Leading Dynamic Virtual Teams:
The Case of Changing Membership

Petros Chamakiotis
University of Sussex
P.Chamakiotis@sussex.ac.uk

Niki Panteli
Royal Holloway University of London
Niki.Panteli@rhul.ac.uk

Abstract

Virtual teams have gained significant attention within the recent information systems literature. These teams are often globally distributed — also referred to as global virtual teams (GVTs) — and comprise geographically, organizationally, and temporally dispersed members who collaborate in technology-mediated environments and may never meet face-to-face. GVTs are known for their unique characteristics, for example dispersion, increased heterogeneity, and changing membership across their lifecycle. Scholars agree that these unique characteristics raise unprecedented challenges, such as that of effective leadership, among others. Leadership can effectively contribute to the establishment of group norms and explicit policies and enable coordination among GVT members' interactions. However, despite the growing popularity of GVTs, empirical research on leadership in this context has remained limited. How does changing membership in GVTs influence leadership role and behavior? And how can the GVT leader(s) build cohesiveness and coordination when new members join sometimes on a regular basis, disrupting the 'normal' GVT lifecycle? What are the implications of changing membership for team adaptation? In this abstract, we are interested in exploring the above research questions.

Thus far, we have conducted a systematic literature review in the areas of GVTs, leadership, and team adaptation in order to develop the above research questions, and we have also started to collect data. Given the newness of our study and nature of our research questions, the qualitative case study approach has been selected. Phase 1, which has already been completed, involved interviews with 10 GVT members in a Fortune 100 organization in the financial services industry. Phase 2, which will be taking place in early autumn, will involve a comparative study with 50 participants in GVTs with changing membership from two selected organizations. Thematic analysis will serve as our analytical approach.

Our Phase 1 findings make three contributions: they (a) reveal what team adaptation with regard to changing membership looks like in the GVT context; (b) identify challenges associated with this; and (c) explain how leadership can be exercised to support effective team adaptation in cases of changing membership. These preliminary findings have begun to hint at contradictions with relevant literature arguing that shared leadership might be more suitable in GVT environments. At the TREO talk session, we will present our theoretical foundations and the findings of the study so far, and we will seek to get feedback on our forthcoming steps as we are conducting Phase 2 of our study.