

Online Surveys as a Management Tool: Monitoring Multicultural Virtual Team Processes



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Introduction

Collaboration across distributed business units increasing

- ~50% of organizations use virtual teams (VTs)
- >2/3 of multinational corporations rely on VTs (Society for HRM, 2012)

The Problem:

- Managers challenged to identify & cope with VT issues before they hamper performance (proactive intervention)

Potential Solution:

- Online survey platforms can also serve as a management feedback instrument

This study investigates the impact of periodic reflection using an online survey platform on performance & member satisfaction within multicultural VTs (MVTs)

Key Concepts & Questions

MVT *Set of interdependent individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds connected, to some degree, via CMC technologies across geo, org &/or functional boundaries where their combined knowledge & skills are required to accomplish org goal(s)* (eg. Garrison et al, 2010; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999)

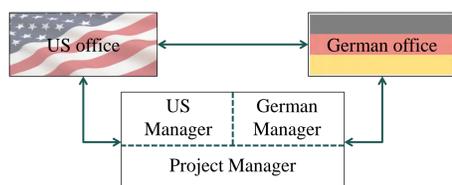
Advantages	Disadvantages
• Flexibility	• Communication
• Responsiveness	• Trust
• Lower Costs	• Accountability
• Resource Allocation	• (Mis)understanding
• Creativity	• Productivity

Proactive Intervention *Planned action initiated by a team leader or manager at key moments to address potentially disruptive issues before they escalate* (eg. Mitchell, 2012; Thomas & Bostrom, 2010)

How much proactive intervention is enough to impact team performance? Is more necessarily better?

Sample

- 22 self directed MVTs (n= 161) & 3 managers
 - 6 – 10 members per team
- Large MNC with offices in US & Germany
 - Team members located in both countries



- Lingua franca for the project was English
- 65% of participants were non-native speakers
- Members came from 27 different countries
 - USA 35%; Germany 26%
 - 4% - China, Mexico, Saudi Arabia
 - 3% - Cameroon
 - 2% - France, India, Iran, Norway, Pakistan, Russia
 - 1% - Brazil, Bulgaria, Columbia, Ecuador, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Jamaica, Jordan, Morocco, Peru, Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey

The Experiment

Controls implemented to focus on impact of periodic reflection on performance & satisfaction

- Teams assigned a similar task
- Teams given identical resources, training, support & deadlines
- Teams grouped into 3 subsets

	Weekly Online Surveys (SurveyMonkey)	Frequency	Interim Survey; Self / Peer Evaluation	Final Survey; Self / Peer Evaluation
Control Group (8 teams)	NO	0	NO	YES
Test Group 1 (7 teams)	YES	1 / week	YES	YES
Test Group 2 (7 teams)	YES	2 / week	YES	YES

Team Members

- Intra-group heterogeneity (home country & native language) varied from 50% German / 50% American to each team member coming from a different country
- Inter-group patterns of heterogeneity similar
- No prior work history among the members

H1 *Teams whose members periodically reflect on the project perform better than teams that do not.*

Measurement:

- Country manager output evaluation
- Project manager intervention with big discrepancies
- Scale (1 = excellent; 5 = inferior); 2.5 quality threshold

H2 *Members who periodically reflect on the project experience greater personal satisfaction than those who do not.*

Measurement:

- 4-item scale = 1 factor (Principle Component Analysis explains 68.4% of the variance)
 - I enjoy working with my teammates (0.884)
 - This project was a worthwhile experience (0.866)
 - This experience is important to my professional development (0.800)
 - Our team worked well together (0.750)

H3_a *The frequency with which reflection occurs impacts overall team performance.*

H3_b *The frequency with which reflection occurs impacts individual member satisfaction.*

Results

T-tests compare team **performance** between groups

Comparison	Mean Difference	t	P value
Control Group – Test Group 1	0.279	2.882	0.003
Control Group – Test Group 2	0.250	2.356	0.010
Test Group 1 – Test Group 2	-0.029	-0.285	0.776

H1 SUPPORTED

Significant difference in performance between control group & both test groups (Test Gp1 & Test Gp2 p<0.01)

T-tests compare member **satisfaction** between groups

Comparison	Mean Difference	t	P value
Control Group – Test Group 1	-0.640	-3.376	0.001
Control Group – Test Group 2	-0.321	-1.507	0.068
Test Group 1 – Test Group 2	0.319	2.028	0.046

H2 PARTIALLY SUPPORTED

Significant difference in performance between control group & Test Gp1 (p<0.001); Difference not significant with Test Gp2

Frequency found to impact satisfaction but not performance
H3_a NOT SUPPORTED

No significant difference in performance between Test Gp1 & Test Gp2

H3_b SUPPORTED

Significant difference in satisfaction between Test Gp1 & Test Gp2 (p<0.05)

Significance

- Online survey platform value extends beyond traditional market research applications
- Powerful management tool for proactive intervention in MVTs
 - Harnesses the potential of reflective learning so team members stay grounded
 - Better communication; increased trust; more accountability; fewer misunderstandings; better performance
- Too much of a good thing isn't good!
 - Satisfaction becomes frustration
 - Reflection loses value when it becomes busy work

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