answers are considered only in the online context.

The CEO described that the true leader is firstly a connector. This idea is coherent to the "Leader" puzzle of Fisher, M. & Fisher, K. He stated that it is crucial for the team leader to have the capability to unite all the remote members to the encouragement and motivation to achieve the goals of the organisation. He also commented on the position of a leader in a virtual team. A virtual leader with good leadership is to take responsibility for the business growth spiritually. It means that he gives everyone the equality to contribute to the company. This view adapts to the concept of "boundary-less organisation" drawn by Jack Welch.

The competence "business analyser" of being a successful leader is in coherence with the skills brought up by all the interviewees. The leader is the communicator. The Digital Marketing Leader illustrated that as his department requires a full percentage of virtual technology to develop, it is difficult sometimes to convey his messages of business change and requirements. So as a team leader, he needs to integrate the skills to interact to all the members and ensure that everyone is on the same stage.

The CEO said in his interview that to have good leadership in a team, especially in teleworking context, you need to make your people believe in you, not only by the title. That is the difference between manager and leader. You lead people but you do not. Sometimes, with the leader's handful of experiences, it is more effective to set the examples by yourself before telling your employees to do it. His thought is an alliance with the aspect of "Living Example" by Fisher & Fisher in theoretical knowledge.

Leading virtually is different from leading those people in the same place. The leader is the motivator. There are some unexpected obstacles happened that the leader never knows. The Digital Marketing Leader illustrated that the team was once brought into a small conflict because people said that they felt not being listened to. Although it occurred in a short time and was handled cleverly by the team leader, a gap of team development was created leading to the bad

performance of the team. So he highlighted the view that everyone should not be ignored, even in the smallest issues. Leaders should not see themselves higher than other colleagues but as a friend. It would be easier to build trust, which is absolutely important in the virtual context. Hence, the two elements of Fisher & Fisher "Barrier Buster" and "Coach" are illustrated clearly under the sharing of the Digital Marketing Leader. It also integrates with the five traits of a successful coach by the Academy of Leadership Coaching.

The CEO shared his experience on the technical issues of the online platform that the company regularly use to communicate and eventually highlighted the importance of providing available facilities for virtual employees to innovate. It is the mission of the leader to make the employees feel valuable to freely develop within the company environment. It is the "Facilitator" role according to the concept in the theoretical section.

Finally, to point forwards the "result catalyst" in the competencies of an effective virtual team leader, the author states the view of the Community Manager. She said that the leader should deliver the team goal very clear to each individual so that they understand and start moving towards the goal. And instead of commanding team players with compulsory order, it is wiser to respect, listen and collaborate with them as a colleague.

5.4 Roles of leader in the virtual environment

Discussing the roles of a leader in the communication part of the leadership, the Digital Marketing Leader emphasised the core function of its as mentioned in the above section. He stated that a leader needs to be a skilled communicator at both organisational and team levels. Being in the leader position, a person should always express ideas, opinions clearly and share information comprehensively. The leader is the connector between a lot of people in an organisation, among customers and stakeholders as well. Therefore, it is critical for the leader to know how to listen to the right trait of the problem. Listening is an essential skill for the leader, the CEO stated. He shared that when you listen well, you get the bigger picture of an issue and understand other's perspectives. It gives you a clue about finding the root of the problem rather than the problem itself. When you know the core of its, finding solutions would be much effective and meaningful to the persons in need. This idea is compliant with the communication piece in the three C's of Virtual Leadership.

The CEO stated that in the virtual company, the management role of a leader is the key to smooth business growth. Although it is different between being a leader and manager, the leader often

uses managerial skills when it comes to the professional field. The leader needs to represent the organisational goal to the entire team and ensure that it is accomplished efficiently. Because everyone is not the same in goal setting, they come to the business with their ambitions. So the job of the leader is to understand theirs and reconcile personal goals with organisational goals to help the management job easier. Besides setting goals, the CEO especially pointed out another interesting feature. In the management roles, the leader not only needs to manage the team goal, but he also needs vision. A good leader must have a picture in the mind about the future of the company, where the team is heading to and how to reach the destination. That is the company strategy and once you have it clear in your mind, you would know how to make the best use of your potential employees to move the company forwards. The leader is not accidentally the highest level in an organisation. They are trusted by other colleagues to deliver the company mission. Being a leader is not difficult, but being a good leader is not easy, said the CEO.

In reference to the adaptability of the leader, all the interviewees indicated that they have never experienced the gender bias in the company, probably at least in their career. However, they all stressed that the gender bias should be highlighted and eradicated immediately when seeing an indicator of its. The Digital Marketing Leader shared his view on the cultural adaptability within a multinational team. He stated that it is necessary to understand all the member's cultural backgrounds. For example, one of the conflicts happened most frequently is the fight of work schedules. Employees in Asia has very different working styles and timetables for the Western people. They would mostly prefer to work as long as they can and are reachable even in the weekend while it is almost inaccessible to the people in the Western countries during that time as they consider it as a relaxing time. The CEO shared one experience that once time, the website went down completely during the weekend and the responsible person is in the "flight mode" at that time. He eventually had to have his own relatives to fix it temporarily and waited until Monday morning to have it completed again by that person. Afterward, he shared that he had a lesson to always have the people available or at least a contingency plan because everyone has their view and opinion. People could not deny one's culture and need to accept it when you cooperate with them. Under certain situations, the leader should have the flexibility to move forwards and improvise accordingly.

6 CONCLUSIONS

This article answers the research questions "What are the benefits and challenges working in the virtual environment?" and "What are the roles of a leader in leading virtual team?".

For the first question, based on both the theoretical backgrounds and findings in the empirical study, the author concludes that the benefits and challenges of working virtually remain in both humans and the work itself, mainly in the management process and the team communication. In terms of team communication, the first benefit found is that the diversity of cultural and educational backgrounds brings the richness of human capital and business advantages for the organisation. However, it is concluded that communication in a virtual environment gives more challenges that can lead to less cohesiveness and social isolation. The lack of trust is another drawback. Mentioning the management aspect, the lower overhead costs for the organisation is one of the main highlighted benefits while data security and network stability remain the concern for a virtual team.

Based on all the benefits and challenges of working virtually, virtual leaders are expected to have several roles in team development and project management. Concerning the human factor, the leader is not only the highest position in the team, but he also acts as a connector within the team members to help individuals collaborate smoothly. The team leader should be able to adapt flexibly to the unexpected cultural difficulties and differences from their team members. He also needs to have skills of being a coach with the willingness to be the motivator to other team members whenever needed. From the project management perspective, a good leader plays the role of a team booster with clear goal setting and team vision to make the best use of the potential in team players in order to move the virtual company forward.

Overall, both theories explained and empirical findings illustrate that leading virtually would impose the virtual leader to have more communication skills because leading in a virtual context offer a more challenging job comparing to the traditional physical way of leading. The challenges lay not only in the professional job but also in the psychological and social perspectives.

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Virtual team

- What are the features of an effective virtual team?
- What are the benefits of working virtually? For example, in the human perspective and project management perspective.
- And what are the following challenges?

Virtual leader

- What are the leadership skills needed for a good leader in a virtual company?
- What are the roles of leader in the virtual team? For example, when dealing with team members and when dealing with the project.