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The Impact of Cross-Cultural Communication on Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Global Virtual Teams

A Case Study from a Nordic Multinational Company

Master's Thesis
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Abstract

Due to the far-reaching impacts of globalization, rapid technological advancements, as well as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations are increasingly employing Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) to unite diverse talents across geographical boundaries. The distinct nature of GVTs brings about new and unique challenges, particularly related to communication. Moreover, fostering Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), which refers to voluntary, discretionary proactive actions that benefit the organization, is proven to be more difficult in a virtual work environment. This thesis aims to explore the impact of cross-cultural communication on OCB in GVTs. The main objective is to understand how cultural diversity and digital communication influence employees' behavior within their respective GVT. Specifically, the study focuses on their willingness to engage in proactive activities that contribute to organizational success.

The research methodology employed semi-structured interviews with seven participating employees from a single GVT within a multinational organization based in the Nordics. These participants represented diverse nationalities, backgrounds, work arrangements and work experiences, forming a representative sample and glimpse into current trends in organizational behavior and the future of work. Thematic analysis was used to identify and explore key themes arising from the interview data.

The research revealed that cross-cultural communication plays a significant role in shaping OCB behaviors within GVTs. First, participants acknowledged that language proficiency and cultural understanding influenced their ability to build trust, collaborate, and engage in prosocial OCB. Secondly, the study highlighted the subjective nature of productivity and its potential cultural implications, emphasizing the importance of aligning work arrangements with individual preferences. Lastly, findings revealed a dual effect of adopting a lingua franca as a common language. It can mitigate communication barriers but at the same time have negative consequences when individuals have differing levels of proficiency in the language.

The study suggests that organizations should adopt a nuanced approach to enhance OCB in GVTs, acknowledging that both individual and cultural factors influence employee behavior. Promoting cultural competency, providing language training, and creating a supportive virtual work environment can foster better communication which can lead to increased OCB. This thesis contributes to the growing body of research on OCB and virtual team dynamics, offering practical implications for organizations thrive in the dynamic landscape of the global business environment.

Keywords global virtual teams, cross-cultural communication, organizational citizenship behavior, digital communication

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1 INTRODUCTION

Across the world today, organizations are shifting towards more flexible work environments where remote work and virtual meetings are becoming the norm. This hybrid work model presents better opportunities for organizations to enrich their diversity through hiring individuals from various locations and backgrounds (Lund et al., 2021). As organizations hire employees from diverse geographical locations, it increases the presence of cultural diversity within work teams (Ozimek, 2020).

Consequently, this has led to organizations becoming multinational and creating global virtual teams (GVTs) that are more geographically dispersed whereby interactions and work activities are mostly done remotely and virtually. A survey showed that 89% of professional white-collar employees have 'at least occasionally' worked in GVTs (Taras *et al.*, 2021). Certainly, having culturally diverse and inclusive work teams provide many potential benefits. Cultural diversity in a workplace can result in having a broader knowledge base as well as leveraging multiple perspectives and skills (Oetzel, 2005). On the other hand, it can also bring about many challenges and problems such as an increased likelihood of miscommunication and dysfunction (Martin, 2014).

The rapid rise of virtual remote work can be partially attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, where the already existing trend of virtual meetings and remote work simply accelerated as physical spaces shut down (Lund *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, advancements in computer-mediated communication systems (CMCS), such as emails, video-conferencing, and instant messaging, facilitated the use of technologies in virtual work. Yet, despite improvements in technology and virtual communication allowing individuals across time zones and geographical locations to collaborate, existing issues related to communication and management continue to persist (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999). Additionally, new challenges related to work in a digital environment have risen.

Communication challenges related to virtual work revolve around the lack of non-verbal cues and the need for additional effort to establish trust and rapport (Ferrell & Kline, 2018). Furthermore, the usual challenges related to managing diversity increases in virtual work as it is more difficult to foster a sense of community with shared values amongst remote employees due to the nature of virtual participation (Elliott & Scacchi, 2003). This in turn

can hinder the formation and expression of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) amongst employees in virtual teams.

Organ (1988, p.4) defined OCB as employees engaging in "behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of an organization". OCB occurs when employees exhibit pro-active activities and undertake voluntary services with no additional reward for the betterment of the organization. Such examples include cooperating well with other employees despite issues, aiding in orienting new employees into the company, or offering to help others when seeing them struggle in their duties (Harper, 2015). Therefore, communication plays a key role in building relationships amongst employees and fostering employees' OCB to contribute to the organization's overall performance (Yildirim, 2014).

Despite extensive research and studies related to GVTs, cross-cultural communication and OCB (Elliott & Scacchi, 2003; Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999; Yildirim, 2014), there is a significant gap in research that combines all three of these topics. Particularly, there is a lack of research exploring the role that CMCS have on cross-cultural communication within tech companies, which are known for their culturally diverse workforce. Afterall, an individual's cultural background forms their attitudes and values which in turn directly impacts their communication behavior and decisions (Oetzel, 1998). It is then critical to understand how multiple cultures and heterogeneity within GVTs impact group interaction and performance.

Furthermore, the accelerated impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has on remote working and GVTs have resulted in organizations facing challenges related to the scale and nature of workforce transitions (Lund *et al*., 2021). As organizations diverge from traditional work models, they must navigate the complexities that remote work, digital collaboration and shifting skill requirements have on their cross-cultural workforce. The full impact of the pandemic has yet to be assessed, but the journey ahead is no doubt challenging as organizations globally are working to align their workforce with the evolving demands of a rapidly changing work landscape.

1.1 Research Gap & Objectives

Based on the increasing trends in the global business environment, this thesis seeks to better understand individual employees' experiences of communicating in cross-cultural global virtual teams (GVTs) and whether they engage or show forms of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) towards each other. By integrating the three elements of GVTs, cross-cultural communication and OCB, an understanding can be developed on how cultural heterogeneity influences virtual group communication and OCB in the context of a multinational tech company based in Nordic Europe.

Moreover, studies around cultural heterogeneity in organizations tend to only focus on the negative effects. An analysis of 1141 articles over a 24-year period that are published in the Journal of International Business Studies showed that there is a disproportionate focus on adverse outcomes associated with cultural differences (Stahl & Tung, 2015). To address the imbalance regarding the prevailing emphasis on the negative consequences of cultural differences in GVTs, this study also aimed to provide potential positive effects of leveraging cross-cultural diversity in GVTs. By broadening the limited perspective, a more expansive understanding of the mechanisms that allow organizations to better leverage the advantages offered by cultural diversity can be achieved.

It is also worth noting that there is limited research in these research topics in the context of the post-pandemic era. The global nature of the pandemic affected organizations and individuals alike, providing a common context for studying the widespread rise of global virtual teams and collaboration. Thus, there is an increased need for research on how the phenomena have altered ways of working to allow for better decision-making and strategy development. There is opportunity to generate replicable findings by leveraging the unique circumstances and shared experiences brought by the pandemic. As organizations adapt to these new work models, new research can inform companies on future practices and interventions related to organizational behavior.

This thesis has both practical and academic objectives. The distinct characteristics of the global tech industry make it the ideal candidate for further research and insight.. Academically, the thesis can supplement existing research by providing a better integration of themes mentioned. Moreover, with big crisis events like the COVID-19 pandemic having

accelerated the future of work, this thesis aims to provide a reflection on whether existing research still maintains all of its relevance. On a practical standpoint, the topics related to OCB and cross-cultural virtual team communication are highly relevant. A further objective for this thesis is then to provide clarity and understanding for the participating organization and others in the tech industry on the changing dynamics of their ever-increasing employee diversity.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis combines the following factors to assess the impact that virtual work has on cross-cultural team communication and organizational citizenship behavior within a single organization based in Finland. The main research question is:

What is the impact of cross-cultural communication on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within global virtual teams (GVTs)?

To support the main research question, 3 sub-questions were further developed and posed below:

R1. What are the unique challenges and opportunities presented by virtual work teams in a post pandemic context?

R2. How do cultural and linguistic differences influence communication within cross-cultural virtual work teams?

R3. To what extent does the virtual context of cross-cultural work teams influence employee organization identity and impact the prevalence of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)?

1.3 Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured into six sections, addressing the aforementioned research questions in order to build an understanding on the connections and interplay of communication within cross-cultural GVTs. Section 1 serves as the introduction, establishing the research background, objectives, and research questions. It provides a foundation to the thesis,

highlighting the importance of effective communication in virtual teams, the challenges posed by cross-cultural differences, and the significance of OCB in a post-pandemic context. Section 2 elaborates on these topics further where a comprehensive literature review is divided into four parts. The first part examines the concept of global virtual teams, discussing their characteristics, advantages, and challenges. The second part explores cross-cultural communication and the impact of cultural and linguistic differences on inter-unit communication. The third part focuses on OCB, and its potential influence on virtual team dynamics whilst the fourth part analyzes the relationship of OCB and communication within cross-cultural GVTs.

Section 3 outlines the research conducted to gain firsthand understanding of the research themes. The methodology and data collection are discussed in detail, touching upon the participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used in this thesis. Section 4 presents the findings from the data. These findings showcase the experiences and challenges faced by interview participants who are part of the same virtual work team in their multinational organization.

Section 5 discusses the findings in light of the research questions. This section provides a more nuanced understanding of insights derived from the findings, discovering any trends and how it relates to existing literature. Lastly, section 6 concludes the thesis by providing a summary of the entire paper, listing implications and limitations of the study, and suggesting future avenues of research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to provide a comprehensive review of existing literature and research revolving around communication, cross-cultural global virtual teams (GVTs) and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within organizations. Hence, this literature review will be structured around the four key phenomena - GVTs, cross-cultural communication, OCB and their impact on cross-cultural work teams. The aim of the literature review and the overall research objective would be to examine the link between the four topics.

The section starts with an introduction to the concept of global virtual work teams. The unique challenges and opportunities of such work teams will be thoroughly discussed in Section 2.1.. This will continue in Section 2.2., which focuses on the role of cross-cultural communication within GVTs where the impact of cultural and linguistic differences amongst team members and how they communicate are highlighted. Section 2.3. introduces the concept of OCB and its role in long term employee performance and team effectiveness. Lastly, Section 2.4. combines the concepts from previous sections, summarizing the connection between cross-cultural GVTs and OCB.

2.1 Global Virtual Teams

In recent decades, rapid technological advancements have led to increased globalization and virtualization, prompting companies worldwide to adapt to these changes to varying extents. The new phase of globalization that has emerged is often referred to by academics as digital globalization, distinguished by a massive increase in the flow of data and information (Burlacu et al., 2022).This surge in digital globalization has reshaped the way organizations operate, with many embracing the employment of GVTs to harness diverse talents across geographical boundaries. However, the distinct nature of GVTs from traditional work teams presents new and unique challenges, particularly in the realm of communication and management.

CMCS have become integral to daily business operations. The advancements in CMCS have greatly facilitated virtual work, enabling employees from different time zones and locations to collaborate effectively (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999). Consequently, organizations have

increasingly embraced GVTs as a means of conducting their business (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005).

There are multiple definitions on what constitutes a GVT. Some refer to the term as co-located team members who employ virtual means of coordinating their work activities (Griffith *et al.*, 2003). For instance, despite working from the same location, sharing documents online. However, the more commonly used definition for virtual teams highlights geographic dispersion as the defining characteristic. Townsend, De Marie and Hendrickson (1998: p.17) defined virtual work teams as "groups of geographically and/or organizationally dispersed coworkers that are assembled using a combination of telecommunications and information technologies to accomplish a variety of critical tasks". This is supported by Cohen and Gibson (2003) who emphasized physical distance as a key factor of global virtual teams. In line with the others, Bell and Kozlowski (2002) highlighted the importance of virtual teams crossing boundaries of space. Thus, this paper refers to GVTs as:

❖ Teams where members make up an interdependent unit, sharing responsibilities and work toward common goals within their organization
❖ Teams where members are geographically dispersed across multiple locations
❖ Teams where members rely primarily on digital technology and forms of CMCS as a means of communication and collaboration

The GDT (Global Dispersed Teams) Framework (Figure 1) proposed by Cohen and Gibson (2003), is a framework that takes account the unique characteristics and challenges faced by teams that are dispersed geographically and work across different cultures and/or time zones. The figure below summarized how the degree of virtuality and degree of differences alters how design factors (i.e. context, group structure, technology, people process) contribute to enabling conditions (i.e. shared understanding, integration, trust). In turn, these enabling conditions influence the level of effectiveness of outcomes (Cohen & Gibson, 2003).
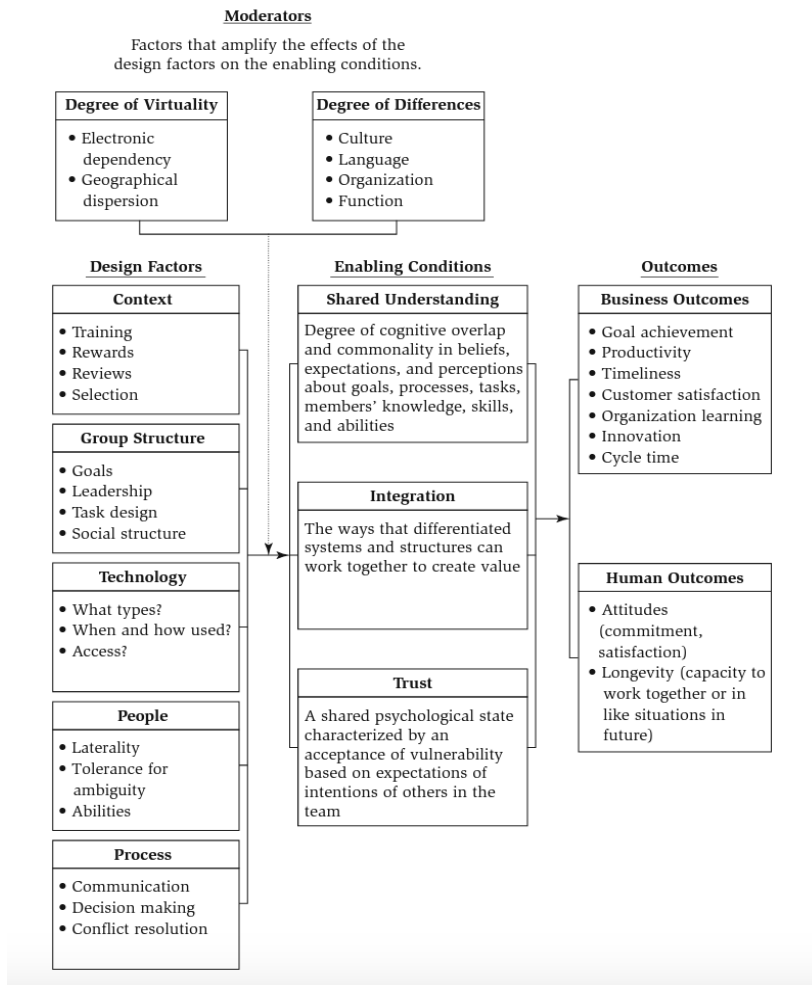
Figure 1. Cohen & Gibson (2003) Globally Dispersed Team (GDT) Framework

To understand the interplay between design factors and enabling conditions, the framework (Figure 1) highlights how context, group structure, technology and people processes lead to the creation of favorable enabling conditions of shared understanding, integration and trust to thrive within virtual teams. When enabling conditions are met, positive outcomes related to business functions (i.e. goal achievement, productivity, timeliness, customer satisfaction, organization learning, innovation, cycle time) and team members themselves (i.e. commitment, satisfaction, longevity) surface (Cohen & Gibson, 2003).

2.1.1 Characteristics of Virtual Work Teams

There are fundamental differences in the nature of GVTs and traditional face to face teams in regard to their competencies, roles, communication, collaboration and trust. Due to spatial separation, members in virtual teams tend to work apart from one another. Hence, they mostly interact through CMCS such as email and video conferencing (Popescu *et al*., 2012).

In fact, it is mandatory for virtual teams to rely on computer mediated communication (Morgan *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, most virtual work tends to lack the hierarchies of traditional organizations as team leaders have less control over their group members digitally (Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Popescu *et al*., 2012).

One known model to illustrate virtual team competencies is by Hertel, Konradt and Voss (2006). They developed a conceptual model called Virtual Team Competency Inventory (VTCI). The VTCI model proposes a set of variables including personality traits such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and emotional stability, which are relevant to both teamwork and taskwork aspects. These attributes, along with cognitive abilities, knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs), are factors that can influence potential and actual team performance in a virtual setting. The VTCI model is visualized in *Figure 2* below.
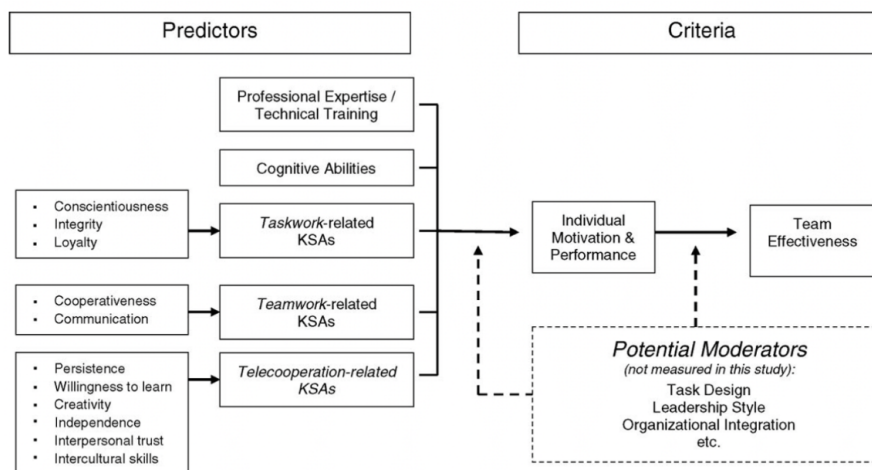
Figure 2. Hertel, Konradt & Voss (2006)'s predictors and criteria of Virtual Team Competency Inventory (VTCI).

Taskwork related KSAs revolve around the reliability of the team member whilst teamwork related KSAs involve member's social skills. Telecooperation related KSAs are particularly important in virtual teams, as their competencies such as intercultural skills, independence and interpersonal trust are vital in virtual team success (Hertel *et al*., 2006; Krawczyk-Bryłka, 2017). Hertel *et al*. (2006) discovered that certain skills considered vital in face-to-face communication (i.e. being quick witted) may not be crucial for virtual teams. However, the study suggested that loyalty and cooperativeness are significant predictors of team

performance in GVTs, showing that similar competencies to traditional teams are still required for virtual teamwork (ibid.).

2.1.2 Challenges of Global Virtual Teams

The COVID-19 pandemic has only increased the amount of GVTs as organizations were forced to adopt remote working very quickly once physical spaces were shut down, further emphasizing the role that information and communication technologies play in daily business activities. Though digital globalization has provided many advantages as highlighted above, GVTs face additional challenges on top of the typical issues faced in managing traditional teams. Therefore, despite how technology has facilitated virtual work, they simultaneously present new problems not typically found in traditional face-to-face (FtF) teams as summarized below.

Most commonly, virtual teams have a variety of communication-related challenges. The level of quality in communication depends on the type of CMCS used. Some CMCS, particularly text-based ones such as email or instant messaging, severely lack in their ability to convey non-verbal cues such as facial expression, gestures and voice inflections (Warkentin *et al.*, 1997). Such non-verbal cues tend to get lost or distorted in virtual team environments, resulting in potential miscommunication and misinterpretation of messages (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002).

In addition, CMCS increases communication traffic within virtual teams. As most messages are not exchanged in real time, team members may experience information overload from the influx of communication they receive (Hiltz & Turoff, 1985). This is due to the vast amount of disjointed topics that are not related to each other yet communicated simultaneously through the CMCS used. Hence, team members often experience information overload, where information comes in too rapidly for them to process effectively without distraction (Klapp, 1986). The stress may lead to selective perception as team members' unconsciously omit information that is difficult to assimilate (Edmunds & Morris, 2000). This in turn can create misunderstandings as individual members may have different ideas on which information is more important. At the same time, information overload in virtual teams is further exacerbated as team members often feel the need to compensate by writing more detailed messages in their communication (Hiltz & Johnson, 1990). This

creates a self-perpetuating pattern where team members are consistently burdened with the task of processing increasingly complex and lengthy messages.

Additionally, the distortion of important contextual information may not be as effectively conveyed or accurately perceived in a virtual team setting due to virtual teams having to rely heavily on CMCS (Dubrovsky et al., 1991; Morgan et al., 2014). For instance, distorting information regarding the team members' social status or their level of expertise may be distorted in a virtual setting. Such contextual cues are typically more identifiable in a traditional face-to-face team setting. The lack of contextual information conveyed can then lead to implications in team dynamics, hindering collaboration, decision making processes, and overall team performance (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002).

Moreover, the absence of social context can obstruct trust building amongst team members and colleagues (Järvenpää et al., 1998). Building trust in virtual teams is more difficult due to the barriers of geography, time zones and cultures (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). For virtual teams, first impressions strongly matter as it will be the determinant factor of trust later down the line (Järvenpää et al., 1998). The obstacles to trust building eventually leads to issues in relationship development amongst virtual team members. This produces negative outcomes such as poor morale, reduced creativity, and bad decision making (Walther & Burgoon, 1992). Effective communication then becomes even more crucial in overcoming the challenges of building trust in virtual teams.

Lastly, an additional challenge faced by virtual team members has to do with the technology and CMCS utilized. Team members who demonstrate proficiency in using the technology and CMCS often receive preferential treatment amongst their colleagues (Townsend et al., 1998). In contrast, those who struggle to acquire and adapt such technological skills may face difficulties related to productivity and communication. This may pose a rising issue concerning a hidden power structure within virtual teams, where members possessing more advanced technological skills have greater influence than their counterparts.

2.1.3   Post-Pandemic Global Virtual Teams

Initially, GVTs were designed for temporary projects (Hansen et al., 2012). They were created as a means to address specific tasks that required individuals from different geographical locations. However, over time, there is a noticeable shift as global virtual work

teams are emerging to be the primary means of work within many organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption and acceptance of virtual and remote work arrangements as evidenced by the fact that 12.3% of the employed workforce in Europe now usually work remotely, a big jump for the constantly stable 5% the previous decade (Eurostat, 2021).

Despite the World Health Organization (WHO) stating that the pandemic is no longer a global emergency (Gumbrecht *et al*., 2023), organizations are still employing various means of remote working or hybrid work arrangements. Offering employees the flexibility to work off site and using CMCS or other digital technologies as a primary form of communication and collaboration is becoming the norm. Finland, for instance, has one of the highest share of remote workers in Europe, where 25.1% of employees regularly work remotely, followed by Luxembourg and Ireland with over 20% as well (McCarthy, 2021).

It is notable how a crisis event like the COVID-19 pandemic have permanently altered the way organizations operate. Alongside the rapid advancements in technology and globalization, there is a significant increase in the adoption of GVTs. Building upon the aforementioned section on GVTs, the paper will explore how the pandemic has further shaped the dynamics of such teams. This leads to the development of the first research question as follows:

R1. What are the unique challenges and opportunities presented by virtual work teams in a post pandemic context?

While existing literature has shed light on the many challenges and opportunities that virtual work teams pose, it is essential to examine if the pandemic has changed them in any significant way. By delving into the following research question, this paper aims to look into if any new challenges have risen, or whether new opportunities have been created for virtual work teams. Based on the answers, further insights can be gained into the evolving nature of GVTs and how organizations can navigate the complexities of virtual collaboration in a post-pandemic era.

2.2 Cross-Cultural Communication

As organizations expand their operations globally, the diverse cultural backgrounds of team members become increasingly prominent. National culture plays a significant role in shaping the communication dynamics within GVTs, influencing language preferences, communication styles, and behavioral norms (Hofstede, 1980; Kozan & Ergin, 1998; Gudykunst, 2003). Additionally, the adoption of English as a lingua franca within multinational organizations raises important considerations for effective cross-cultural communication. Language barriers, cultural differences, and the need to bridge communication gaps pose unique challenges in GVTs. This section explores the impact of national culture, the use of English as a lingua franca, and the complexities of cross-cultural communication on the functioning and effectiveness of GVTs.

2.2.1 National Culture

Although there can be multiple definitions of culture, it can be agreed that culture is a collection of socially constructed values, tools, behaviors and knowledge that arise from group interactions (Kress, 2010, p.14). Hofstede (1980) defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another". Therefore, culture can exist at different levels (i.e. individual, organizational, regional or national) and individuals can find themselves being members of multiple cultures simultaneously. This thesis specifically studied how national cultures and language impact communication behaviors. However, it is acknowledged that national culture plays a role in affecting organizational culture (Gerhart, 2009).

Culture and language, while different, are often grouped closely together. Brown (1994, p.165) posited that language and culture affect one another, having an interconnected bond that cannot be easily disentangled. Each language carries meanings that are associated with their respective culture (Nida, 1998). As language is culture-specific, it can result in completely different meanings to individuals of different cultures. Jiang (2020) presented a compelling metaphor, referring to communication as transportation where language serves as the vehicle and culture acts as the traffic light. Language facilitates communication but culture governs its pace, either expediting or hindering it (ibid.).

Communication behavior is heavily influenced by an individual's cultural background, attitudes, and values (Oetzel, 1998). While linguistic communities often share a common language, it is essential to acknowledge that language and culture are not synonymous (Komissarov, 1991). For instance, Spanish is spoken in various countries, such as Latin America, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, but each country has distinct cultural differences. Furthermore, effective communication is more than verbal expression. It also encompasses non-verbal cues, which are deeply rooted in cultural norms.

Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions and Gudykunst's (2003) work on cross-cultural communication provide background knowledge on how different cultures communicate. Hostede (1980) created a framework around four main cultural dimensions (i.e. *power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism,* and *masculinity versus femininity*) to provide insight on how varying national culture plays into global team dynamics. Additionally, two more dimensions were added in the following years. *Long term versus short term* orientation relates to an individual's preferred focus (the future or the present and past) and *indulgence versus restraint*, which relates to an individual's control towards their desires and gratification (Hofstede, 2011).

These cultural dimensions lead to differing behavior and actions across various cultures. For instance, collectivist versus individualistic cultures have different emotional displays, conflict styles and time orientation, requiring different approaches in communication and interaction (Gudykunst, 2003; Hofstede, 1980). In one study, collectivist Turkish participants were more likely to seek third party help during a conflict to maintain group harmony and cohesiveness whereas individualist American participants preferred direct communication to maximize rewards (Kozan & Ergin, 1998). Another illustration of cultural differences would be the dissimilar uses of hand motions. For Germans it can specify attitude and commitment, amongst French people it signals style and containment and amongst Italians its purpose is for illustration and display (Gao, 2006).

While Hofstede (1980)'s cultural dimensions are still commonly used today, the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) Framework can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how elements of national culture affects employee behavior and work team dynamics. The GLOBE Framework identified nine core dimensions of culture (i.e. *in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, power distance,*

assertiveness, gender egalitarianism, future orientation, humane orientation, performance orientation and uncertainty avoidance) as shown in figure 3 (House *et al*., 2010).

Cultural dimension	Definition
1. Institutional collectivism	The degree to which organisational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward the collective distribution of resources and collective action
2. In-group collectivism	The degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in their organisations or families
3. Power distance	The degree to which members of a society expect and agree that power should be stratified and concentrated at higher levels of an organisation or government
4. Performance orientation	The degree to which an organisation or society encourages and rewards members for performance improvement and excellence
5. Gender egalitarianism	The degree to which a society minimises gender role differences while promoting gender equality
6. Future orientation	The degree to which individuals in organisations or societies engage in future-orientated behaviours such as planning, investing in the future, and delaying individual or collective gratification
7. Humane orientation	The degree to which members of a society encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind to others
8. Assertiveness	The degree to which members of a society are assertive, confrontational or aggressive in social relationships
9. Uncertainty avoidance	The extent to which members of a society seek certainty in their environment by relying on established social norms, rituals and bureaucratic practices

Figure 3. Nine cultural dimensions of the GLOBE framework (House *et al*., 2010)

To effectively differentiate and compare cultures, House *et al*. (2004) grouped the identified 62 societal cultures into ten regional clusters shown in figure 4. These cluster profiles provide a convenient way to view intercultural similarities and differences. Clustering societies aids in understanding how diverse nationalities or cultures may react differently to practices, policies, and procedures. Understanding these clusters is particularly beneficial for multinational organizations navigating diverse cultures while finding a balance between global convergence and local adaptability (House *et al*., 2010).

Cluster name	Countries
Anglo	Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa (white sample), United States
Latin Europe	France, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (French-speaking)
Nordic Europe	Denmark, Finland, Sweden
Germanic Europe	Austria, Germany (former East), Germany (former West), the Netherlands, Switzerland
Eastern Europe	Albania, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Poland, Russia, Slovenia
Latin America	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Columbia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela
Sub-Saharan Africa	Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa (black sample), Zambia, Zimbabwe
Middle East	Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Qatar, Turkey
Southern Asia	India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand
Confucian Asia	China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan

Figure 4. Ten societal clusters in the GLOBE study (House *et al*., 2010)

The key differences identified between Hofstede's study and the GLOBE research centers on the study's respondents, the theoretical approach and the cultural dimensions themselves. In Hofstede's (1980) initial study, respondents were predominantly non-managerial employees from a single multinational company (MNC). In contrast, House et al. 's (2004) study involved managerial employees from 951 MNCs. Furthermore, the GLOBE study was heavily theory-driven and based on extensive academic literature, including Hofstede's (1980) work, while Hofstede did not explicitly follow a theoretical approach (Shi & Wang, 2011). Most notably, House et al. (2010) introduced cultural dimensions at both the organizational and societal levels, such as institutional and in-group collectivism which were not distinguished by Hofstede (1980). Moreover, while Hofstede (1980) simply considered a lack of masculinity attributes as feminine, House et al. (2004) replaced masculinity-femininity by four components (Assertiveness, Performance Orientation, Gender Egalitarianism, Humane Orientation).

Even if the GLOBE framework took inspiration from Hofstede's framework and developed it further, both frameworks can still be used in tandem to provide valuable insights into cultural diversity within cross-cultural teams. The GLOBE framework offers a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to understanding cultural variations, while Hofstede's model focuses on broader dimensions. Combining both frameworks can lead to a deeper understanding of cultural dynamics within multinational organizations.

2.2.2   Lingua Franca

As Spinks and Wells (1997) aptly stated, "physical distance makes effective communication necessary and cultural distance makes effective global communication essential." Thus, given the myriad of cultures that exist and their inherent differences amongst members in GVTs, it becomes crucial to carefully consider effective communication methods. As a response, organizations have made substantial investments in modern communication technologies (i.e. video-conferencing, e-mail networks) which have all contributed to faster, easier, and more secure information flows (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999; Popescu *et al*., 2012). However, these advanced technological tools can still result in communicational issues when language becomes a serious barrier. Hence, the impact of language barriers on effective GVT communication cannot be overlooked.

To address such challenges posed by cultural diversity in GVTs, organizations tend to establish a lingua franca. Seidlhofer's (2011) definition of English as a lingua franca revolves around using English as a medium amongst speakers with different native languages, characterized by its variable and hybrid nature which is adapted to the specific needs and multilingual resources of the business context. A lingua franca allows organizations to adopt a single shared language, serving as a common means of communication. It enables employees from various cultural backgrounds to communicate more effectively, share knowledge, foster a sense of solidarity and reduce potential misunderstandings caused by language barriers (Pullin, 2010). Due to its widespread use, English has become the lingua franca of many organizations worldwide (Ehrenreich, 2010). Companies that make the strategic decision to adopt English as a lingua franca perceive it as a means to gain a competitive advantage. They believe that it allows them to expand their reach to markets outside their base, particularly in cross-cultural mergers and acquisitions, where a shared language can ensure more effective negotiations and cultural integration (Neeley, 2012).

While English may be the primary language in many multinational organizations and the global business environment, it doesn't necessarily result in other languages being unused. Instead, these languages continue to have a significant presence and play a role alongside English in various ways (Ehrenreich, 2010). At an individual level, employees may still communicate in their native language to communicate with colleagues who share the same language. On a social level, the use of multiple languages can create a rich multicultural environment. It allows individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds to share their

opinions and expertise, overcoming "tribal" inclinations, as observed in teams consisting of French and German speaking members (Komoro-Glatz, 2018). Lastly, at the organizational level, multilingualism may be strategically employed to address specific business needs or issues. For example, Nordea, a Finnish-Swedish bank adopted English as its company language after its merger as a means to neutralize a conflict arising from the symbolic significance of choosing one partner's language over the other in a supposed equal merger deal (Björkman et al., 2005).

Additionally, the role of language is often overlooked in the studies of inter-unit communication. Especially within culturally diverse work teams, language has the ability to impose its own structure on communication flows where it can then be either a facilitator, a barrier or a source of power (Marschan-Piekkari et al., 1999). A study showed that individuals with stronger language proficiency tend to wield greater influence amongst their peers, while those with limited skills may find difficulties in establishing rapport and relationships (ibid.).

As a result, the use of English as a lingua franca in cross-cultural GVTs acts as both a facilitator and a barrier, impacting the flow of information and influencing power dynamics among team members. Acknowledging the significance of language in team communication is essential so that effective collaboration can occur within culturally diverse GVTs.

2.2.3   Cross Cultural Communication in Organization

While the adoption of English as a lingua franca has become a common strategy to address communication challenges within multinational organizations, it is essential to recognize that language proficiency alone is not sufficient for effective cross-cultural communication. As the world continues to be highly globalized and organizations continue to expand internationally, individuals are increasingly getting exposed to other cultural backgrounds in their workplaces (Tran, 2016). Therefore, it must be acknowledged that cultural differences encompass more than just language and require both organizations and their employees to navigate diverse values, norms, and communication styles that exist.

The effects of cultural diversity in an organization can either be favorable or unfavorable. A variety of perspectives may enhance performance, particularly in relation to innovation, as

employees gather ideas from a larger range of previous experiences (Salazar & Salas, 2013). Yet, success depends on how well organizations leverage their cultural diversity. After all, to achieve competitive advantage, multinational organizations are dependent on effectively disseminating knowledge across their organization (Solvell & Zander, 1995). Particularly in modern organizations with less-hierarchical structure, it is imperative to understand informal control mechanisms and how they aid in enhancing inter-unit communication and supporting networks of personal relationships (Marschan-Piekkari *et al*., 1999). While a diverse workforce can cultivate a robust knowledge base from its in-house talent, without proper strategic planning, it may instead result in miscommunication, interpersonal conflict, and poor productivity (Martin, 2014).

If done well, a diverse team can be more creative, process facts more effectively, are less likely to fall into the groupthink trap, and have better decisions than their homogeneous counterparts (Taras *et al*., 2021). Diversity fosters creativity within the team as individuals from different cultural backgrounds bring their own unique perspectives, experiences, and knowledge (Leroy *et al.,* 2022). This diversity of viewpoints enhances the team's ability to generate novel ideas and solutions. Similarly, such diversity in viewpoints allows diverse teams to be better equipped at processing facts and information effectively. This broader information processing capacity enables the team to make well-informed decisions based on a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.

Furthermore, diverse teams are less prone to falling into the trap of groupthink, as individuals are more likely to challenge assumptions, fostering a culture of constructive debate (Taras & Rowney, 2007). Groupthink occurs when team members conform to a dominant perspective or avoid dissenting opinions, leading to flawed decision-making and a lack of critical evaluation (ibid.). Ultimately, these factors contribute to better decision-making outcomes for diverse teams compared to homogeneous teams. The different viewpoints and experiences in the team improve discussions, consider more possibilities, and result in stronger and better decisions.

In contrast, there remains an argument that teams with similar cultures, values and attitudes tend to execute tasks more efficiently and make higher quality decisions (Salazar & Salas, 2013). So, while cultural differences bring valuable perspectives, they also bring additional complexities and potential communication barriers for team members (Kayworth & Leidner,

2002). Interactions between cross-cultural team members may be influenced by cultural biases and assumptions, leading to misinterpretations or distortions of information which can negatively affect inter-unit communication (Solomon, 1995). Preconceived notions of different cultures may lead to judgments or biases in interpreting others' behaviors or decisions. These biases can create a lack of trust, misunderstandings, and hinder the development of strong working relationships within the team (Zakaria *et al.*, 2004).

2.2.4   Cross-Cultural Communication in GVTs

Despite being on a smaller scale, GVTs still often span multiple geographical boundaries, resulting in a diverse range of cultural backgrounds among team members. This diversity, while beneficial in many ways, can also complicate communication and work interactions within the GVT (Townsend et al., 1998). Cross-cultural communication then presents significant challenges due to the higher diversity level of team members' ethnic, national, and organizational backgrounds. Cultural values, such as collectivism vs. individualism or long term vs. short term orientation (Hofstede, 1980), shapes how individuals interpret information and process decision-making (Adler, 1997). Hence, the cultural diversity within GVTs can contribute to a wide range of communication challenges. This is due to the variety in each member's diverse communication styles and behaviors that is influenced by cultural differences (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999). In turn, it can prevent GVTs from realizing their full potential (Adler, 1997).

First, as mentioned briefly in a previous section, team members may experience language barriers, preventing them from expressing their voices and ideas accurately (Tran, 2016). With varying levels of richness that CMCS provides, there could be a decrease in the smoothness of communication and understanding (McDonough *et al.*, 2001). Secondly, the differing communication behavior and social norms between cultures can be exacerbated in a virtual context, creating greater potential for misunderstandings and negative conflicts (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999; Scott & Wildman, 2015).

Therefore, the increase in cultural diversity requires team members to have greater communication skills (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). Communication skills such as active listening, clarity, understanding of non-verbal cues, proficiency in virtual communication, open-mindedness and language skills all contribute to effective collaboration and decision-making. Otherwise, the differences in social norms across cultures can further contribute to

misunderstandings and conflicts, creating additional barriers to effective communication (Wildman & Griffith, 2014). Particularly for members in GVTs, it is important to be aware of cultural differences and learn how to communicate with each other, overcoming their differences and leveraging it to the team's advantage (Townsend et al., 1998).

In addition to the challenges of cross-cultural communication, GVTs face the unique context of predominantly communicating online and through computer-mediated communication systems. While advancements in technology have improved digital communication, issues such as information distortion and loss persist, particularly when team members come from different cultures and speak different languages. Despite the convenience and speed of digital communication, nuances, cultural context, and nonverbal cues may be lost, leading to misunderstandings and misinterpretations (Fixman, 1990).

Additionally, the reliance on written text and the absence of face-to-face interaction can further hinder effective communication and complicate the exchange of ideas and information within virtual teams. Conveying non-verbal cues and gestures that are crucial in face-to-face interactions are often lacking in virtual interactions (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). Moreover, cultural differences in body language, facial expressions, and gestures can be easily misunderstood or overlooked in virtual computer-mediated communication, potentially resulting in misinterpretations and communication breakdowns. The lack of non-verbal cues in such virtual settings requires additional effort to establish trust and rapport, highlighting the importance of addressing communication challenges and building strong work relationships (Gajendran et al., 2022).

It is evident that cross-cultural communication plays a vital role in the effectiveness of virtual work teams. The existing literature highlighted has shed light on various challenges and strategies related to cross-cultural communication within virtual work teams. However, there is a lack of discussion surrounding its benefits. Thus, there remains a need to further explore the influence of cultural and linguistic differences on communication dynamics within cross-cultural global virtual teams. Therefore, the second research question is presented below:

R2. How do cultural and linguistic differences influence communication within cross-cultural virtual work teams?

This research question aims to critically examine the specific impact of cultural and linguistic diversity on communication processes, examining how these differences shape the effectiveness and efficiency of communication within virtual teams. Moreover, how using an official company language that is typically not a team member's mother tongue, affects team communication and dynamics. By addressing this question, a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between culture, language, and communication in virtual work teams can be gained.

2.3   Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Overall, cross-cultural communication plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of OCB within diverse work environments. Effective cross-cultural communication enables individuals from different cultural backgrounds to understand and appreciate each other's perspectives, values, and norms. This understanding fosters trust, respect, and positive relationships among team members, which are crucial for the development of OCB.

OCB is defined as when individuals in an organization engage in discretionary behavior outside their formal job description for the betterment of their organization (Organ, 1988). Employees engage in OCB when they take on additional responsibilities or tasks by choice, regardless if they are to be formally rewarded or compensated. Examples of OCB include when employees offer to help and cooperate with others, tolerating inconveniences, taking extra responsibilities, aid in orienting new employees, and keeping up with company affairs (Organ *et al*., 2006; Harper, 2015). Similar to cross-cultural communication, effective management of OCB can yield favorable outcomes for organizations, making it more productive and competitive (Organ *et al.*, 2006).

It is worth noting that individual motives behind engaging in OCB can vary among employees. While some individuals may exhibit OCB out of genuine concern for their organization, others may be driven by personal goals and self-interest. Halbesleben et al. (2010) shed light on this aspect by highlighting that individuals may perceive engaging in OCB as a strategic behavior that can bring personal benefits and advance their own career prospects. Such individuals may view OCB as a way to enhance their reputation, build positive relationships with colleagues, or gain favor from their supervisors. It further

highlights the complex interplay between individual goals and organizational outcomes, requiring a more nuanced understanding of OCB and its motives.

Moreover, cultural context influences and shapes OCB within organizations. Culture can influence what forms of OCB are observed, the frequency and different types of OCB, and the relationship of factors that promote OCB (Podsakoff *et al*., 2000). Therefore, it is essential to understand the connections between OCB and its influencing factors as it generally impacts the success of an organization. The nature of work, whether it be remote or virtual, and the cultural diversity of individuals within an organization, play contributing factors into the overall level of OCB present.

However, existing cross-cultural OCB research has differing findings. For example, Farh et al., (2007) concluded that higher power distance weakens OCB as individuals who defer to authority tend to focus more on formal assignments rather than discretionary proactive behavior. Therefore OCB tends to occur more amongst individuals who are less power oriented. In contrast, other studies suggest that employees may appreciate it when organizations in a high power distance culture offer high levels of support when not required, leading to increased citizenship behaviors (Chiaburu et al., 2015). In addition to perceived organizational support, studies showed a positive relationship between OCB and work relationships, where open and collaborative relationships foster an environment conducive to OCB (Cohen, 2007). Organizations must then be aware of the role they play in facilitating OCB, acknowledging the culture dimensions present amongst their employees and fostering a positive environment to encourage OCB.

2.3.1   Key Dimensions of Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Despite its prevalence and trend in research and practice, there is a lack of consensus on the dimensions of OCB. In fact, an analysis by Podsakoff *et al*. (2000) showed close to 30 distinct forms of OCB which can be constructed into seven common themes of *helping behavior, organizational loyalty, organizational compliance, sportsmanship, individual initiative, civic virtue & self-development*. Most commonly used is the study by Organ (1988), which listed five main dimensions of OCB - *altruism, conscientiousness, civic virtue, sportsmanship,* and *courtesy*.

Altruism is when a person engages in voluntary actions that helps another with a work problem or task (Organ, 1988). This dimension is related to the *helping behavior* theme classified by Podsakoff *et al*. (2000). *Helping behavior* is also involved with helping others voluntarily, without being told formally to do so. This can mean aiding new employees, assisting colleagues who are overwhelmed, guiding employees to accomplish difficult tasks and such forth (Tambe, 2014).

The other part of *helping behavior* relates to preventing work-related problems to occur (Podsakoff *et al*., 2000). Thus, this also relates to *Courtesy*, which mentions using foresightful gestures to prevent interpersonal issues, touching base with other individuals before committing to actions that affect them (Organ, 1988). It is essentially gestures to demonstrate that the employee is not interested in creating problems for their colleagues, namely communicating encouragement when their colleagues feel discouraged or giving them notice in advance when there is an addition to their workload (Tambe, 2014).

Meanwhile, s*portsmanship* is the willingness of an individual to tolerate inconveniences at work without complaining (Organ, 1990). Inconveniences are inevitable at the workplace, and it is desirable for employees to be a 'good sport' by being positive and tolerant against difficulties. It is the willingness to tolerate the minor impositions of work without grievances so that organizational energies can be conserved and focused to accomplish more meaningful tasks (Organ & Ryan, 1995). Therefore *sportsmanship* is distinct from other OCB dimensions because it specifically refers to having a positive outlook and attitude despite being inconvenienced or if problematic situations occur.

Conscientiousness is discretionary behavior that goes beyond the minimum job requirements such as working longer days, obeying rules and regulations, and not taking extra breaks (MacKenzie *et al*, 1993). It is when individuals aim to proactively conserve the organizational resources and go beyond the minimum levels of required attendance (Organ, 1990). Moorman and Blakely (1995) similarly refers to conscientiousness as *individual initiative*, meaning that individuals take part in tasks above their line of duty and actively communicate with others to improve both individual and group performance.

Civic virtue relates to keeping involved with the organization's affairs and political processes by expressing opinions, attending meetings, and keeping tabs on larger issues involving the

firm (Organ, 1988). It reflects an employee's sense of responsibility and commitment towards their organization. Employees who exhibit civic virtue demonstrate loyalty by actively engaging in activities that promote the culture of the organization. Thus, organizational participation is a vital component of OCB. Driven by virtuous ideals, individuals also partake in their organization's governance through less favorable tasks such as delivering bad news, trying to play devil's advocate to counter groupthink, or being willing to deliver challenging feedback (Graham, 1991).

Understanding all the dimensions above and how they affect and develop organizational citizenship behavior contributes to overall organization success. Actively nurturing OCB amongst employees not only creates a positive work environment, but also fosters greater commitment and enhances overall productivity.

2.3.2 Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Global Virtual Teams

The studies of OCB in traditional non-virtual teams may not apply in GVTs. This is due to their unique nature as GVTs are geographically dispersed, culturally diverse, and communicate predominantly through computer mediated communication systems (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999; Popescu *et al*., 2012). Furthermore, most virtual work lack the hierarchies of traditional organizations and instead rely on mutual trust amongst team members (Popescu *et al*., 2012). Thus, OCB tends to be weaker in general due to distance making establishing relationships harder and limited cues resulting in reduced sharing, cohesiveness, and friendship amongst team members (Yu & Chu, 2007).

Therefore, the added complexities of virtual work environments brings about distinct challenges and opportunities when it comes to fostering OCB. Understanding these specific factors is then crucial to be able to promote a positive work culture and maximize the effectiveness of virtual teams. For instance, the level and frequency of direct personal interactions with peers in GVTs differs from traditional teams that are used to interacting face-to-face in person more frequently. This in turn influences the amount of support and level of cooperation, which are related to Organ (1988)'s dimensions of *altruism* and *sportsmanship.* Helping other team members tends to be caused by spontaneous behavior and impromptu actions, which are more easily done in traditional face-to-face settings (Ilies *et al*., 2006).

As mentioned, the lack of hierarchies and increased physical distance between members in organizations with GVTs (Popescu *et al*., 2012) contributes to a lower level of social control. Compared to more traditional on-site work teams, there is less pressure amongst GVT members to conform to social expectations like starting work early or working later hours. Hence, self-management skills are crucial for individuals to be able to manage their work and tasks autonomously (Harvey *et al*. 2004). Consequently, individuals in GVTs require a higher level of *conscientiousness* in regards to OCB. Otherwise, individuals might exploit their autonomy and present slacking behaviors. The challenge lies in the difficulty of detecting slacking behaviors in virtual work settings, making it even more critical for organizations to address the issue proactively.

Though managers and leaders in organizations generally respond well to employees engaging in OCB as a result of prosocial values, there is still little knowledge and research on how colleagues respond to OCB in a group context (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2010; Lai *et al.*, 2013). This is surprising as empirical studies have shown that group level OCB is a significant predictor or team performance (Podsakoff *et al*., 2009)

Particularly within a culturally diverse group, the nuances between individuals' various national cultures and social behaviors should be considered when discussing how to foster OCB. In addition to national cultures, culture within groups also plays a crucial role in shaping employees' overall performance (Lai *et al.*, 2013). This is because group culture has the ability to "influence members' focus of attention, shape interpretations of events, and guide attitudes and behavior" (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996, p. 157). To illustrate, it was discovered that collectivistic teams place high value on group harmony thus, in-role behavior such as the OCB dimensions of altruism and courtesy are praised more (Lai *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, individualistic teams with norms of personal achievement and independence prefer engaging in extra role behavior like sportsmanship, conscientiousness and civic virtue in order to improve performance (ibid.).

The coexistence of both group and national cultures within GVTs poses additional challenges. Employees themselves bring their own set of values and behavior patterns shaped by their own national culture. Simultaneously, being in a GVT, members are exposed to a group culture that emerges over time within their specific team. When group culture

contrasts with an individual's national culture, it may negatively affect employees and in turn, the formation of OCB.

A study concluded that some employees may resent their colleagues, who got ahead due to displaying high levels of OCB, when these employees are restricted in engaging in OCB due to family obligations or other factors (Bolino *et al*., 2004). Some employees may perceive their colleagues who advance in their careers due to their high levels of OCB as a source of frustration and dissatisfaction, particularly when these employees themselves are constrained from engaging in OCB due to personal commitments or other factors

2.3.3   Impact of Virtual Work on Organizational Identity

Having discussed aspects of OCB within GVTs, this thesis further delves into the broader implications of virtual work on the organizational identity. The unique characteristics of virtual work, such as limited face-to-face interactions and reliance on digital communication, not only shapes individual behaviors but also influences the overall identity of the organization itself. An examination of the impact of virtual work on organizational identity is required to shed light on how the virtual context affects employees' sense of belonging, shared values, and collective identity within GVTs.

A key aspect related to creating an organizational identity in virtual work relates to an employees' onboarding process. Onboarding, also referred to as employee orientation, is a crucial process in implementing organizational socialization and facilitates the mutual understanding between newly hired employees and the organization (Petrilli *et al*., 2022). Both parties have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the organization's culture, values, and job expectations. Hence, onboarding plays a key role in shaping employees' consequent work experience and attitude towards their organization. It affects their likelihood of staying, generates a sense of belonging, and facilitates role clarity and social integration in their organization (Bauer, 2010). As such, when onboarding is done poorly, it can lead to lower confidence as employees feel uncertain in their new roles, resulting in reduced engagement and increased attrition rates in the organization (Sibisi & Kappers, 2022).

Onboarding becomes even more complex and difficult when conducted remotely and virtually. First and foremost, the limited interaction opportunities and reliance on virtual computer mediated communication systems negatively affects the development of social relationships amongst new employees (Petrilli *et al*., 2022). Secondly, virtual environments make it more difficult to teach newly hired employees their organization's culture and values due to less impromptu learning and collaborative learning amongst new and old employees (Hemphill & Begel, 2011).

Therefore, onboarding is even more critical for employees in GVTs. To address the uncertainty faced by new employees, digital onboarding practices can be implemented to help new hires navigate their new environment by providing them with the necessary resources and information, enabling them to become fully integrated and effective members of the organization in their new roles (Petrilli et *al*., 2022). Moreover, effectively implementing socialization and onboarding practices can encourage collective thinking and a sense of belonging, which enhances organizational identification and promotes citizenship behaviors (Marstand *et al*., 2021). This results in long term viability as a culture of mutual support encourages older members in the organization to assist new employees in their onboarding period. Hence, by addressing the different nature of virtual onboarding on organizational identity and creating a structured process for it, organizations can create a solid foundation for employees' success, and start cultivating OCB.

As such, it is crucial to develop and maintain a strong sense of organizational identity in virtual work environments. GVTs and hybrid / remote methods of work bring both challenges and opportunities for fostering a strong organizational identity. The literature review highlighted how the lack of face-to-face interactions, increased cultural diversity and geographically dispersion in virtual work result in organizations having to adopt more novel approaches to build a sense of shared purpose, values, and culture amongst their employees. Hence, this topic leads to the next research question:

R3. To what extent does the virtual context of cross-cultural work teams influence employee organizational identity and impact the prevalence of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)?

By understanding the extent to which virtual work shapes employees' sense of belonging and organizational identity, organizations can then develop strategies to facilitate organizational citizenship behavior. Only then can organizations foster a positive work environment that encourages positive proactive behavior from their employees.

2.4   Cross-Cultural Communication on OCB in GVTs

By addressing the three research questions presented above, the literature review has laid the foundation for the main research question of this thesis:

What is the impact of cross-cultural communication on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within global virtual teams (GVTs)?

The study combines the three topics of GVTs, cross-cultural communication, and OCB. The main research question aims to identify how the three topics are connected to one another and how organizations are able to use the knowledge to optimize overall team performance, promote effective communication, and cultivate a strong culture. The aim of the thesis' research is then to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between cross-cultural communication, OCB, and the distinct characteristics of GVTs in a post-pandemic context.

Given the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the way organizations operate, it is crucial to focus the study's examination on the post-pandemic work environment. Such a massive crisis event like COVID-19 has fundamentally altered the way organizations function, making it vital to recognize and adapt to the new realities of work. It has accelerated existing trends of virtual work arrangements (Lund *et al*., 2021), leading to an increase in GVTs. It results in employees having minimal face-to-face interactions and increased reliance on digital communication, which in turn affects their behavior patterns and relationships with one another at work (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002; Ilies *et al*., 2006). Additionally, traditional methods of control may no longer be feasible for employees working remotely (Hansen *et al.*, 2012). Thus, for GVTs to be productive, individual employees must have strong self-regulation and self-management skills to organize their work and stay motivated (Harvey *et al*. 2004).

This only further drives the need to understand the impact of cross-cultural team communication and OCB on GVT effectiveness in this new paradigm in order to thrive in the ever-evolving landscape. Therefore, this research will hopefully give insight into how organizations can leverage this knowledge to enhance team performance, foster effective communication practices, and cultivate a cohesive organizational culture within the context of GVTs.

3 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter describes the methodology and research methods used in this study to address the research questions presented in the previous section. Additionally, the section justifies the reasons for choosing the specified research methods and discusses the overall trustworthiness of the study. Through implementing the research methods addressed below, this study aims to uncover valuable insights that can optimize the functioning of Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) and enhance success in virtual work environments. By analyzing the findings and drawing meaningful conclusions, practical implications can be derived to guide organizations in fostering effective teamwork, improving communication, and maximizing productivity in the context of GVTs. Ultimately, the aim is to provide actionable recommendations that can enhance the overall performance and outcomes of GVTs in the ever-evolving landscape of virtual work.

3.1 Research Method

The research was conducted through a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is research that constructs findings not derived from quantifiable or statistical data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.11). It aims to give detailed explanations of individual experiences, behaviors, interactions, feelings, opinions within social contexts (Denzin, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative research was chosen instead of quantitative research in this specific study as it allows for a holistic understanding of people's experiences in a specific work team setting and specialized industry context. It spans multiple epistemological viewpoints, and applies various research methods and interpretive techniques to understand individual experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2002). Moreover, there is more direct interaction with participants, resulting in more detailed and subjective data collection (Rahman, 2017). This will allow the study to gain deeper insight regarding how each individual's differing culture background and personal experiences affect their view on communication in their work teams.

Additionally, the philosophical assumptions and positions of this study need to be defined. This qualitative approach identifies with a relativist ontology, the acceptance of multiple realities, and of a subjectivist epistemology, where understanding is created through interaction between parties (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p.27). This research will focus on

employee's personal experiences in regards to cross cultural communication and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within their global virtual team (GVT). Different cultural groups have different constructions of reality based on their upbringing and world view. Thus, many varying interpretations and perspectives can be gathered on a single situation instead of an objective truth. Therefore, reality is not so static and knowledge is not always independent, rather it is socially constructed by people's experiences (Yilmaz, 2013).

3.2   Data Collection

Primary data collected from this study was done through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews require a prepared list of questions beforehand but still have the flexibility of asking additional probing questions as needed (Newcomer, Harry & Wholly, 2015). It allows for reciprocity and rapport between the interviewer and participants, where the researcher is able to improvise and create follow-up questions based on participants' responses (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). Such a method is ideal as responses can vary widely due to differing cultural backgrounds and experiences. Moreover, the participants are given the opportunity to discuss issues that they feel are important to them, instead of only sticking to the interviewer's prompts and questions (Longhurst, 2003; Pathak & Intratat, 2016).

The participants in this study are all from a single project team within a multinational tech company, *Company X. Company X* is one of the largest cloud based software consulting partners in Europe. Based on the 10 societal clusters from House *et al.*'s (2004) GLOBE Framework, the company is based in Nordic Europe and has offices in Anglo (UK, Ireland) and Eastern Europe. In 2018, it was acquired by a world leading IT company based in Southern Asia. Despite its acquisition, *Company X* has maintained autonomy in its operations. The diverse locations in which *Company X* operates makes it a prime candidate for this study.

The work team that participated in this study is currently based in Nordic Europe. However, a few members are geographically dispersed with some living outside the geographical cluster, in other *Company X* offices or just remotely located. Moreover, they are in frequent contact with client teams also dispersed globally and with other work teams contracted from *Company X's* parent company in Southern Asia. After initial discussions with the project manager of the work team, an invitation email for the interview was sent to employees. A

copy of the email can be found in *Appendix 1*. The email summarizes the objectives of the study and the role of the participants.

The sample of this study was limited to seven participants from the same work team. Table 1 summarizes the interviewees and their backgrounds.

Table 1. Overview of Research Participants

Interviewee	Position	Nationality's Societal Cluster	Tenure at Company X	Currently Located In
1	Solution Architect	Southern Asia	8 months	Nordic Europe
2	Lead Developer	Southern Asia	4.5 years	Nordic Europe
3	Senior Solution Consultant	Germanic Europe	5 months	Nordic Europe
4	Project Manager	Middle East	3 years	Nordic Europe
5	Business Consultant	Southern Asia	8 months	Nordic Europe
6	Senior Technical Architect	Latin Europe	8 months	Nordic Europe
7	Senior Technical Architect	Southern Asia	3 years	Anglo Europe

Each one-on-one interview was approximately 30-45 minutes long and were all conducted through online video conferencing calls that were recorded. All interviews were conducted in English. It is important to note that none of the interviewees have English as their mother

tongue. However, they use English extensively at work as it is the official company language. Their current project's client also operates with offices in Anglo and Germanic Europe clusters.

An interview framework which serves as a guide and structure is used and can be seen in *Appendix 2*. Each interview begins by creating a comfortable atmosphere through small talk. It is vital as the opening sets the mood and affects the willingness and motivation of interviewees to communicate freely and accurately (Stewart & Cash, 2018). The interview consists of five parts and has a topical sequence, following natural divisions of the topic (ibid.). The first section is an introduction, which will focus on getting to know the interviewee's work and cultural background. Second, the interviewees' views on their cross-cultural team is discussed which is followed by how they feel and experience communicating in virtual work teams. Then, the interviewer aims to probe on the extent OCB is occurring virtually and how each person perceives OCB to or from their team members. Lastly, closing the interview is as important as the other aspects. To end, a clearinghouse question is asked to ensure that all necessary information is obtained or whether participants have further comments and concerns (ibid.).

3.3   Data Structure & Analysis

To ensure the data gathered is systematically reviewed and organized, a structured approach of data analysis was adopted. As mentioned, the study followed a qualitative research design to be able to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of individuals in global virtual teams (GVTs) and their cross-cultural communication behavior. The data collection process involved semi-structured interviews conducted with participants from diverse cultural backgrounds within tech companies. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, providing a rich and detailed dataset for analysis.

The data analysis had a bottom-up approach, using strategies to identify emerging themes (Yilmaz, 2013). Thematic analysis was applied to identify and interpret such themes. It provided a systematic procedure for generating codes yet took on an organic flexible approach to theme development (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Particularly, thematic analysis aided in identifying patterns across data related to participants' lived experiences, perspectives, and behaviors (ibid.). This study applied Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase

guide to thematic analysis. First, the data was familiarized with (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were made from all interviews conducted. Phase 2 revolved around generating initial codes for the entire dataset, for as many potential themes as possible (ibid.). As part of thematic analysis, the aim was to find emerging issues, patterns, or themes and incorporate the most relevant ones that would answer the initial research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thus, Phases 3 and 4 involved searching for themes and reviewing them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Phase 5 referred to defining and naming the themes, identifying the 'essence' of what each theme captured (ibid.). Certain sub-themes might have also arisen during this stage.

Finally, a report was produced in the last stage. The final data structure consisted of several overarching themes, each comprising sub-themes and associated illustrative quotes from the participants' interviews. This structure allowed for a clear and coherent presentation of the findings, organizing the data in a readable and captivating manner for readers. The report served as a detailed analysis of the research data whilst also being narrative to convince the reader of the merit and validity of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, the data structure provides a way of understanding the relationship between topics in the analysis and provides a visual representation of the progression from raw data to themes discovered, ensuring thoroughness in the qualitative research (Gioia, 2021).

3.4   Trustworthiness

Ethical considerations and privacy concerns are acknowledged throughout the entire research process. Considerations are made to ensure the privacy of the participating company and their employees when handling their interview data. All interview data is stored safely on cloud and findings are written anonymously. Pseudonyms are used in place of the actual names of the company and employees in line with the non-disclosure agreement signed by both researcher and participating company.

The aim of trustworthiness in a qualitative study is to ensure that the main argument supports the research findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness can be assessed by looking at the study's dependability, confirmability, transferability, credibility, and authenticity (ibid.). The study's credibility is shown as the participants in the study are clearly described accurately. Conformability refers to the objectivity about the data's accuracy and relevance

whilst dependability refers to the stability of data over time and different conditions. Transferability relates to the ability for the findings to be transferred to other situations (Elo *et al.*, 2014).

Overall, the trustworthiness of the study is mainly dependent on collecting rich data gathered during data collection, analysis and reporting (Elo *et al.*, 2014). Trustworthiness is improved by thorough preparation and heightened awareness throughout the research period. Due to the highly personalized nature of these perspectives, some degree of biases and subjectivity is present. All findings are subjective to each participant's experiences and world view. Therefore, it is vital to acknowledge that this study provides a limited view as it only relates to the experiences of a single work team within a single company. Further limitations are further acknowledged in Section 6.3.

4 FINDINGS

The following section presents findings of the research, based on the interviews conducted of the 7 employees within the same project team in *Company X*, an IT consulting company based in Nordic Europe. The data collected provided plenty of valuable insights towards the research of cross-cultural communication in a predominantly virtual work environment. The main research question which guided the interviews was:

What is the impact of cross-cultural communication on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within global virtual teams (GVTs)?

The participating employees provided a diverse sample for this study. In addition to the many nationalities being represented, employees have differing levels of experience, positions, and amount of time they have lived abroad and have worked for *Company X*. This translated to varying experiences and multitude of perceptions. It was enlightening to observe how employees who were hired prior to the COVID-19 pandemic have different experiences to employees who were hired after or during, when remote virtual work became the norm. Furthermore, notable variations in experiences were observed among employees who opted for hybrid work and were residing in the city where the office is located, compared to their colleagues who resided abroad and are working fully remote.

Additionally, the participants' own experiences held significant relevance in understanding their communication dynamics within their daily work routines and colleagues. In turn, their communication and interactions directly influence organizational citizenship behavior within the team. Hence, to examine the presence of OCB, an understanding of the impact of remote working on employees and their interrelationships must first be gained.

The composition of the team, with its diverse work arrangements, offers valuable insights into the dynamics of real-life organizations, albeit on a smaller scale. The presence of team members who have different work setups, including hybrid, on-site, and remote arrangements, mirrors the increasingly common diversity of work arrangements in larger organizations. By studying this work team, a representative sample is gained, allowing for the analysis of trends in organizational behavior and the future of work.

The following subsections present the challenges and benefits identified by the interview participants. As virtual work and cross-cultural teams continue to increase, the findings highlight the importance for organizations to be mindful of the trade-offs employees encounter and to establish systematic approaches for fostering effective communication and promoting OCB among team members.

4.1 Structure of Findings

The findings of this qualitative study are presented in alignment with the three research sub-questions derived from the main research question. Each sub-question delves into a specific aspect of the impact of cross-cultural communication and OCB on the effectiveness of virtual teams. The three sub-questions not only guided the interviews but also played a crucial role in structuring the data analysis process using Braun and Clarke's (2006) guide to thematic analysis. The thematic analysis approach allowed for a systematic exploration of the data gathered. It is organized into three main themes that provide valuable insights into the distinct nature of GVTs, the influence of cultural and linguistic differences, and the presence of OCB within GVTs. Table 2 below gives a summary of the findings using thematic analysis.

Table 2. Interview findings structured using thematic analysis.

CATEGORY	THEME	CODES	AMOUNT	TOTAL
Distinct Nature of GVTs	Productivity	Less/more productive; distraction at home vs. office; focusing on work	10	**28**
	Time & Spatial Dispersion	Difficulty coordinating due to different time zones; not being in the same space	5	
	Virtual Onboarding	Online onboarding vs. on-site; '*[Company X]* Friend'; learning the company culture	6	
	Sense of Belonging	Erosion of community; feelings of isolation; lack of socialization	7	
Cultural & Linguistic Differences	Cultural Diversity in the Team	Having multinational colleagues; gaining cultural proficiency; understanding different cultures & biases	18	**33**
	English as a Lingua Franca	Official company language: Everybody understands English; English facilitating communication;	7	
	Communication Barriers	Differing levels of English proficiency; more privilege/ power to fluent speakers; Lacking the local Nordic language knowledge	8	

Presence of OCB in the Team	Interpersonal Relationships	Difficulty in forming relationships virtually; Informal interactions build relationships; showing empathy & understanding	8	**27**
	Importance of Trust	Establishing trust virtually; vital component of communication; hesitant to engage in OCB	5	
	Knowledge Sharing	Sharing information voluntarily; recognizing each other's value/expertise; proactively helping others	7	
	Organizational Support	Company as a facilitator to OCB; providing a supportive virtual environment; providing hardware for remote work	7	
Total Codes	**32**			
Total Themes	**11**			
Total Categories	**4**			

The first theme revolved around *R1* (*What are the unique challenges and opportunities presented by virtual work teams in a post-pandemic context?*) and focused on the distinct nature of GVTs. It encompassed various nodes related to the functions and characteristics of the interviewed global virtual team. The findings provided insights into the evolving dynamics and implications of remote collaboration in a post-pandemic context. Through the analysis, it was evident that GVTs operated differently from traditional teams due to factors such as limited face-to-face interactions and reliance on digital communication tools to

combat geographically and time dispersion. This resulted in the erosion of community and the need for self-motivation to be productive.

Moving on to the second theme related to *R2* (*How do cultural and linguistic differences influence communication within cross-cultural virtual work teams?*), which delved into the cultural and linguistic differences within GVTs. Here, the differences that influence team communication in a GVT are discussed. Nodes related to this theme highlighted the impact of diverse cultural backgrounds and language barriers on team dynamics, communication processes, and collaboration within the members in the GVT. The analysis provided insights into the challenges faced by GVT members in navigating cultural differences, adapting communication styles, and building mutual understanding across diverse contexts. It gave a glimpse on the interplay between cultural factors and effective communication.

The third theme explored the presence of OCB in GVTs, with a particular focus on the role of trust as a facilitator of OCB. With *R3* (*To what extent does the virtual context of cross-cultural work teams influence employee organization identity and impact the prevalence of OCB?*) in mind, the section investigated the impact of the virtual work context on the development and maintenance of organizational identity. The findings showed how virtual teams navigate the formation of a shared organizational identity and building a sense of belonging despite their physical separation. Moreover, an exploration was made to look to the extent at which the virtual context of cross-cultural work teams influences employee engagement and the prevalence of OCB. The findings delved into the relationship between virtual work arrangements, employee engagement levels, and the demonstration of OCB, providing valuable insights into the factors that foster or hinder pro-social behaviors in virtual team settings. The analysis revealed that trust played a crucial role in promoting information sharing, collaboration, and support among team members. It underscored the importance of establishing trust within GVTs to encourage the manifestation of OCB and enhance overall team effectiveness.

By structuring the findings according to the three themes, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the impact of cross-cultural communication and OCB on virtual team effectiveness, providing a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play in global work environments.

4.2 Distinctive Nature of Global Virtual Teams

GVTs are distinct from more traditional Face-to-Face teams in organization as they predominantly interact and collaborate with individuals from different cultures, who are physically separated from one another (Townsend *et al*., 1998; Griffith et al., 2003). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Co*mpany X* has opted for a hybrid work model where employees are able to commute to the office to work on-site in addition to working remotely. Many employees interviewed still mostly opt to work virtually, only coming to the office a few times a week, while few have no choice but to work fully remotely as they are not based in the same city or region. Thus, team members must rely on technology and digital tools to communicate and collaborate with one another. Such virtuality presents many benefits and challenges for the work team and individual employees alike. Moreover, these challenges can be further amplified in cross-cultural teams due to differences in communication styles, work norms, and cultural values. The following sections address some of these challenges and opportunities.

4.2.1 Productivity in Virtual Work

One main challenge experienced by all employees interviewed was the abrupt transition to virtual work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each team member encountered unique challenges and had to navigate their own struggles during the initial transition period. They continue to face another wave of change with the ongoing implementation of hybrid work. The shift to a hybrid work model introduced more adjustments that team members are still currently experiencing. The constant adjustments have affected their working life to various degrees. One aspect which was heavily discussed by the interviewees was their sense of productivity. There were contradicting opinions on how individuals felt virtual work has affected their productivity.

Based on two comments below from some of the interviewees, there is a clear indication that they perceive higher levels of productivity when working from home compared to working in the office.

"Now it feels like when I go to the office, I'm much less productive. Compared to when I'm working from home."

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"For example, here, I have everything on my table. If I need to go to the kitchen, it's next door. No one is at home. ... In the office, I'm gonna go to the kitchen and I'll meet someone on the way. I'll start talking to them then it's already 5-10 minutes."

They suggested that going to the office can sometimes lead to interruptions that may take away valuable time and focus from work-related tasks. In contrast, some others have struggled with working remotely. Some have expressed that their lower productivity was due to the lack of structure and boundaries between work and home life.

"In the office, you can focus on your work. At home, it's very casual, a lot of things which are distracting, Which may not be in the office. You get more punctual towards work and those kinds of things."

"Sometimes when you're working at home, you go on stretching your work. I was working more at home than what I was working in the office. I used to get out of my office at 4:30pm but when working from home I used to work till five or six o'clock."

"Sometimes you get distracted at home. You cannot ignore when something happens. Like you know, someone coming and ringing a bell, then you have to go and check who was there."

Here, the interviewees expressed different perspectives on productivity when comparing their office and home environments. One interviewee mentioned the potentially distracting nature of working from home which affected their overall productivity. Additionally, there is a mention of extended work hours when working from home, with one interviewee noting the tendency to stretch work beyond the regular office hours. This suggests that while working remotely, individuals may find it challenging to establish boundaries between work and personal life, leading to extended working hours. Lastly, distractions at home are mentioned, such as interruptions from external factors like someone ringing the doorbell, which can divert attention from work tasks.

Such contrasting insights reflect the complexities and trade-offs associated with productivity in different work environments, with the office offering a focused atmosphere but potentially

limited flexibility, while working from home presenting a more relaxed setting but with potential distractions and challenges in maintaining work-life boundaries.

4.2.2   Dispersion of Time & Space

One clear and unavoidable challenge of global virtual teams highlighted by interviewees was coordinating work across multiple time zones and locations. Having team members, clients, or contractors located in different countries is becoming increasingly common (Lund *et al.*, 2021). For instance, the current work that the project team interviewed in this study spans across three continents, as mentioned below.

"People working in different time zones has always been a challenge for us. We have to deal with the clients that have a major part of their operations in the U.S., and the other part working in Europe. On top of that, we have colleagues from China and colleagues from India, who are in completely different time zones too."

Though virtual work has eroded geographical barriers and allows organizations to gain access to a wider talent pool, it poses challenges related to coordination. Different time zones can make it difficult for virtual teams to work together because team members may not be able to communicate or collaborate in real-time due to the time difference. For example, if one team member is in the Anglo America and another is in South Asia, their common working hours may only overlap a small amount or even not at all, making it challenging to schedule meetings or calls at a time that is convenient for both of them This can lead to delays in completing projects or making decisions, and can also make it difficult for team members to build strong working relationships. Additionally, time zone differences can make it difficult for team members to coordinate their schedules and prioritize their work effectively. As an interviewee commented:

"It was a little bit of a challenge to find a suitable time for everyone, and to bring them to different meetings. Sometimes we need to ask them to work outside of the working hours."

When employees have to participate in virtual meetings outside of their time zones, it may result in them having to work outside their normal working hours. In turn, it causes a shift in their work schedule, requiring them to start work earlier or later than usual. This may cause disruptions to their daily work and impact their overall work-life balance. However, it

may be a necessary by-product of virtual work across countries. It is up to employees and the organizations to be able to find a good balance for everyone and ensure effective communication and collaboration can be maintained.

4.2.3   Difficulties in Virtual On-Boarding

On-boarding new employees is a crucial process in every company as it sets the tone for the employee's overall experience in the organization and how they perceive the organization itself as an employer (Sibisi & Kappers, 2022). The process helps introduce new employees to the company's culture, values, and expectations. Thanks to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the shift towards virtual work, many companies like *Company X* have had to move their on-boarding process online. Based on the experiences of the interviewees, on-boarding new employees online is more difficult than in-person.

"I was on-boarded on-site. If it was done online, then it must be difficult, right? Cause you only know very few people. And then you don't know how to reach out and who to reach out and how to sort out the stuff."

The quote above was made by an interviewee who started working for *Company X* before the pandemic, so he was on-boarded on-site. Furthermore, *Company X* provides new employees with a 'Friend' to help new employees acclimatize to their new role and environment.

"In [Company X], we do have a culture of '[Company X] Friend'. So whenever a new person joins, someone is assigned to be your friend, and initially be a guide to the new person to help understand the company culture and the values of the company and how to work, these kinds of things."

Prior to the pandemic, a *Company X Friend* would frequently meet up with their assigned new co-worker outside of work, such as lunch time or after work, to socialize and converse, in addition to being available during work hours for any help that their new colleague might need. However, it was highly dependent on which *Company X Friend* got assigned and whether they are proactive enough to be available to their new colleagues. For instance, one

interviewee had a positive on-boarding experience himself, which in turn, made him want to be a good *Company X Friend* when a new employee was assigned to him.

"I onboarded a new girl in February. We spent the first two weeks mostly at the office. We work together and have lunch together. So I was able to introduce her to the team and to the vision of the company. … [When I first started], I was almost every day in the office with my '[Company X] Friend'. He was here with me three or four days per week. I have a really good onboarding. So I tried to do the same with the girl in February."

Though not everyone had the same positive on-boarding experience. Particularly if they were on-boarded completely remotely and virtually. The lack of face-to-face interaction prevents new employees from creating connections with their colleagues and managers. Simultaneously, building new relationships through online video conferencing or instant messaging is just not the same as in-person interactions. The sentiment is shared by many of the interviewees.

"One disadvantage is when you have to onboard new people. It's difficult to feel what the company is if the company is completely remote. So in that case, I feel that it's better to have some days at the office so you can have a face to face onboarding."

"There's a benefit and trade off. Benefit in terms of like, you're more work focused. On the other hand, you're not socializing, you're just doing work and that's it. You're not even understanding the kind of company culture there is. For the new joiners, it's difficult to understand the company culture and so on."

On-boarding new employees is already difficult to do in-person and doing it online gives added challenges due to the lack of face-to-face interaction, which limits collaboration, interaction, supervision and support. It seems that there is a lack of consensus on how to onboard new employees amongst team members in *Company X*. Thus, it is possible that such challenges can be mitigated by having a more systematic process by providing clearer guidelines and adequate resources. It is vital that new employees have a positive on-boarding experience and are set up for success in their new roles. Afterall, organization citizenship behavior has been shown to be linked with positive employee experience and satisfaction (Organ *et al.*, 2006).

4.2.4 Erosion of Community & Sense of Belonging

Due to this GVT being highly geographically spread out, it is difficult for some team members to engage in hybrid work. Thus, several members fully engage in virtual work exclusively, never having seen their colleagues in-person. As highlighted in the quote below, individuals who have worked together for a longer period and have had more in-person interactions tend to have stronger connections.

"Because they are working remotely, they don't feel that they are really part of the same team. Maybe the other thing is that the people who are working from here have been with the company for a longer time and we may meet physically sometimes, that's why they feel more comfortable."

Working with a hybrid model allowed certain colleagues to meet each other in-person at their offices or through attending social events. This in turn aided in creating better relationships and building a more engaged community. However, employees working fully remotely, or started in the company during the pandemic, seemed to feel more disconnected with their peers. The discrepancy in the level of personal interaction and familiarity resulted in individuals feeling excluded as they are not able to form closer in-person relationships with other team members.

"In this digital environment, there is the risk of isolation and the risk of creating a boxed in view. You say it is good because you have your space, but you don't feel really part of the team. You don't feel part of a group."

Thus, despite many benefits of virtual work pointed out by the interviewees regarding personal productivity and flexibility, employees acknowledge that it has led to the decrease in social connections and shared experiences. In a traditional work environment, employees are often located in the same physical space and thus able to interact with one another on a daily basis. They can build relationships, engage in small talk, and share experiences. However, in a virtual work environment, team members may not have the same opportunities for such social interactions. Though as an interviewee said in a quote below, many have attempted to build some rapport through limited informal interactions prior to starting online meetings.

"In the office, you can meet and greet each other in the morning or afternoon or at coffee break or at lunch, right? That really helps. You get to know who just joined the company or who is working as a consultant or maybe developer or architect."

"When we are working online, then we are more work focused. We are not socializing that much. But I think it's good that if you start the conversation informally, like, how are you doing? What's going on? How was your weekend? And so on and so forth. I think that helps as well."

Moreover, employees have more opportunities to get to know each other on a personal level in a traditional environment, but in virtual work, it can be challenging to build these types of relationships, particularly when employees work in different time zones or have different schedules. As an organization, *Company X* have made attempts to build a community amongst their virtual workforce by organizing online activities for social interactions. However, as mentioned by an interviewee, many employees often decline to join in on such meetings. This can be due to a variety of reasons, stemming from competing schedule demands from more work-centric meetings to simply feeling uncomfortable interacting with one another through technology rather than in person.

"You normally skip those meetings dedicated to socialization. It's very normal. You don't consider it as a meeting, right? I think I hardly attend those meetings. Like breakfast meetings, because it's very early. But in the afternoon if you have any such meeting but then you get a client meeting invite then definitely you're gonna prioritize that."

While virtual work poses challenges for existing employees in maintaining their social interactions, such difficulties are even more pronounced for newer members, particularly those who joined the company during the pandemic when work was purely in a virtual setting. As shown in quotes above, many of these individuals did not have the opportunity to establish in-person connections with their colleagues. As a result, they feel disconnected from their team and the organization. All in all, the lack of informal interactions and spontaneous conversations that often occur in physical face-to-face environments further exacerbates the challenge of forming meaningful relationships for team members, old and new, in global virtual teams.

4.3 Effects of Cultural and Linguistic Differences on GVTs

The following subsection explores the participants' experiences on cultural and linguistic differences within their global virtual team (GVT). Team members' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds bring both opportunities and challenges. Such differences have a notable influencing factor on their team dynamics, communication processes, and overall team performance. The findings below shed light on the impact of cultural and linguistic differences on the participants' experiences with cross-cultural collaboration.

4.3.1 Rich in Cultural Diversity

The participating work team is based in a smaller office branch of *Company X* in Nordic Europe. The office branch itself is smaller in nature but has a high cultural diversity amongst their employees.

"Especially in [Company X], we are a multicultural company. We have people from many places. In fact, in our [Nordic Europe] office, there are people from 10 countries out of 25 people."

In a multicultural workplace with 10 nationalities represented out of 25 employees, there is a rich presence of different cultures, experiences, and perspectives. This diversity can bring many benefits, such as a variety of skills, new ideas, and a greater understanding of different cultural practices (Solvell & Zander, 1995; Salazar & Salas, 2013). Such benefits are recognized by interviewees in the highlighted quotes below.

"The best part of working in multinational companies, because you get to know different people, is that you get to know their different ideas and how they work, how they perceive things, be it good or bad."

"You tend to learn new things about new cultures, and you tend to become more mature as you work with multicultural people. It affects your personality as well. Because in a sense, you will gain more confidence from working with more people with different perspectives."

"I think that it's important to be able to talk and discuss with people coming from other countries because you can have a different point of view and thoughts. With different people

or different experiences, you discover that there are different ways to go from point A to B. Maybe this helps you to open your mind and to be more efficient also in what you're doing because maybe you didn't know that there is another way to do the same thing."

Nevertheless, working in a culturally diverse team also has its challenges. Communication can be complicated by language barriers and differences in communication styles and cultural misunderstandings may arise due to different expectations and norms (Tran, 2016; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). The following quote shows the nuances of interacting with different cultures. Humor often relies on shared cultural references, which may not be familiar to people from different cultures. Moreover, different cultures may have different values and norms around what is considered appropriate or offensive, which can further impact how humor is perceived.

"Sometimes when you communicate, different countries have different mindset and they have different kinds of ways of speaking and different types of jokes that's harder to understand. A joke for me could mean something for someone else."

Hence, working in GVTs requires the added challenge of employees having to build some cultural competence. This allows employees to build a more inclusive workplace where cultural diversity can be leveraged to gain its full benefits. For instance, cultural competence skills can refer to developing an awareness of one's own cultural biases, actively seeking to understand other cultures, and adapting communication and work styles to better align with the needs of team members from different cultures. The quotes below also provided a glimpse into employees performing acts of OCB related to *courtesy* and *conscientiousness* (Organ 1988; 1990).

"Sometimes you have to take some precautions when you talk to other people from different cultures. We need to understand first how they feel when they talk, so you need to observe them. When you are in your own country, you already know how to deal with them."

"One of the things that you need to understand when you work in cultural diversity, is what is important for the audience of the meeting, or what is important for the whole team. You need to make sure even though it's not part of your culture, you have to try to adapt so that you don't offend anyone."

This showed that some cultural competence skills are already displayed amongst several employees. These employees are actively aware of their colleagues' cultural differences and attempt to effectively communicate and collaborate with them by altering their interactions and communication styles.

4.3.2 Use of English as a Unifying Company Language

Table 1 showed that all interview participants in this study are originally from non-English speaking countries and are non-host country nationals. Due to their diverse workforce and customers, English is already used as the official language of *Company X*, and employees converse with their teams in English daily with minimal issues. Employees express their satisfaction with the use of English within the company. Being non-Nordic natives, they find that *Company X*'s extensive use of English makes the organization a more desirable employer.

"[Company X]'s first language is English only so there is no problem in understanding it. I have never faced a problem with my colleagues or vice versa in understanding each other, even though we belong to different cultures and countries."

"If [Company X] was not an international company that uses English, I wouldn't get the job here. Because in [Nordic Europe] generally, companies tend to use [the local language] as the official language, and if you're lacking the skills of the [local] language, it would be a problem for you to find a job."

In addition to being an international multi-cultural organization, being an information technology (IT) company further aided in the ease of using English to communicate with one another. The dominant use of English in the IT industry, or business landscape as a whole, is due to a combination of factors, such as standardization of having a common language, access to readily available information, the role of Western countries in the economy, and the availability of skilled talent (Neeley, 2012). Moreover, compared to other industries, the IT industry is unique in its ability to attract a culturally diverse talent pool. IT jobs typically can be performed from anywhere in the world and simultaneously, there is growing demand for skilled workers due to the accelerating digital transformation

organizations are undergoing (Frankiewicz & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020). This is frequently noted by many participants in their interviewees as shown below.

"It's an international company with an international culture that embraces English. And if you look at the field of IT - IT is what we normally call an English nation. So anyone who has been working in IT or starting working IT has a good command of the English language. Everyone knows how to use English and we communicate with it on a good level, among ourselves and with the customer as well."

"There is high fluency [of English] because they are also well educated from universities like I am. So they're quite fluent in English and it never feels that I'm not able to express something. I never face that kind of issue."

"If you see IT companies now, English is always a language that you have to use in your day-to-day communication. You may be from different cultural backgrounds but when it comes to talking between a team, you always can use English."

The findings revealed a connection between the nature of participants' work and the use of English as a company language. It was consistently recognized by all participants that their work environment, which involved frequent interactions with colleagues and customers from around the globe, played a significant role in facilitating their proficiency in English. The regular communication with other people from diverse linguistic backgrounds allowed participants the chance to practice and improve their English language skills as well. English served as the lingua franca, being a facilitator in overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers among team members dispersed geographically.

These findings underscored the significance of using the English language in GVTs. For individuals who aspire to work in such environments, they need to possess a strong command of English to effectively participate, contribute, and navigate the challenges of working in multicultural and multilingual settings.

4.3.3   Language Barrier & Implications of English Proficiency

On the other hand, the findings of the study also shed light on the potential challenges posed by using English as the predominant language within one's organization. While being fluent

in English was recognized as a prerequisite for success, it also presented a potential barrier for individuals who were not as well-versed and fluent in the language. Participants acknowledged that the reliance on English as the primary mode of communication within the organization could create difficulties for non-native English speakers.

"I would say I never feel that I'm talking to someone who's not able to understand. Everyone understands you, and everyone can converse in very fluent English, which is the best part. It makes me feel comfortable."

Despite one interviewee, as quoted above, saying that they feel that there was never a struggle to understand and communicate with their colleagues, other interviewees have brought up that some people may struggle in expressing themselves in English. Variations of fluency, particularly amongst non-native speakers are inevitable. This results in communication barriers, leading to miscommunication and struggles.

"Those who don't have a good command in English, they do struggle, so there are some challenges sometimes talking to them."

"The challenges are always the language barriers and misunderstandings, especially in virtual meetings. Both of you are speaking English, but neither of you has it as your mother tongue. In a face-to-face setting, you can see the person's reaction whether they really understood what you said. Even if the person says, 'Okay', you can see their body language they don't understand. So that's a challenge virtually when people don't have their cameras on, you have no idea if they really understood what you said."

The quote above showed that in a virtual setting, there are even higher chances of miscommunication. They rely on reading their colleagues' body language and reactions when speaking English to supplement their lack of fluency. Without the ability to do so online if cameras are off, they do not know whether their colleagues were able to absorb the right information.

Another challenge that interviewees brought up is the inadequate representation and lack of professional development amongst their non-fluent English-speaking colleagues.

"It depends on the user really. Some who are very proficient in English dare to speak more because they know the language and they are not afraid of speaking. Then we have some other people that in large groups, they would never say what they think because they didn't feel confident speaking English."

Non-native speakers simply do not have the same level of vocabulary richness as native English speakers or with their own native mother tongue. This can be due to their limited exposure to the English language and cultural influences in their lives compared to native speakers (Marschan-Piekkari *et al*., 1999). As one interviewee mentioned:

"Talking in your own mother tongue is always easier. You can express your thoughts better in your mother language than any other language."

Another aspect where English is a barrier comes from external customers. Some clients still prefer to conduct business in their native language that is not English, because it allows them to communicate more effectively and they are generally more comfortable with it.

"Sometimes there are clients who want something in their native language, which is [the local language]. So that's the time when I feel that I should know the local language so I could be part of that client project."

This preference resulted in the interviewee feeling left out or lacking. It may culminate into a hidden power structure among employees, where native or fluent speakers have more power. These speakers have an advantage as they are able to communicate with the client and can act as intermediaries for their non-fluent colleagues.

"Some or most of the [local] clients ask for those who can speak their language. Because they are more comfortable in the [the local] language. Sometimes I find that I cannot work on that project, because of my lack of [the local language]."

Despite this acknowledgement, employees who are not fluent do not seem to have resentment or tension against their colleagues who are fluent in the local language. Yet, other studies have shown that there is an added exclusivity and privilege among native speakers (Marschan-Piekkari *et al*., 1999).

4.4 Presence of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) in Cross-Cultural Global Virtual Teams (GVTs)

OCB plays a crucial role in the functioning and success of cross-cultural GVTs. This section of the findings delved into the presence of OCB within the context of the interviewed GVT from *Company X*, examining how various factors influence its manifestation and impact. For instance, having empathy and positive interpersonal relationships is vital in fostering OCB. Moreover, trust plays a pivotal role as well, affecting OCB and knowledge exchange within the GVT. Lastly and crucially, the role that organizations themselves play in supporting and creating a positive virtual work environment which encourages OCB is critical.

4.4.1 Nurturing Empathy & Positive Interpersonal Relationships

Empathy and good relationships with co-workers are important factors that can facilitate OCB in the workplace (Podsakoff *et al*., 2000). Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. When employees have empathy for their co-workers, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization beyond their formal job responsibilities.

"If you only ever meet a person virtually, you don't get to go into any personal details. But when you meet in person and eat lunch together, you can talk about your family, your kids, and all the things so you get to actually know the person that you work with. When you have done that, it's also a lot easier to work with the people because you have created a relationship with them."

"If you feel your colleagues are more friendly to you, you can be friends. And friends can be a family where you need to take care of them. It was happening (pre-pandemic), but right now it is not happening. Before you can meet interesting people, you remember them just by a joke or whatever they did that made an impression on you. Which makes you feel that you are in the right place."

Several interviewees highlight how such informal interactions help humanize their colleagues from being just an image on the screen. This allows them to form more empathy for one another. Similarly to on-boarding, it is vital that social connections are continuously nurtured. Good relationships with colleagues can aid in facilitating OCB in the workplace. When employees have positive relationships with each other, they are more likely to feel connected and invested in the company's success. This can lead to increased engagement in behaviors that benefit the organization beyond their formal job responsibilities. For example, as the quote below showed, employees who have positive relationships with their co-workers may be more willing to offer help and support when needed, even if it is not directly related to their job responsibilities.

"You have a deeper understanding as well for people when you actually get to know them. You know that they are not there to make your life miserable and all of those things. If you never met the person, you can be quite quick at judging people and you can get annoyed about them. But if you actually have met the person, it's a completely different thing."

Many interviewees recognize that time coordination is extremely difficult within this project team as it spans multiple continents. As mentioned in this paper, an interviewee noted that early in the project, most meetings were occurring with only European time in mind. It resulted in the people based in America or Asia having to potentially work outside their typical working hours, either very early or very late. Employees within this Denmark based team sought to rectify the situation to accommodate their colleagues as shown in the quote below:

"We have people from Asia Pacific, Europe and the US. So it's either extremely late for Asia or it's extremely early for the US. In the beginning, we actually did it at 1pm European Time, which for some of the US was like five in the morning and they still called in. Then we decided after a week or so that it's not really fair to go on like that for weeks every day. Now, we have a morning meeting with Asia and the Middle East and then we have a late afternoon meeting for Europe and the US. We want to set a time which fits everyone and it takes a bit more time but at least people can call in a time that suits them."

Some degree of OCB is observed as employees took actions that went beyond their formal job descriptions to accommodate their colleagues abroad. The employees based out of

Europe had to engage in OCB by working outside their regular working hours in order to attend meetings set by the European team. Despite hearing no feedback from their colleagues abroad, the Danish work team were able to empathize and understand the additional strain their colleagues might experience. Further engagement in OCB is shown as the Danish team altered their way of working to accommodate and create a more positive work environment for everyone involved. Even if it meant that they had to take on double the work and having additional meetings to cater to multiple time zones. The team have displayed empathic tendencies as they are willing to help their fellow colleagues have better work schedules. Empathy can then be linked to OCB. Batson *et al.*'s (1981) empathy-altruism hypothesis showed that empathy in general can lead to altruistic/helping behavior, whether in a professional setting or not.

Thus, empathy and good relationships with co-workers are important factors that can facilitate OCB in the workplace. When employees have positive relationships with their co-workers, they are more likely to communicate effectively and work together to achieve common goals. When employees have empathy for their co-workers and positive relationships with them, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that benefit the organization beyond their formal job responsibilities. Therefore, *Company X* and other organizations must provide ways to support and facilitate OCB amongst their employees.

4.4.2 Trust, the Critical Catalyst for OCB

The establishment of trust is vital in any working relationship (Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). Trust plays a vital mediating role between relationships amongst employees and OCB (Popescu *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, trust is a fundamental factor in the success of virtual teams (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999). The sentiment is further echoed by multiple interviewees who argued that good communication at work requires a degree of trust, whether virtually, or not. As an interviewee pointed out:

"It's not about online work. It's not about offline work. We don't go to each person and poke them, asking what you're doing and what. We just rely on them, that okay, if he has some given the word, he will be doing it. There is no one else better than him to do it."

According to interviewees, trust is a vital component of effective communication, particularly in virtual work. When team members trust one another, they are more likely to

be open and honest in their communication, which can lead to better collaboration and problem-solving. As mentioned by the interviewee in the quote above, trust also allows team members to rely on one another to get things done, which is essential when working in a virtual environment where direct supervision may be limited.

"Trust is really important because you cannot control everything for your colleague or teammates. So you have to know that the person has some skill, and you rely on those skills. Their personalities and your relationship with them is also part of that trust. So if you have trust in others, and vice versa, I guess it's very simple to work."

"It's important that everybody is aligned on milestones and deadlines and trust each other. If you trust other people, you know that they are reliable and can give you what you need. Then it's not an issue if you work in the same room or in different countries."

In contrast, when team members do not trust one another, communication can be unproductive and chaotic. This can lead to delays and mistakes, and can also make it difficult for team members to build strong working relationships. For instance, an interviewee mentioned that newer team members lack trust which may result in hiding information away for fear of repercussions.

"It's a mixed behavior, because it also depends on people to people. People new to the company will hide it. Because they may have fear of being new to this environment."

The above participant emphasized that newly hired employees in the company may be more hesitant to engage in OCB due to the fear of being new and not yet fully understanding the norms, expectations, and dynamics of the GVT. The participant suggests that newcomers may feel the need to hide their lack of familiarity or knowledge in order to avoid potential negative judgments or perceptions. It suggests that building a sense of psychological safety and trust within the team is crucial for encouraging new employees to feel comfortable and be empowered to contribute beyond their formal roles.

4.4.3 Impact of Trust on Knowledge Exchange

Trust can then bleed into the likelihood of information sharing and knowledge exchange. Teams that lack trust amongst each other may be less likely to share information or offer help to one another. Moreover, they may be more likely to hoard information or resources for their own individual gains which in turn could be damaging to the team's and organization's overall wellbeing and productivity. As highlighted in a previous quote above, newer employees struggle more with trust and sharing information, particularly if it is negative news. The interviewee below also agreed with such a statement.

"What I've seen is that people are a little bit hesitant to answer if you ask them questions. It takes a while for them to open up. I also feel a bit hesitant in sharing information."

The lack of trust and knowledge sharing is counter productive. Afterall, everyone agreed that one main strength of having a diverse cross-cultural work team is the myriad of skill sets, experience, and knowledge across team members.

"As a person, I cannot be an expert in all the fields. For example, you are good in your field, I can be good in my field. I cannot be good in your field at all. So it's about giving respect to people's expertise and being able to ask them questions or talk about problems and valuing their input."

The participant recognized that each individual in their organization possesses unique expertise and specialization in their respective fields. Therefore, one should recognize that one cannot be an expert in every field and should acknowledge the limitations of one's own knowledge. Thus, it is vital to seek input from colleagues who have the right expertise. By valuing and respecting the input of others, team members contribute to a culture of mutual support and collaboration, which are key components of OCB. However, in order to foster OCB, team members must actively engage in sharing knowledge, which requires trust and the ability to recognize the value of diverse perspectives. This in turn also promotes a sense of cohesion and camaraderie among team members.

4.4.4 Organizational Support in Fostering a Supportive Virtual Environment for OCB

Particularly within virtual work environments, organizational support plays a crucial role in facilitating OCB by providing employees with adequate resources and opportunities for social interactions. Organizations can provide support in creating a supportive environment that promotes collaboration, communication, and social connections among team members by various means, such as providing virtual collaboration tools, establishing clear channels of communication, and facilitating virtual team-building activities.

By offering the necessary resources and platforms, organizations empower employees to engage in OCB by facilitating knowledge sharing, helping others, and actively contributing to the overall success of the team. These supportive measures not only enhance employees' capabilities to perform their job responsibilities but also foster a sense of belonging and community, which are crucial for building trust and encouraging positive social interactions.

One way that organizational support can facilitate OCB in virtual work environments is by providing employees with the necessary resources to perform their job effectively. This can include access to technology, software, and other support services. For instance, interviewees below showed that they are satisfied with Company *X*'s investment towards improving their digital infrastructure to make working virtually easier.

"The company has spent money and investments towards their digital infrastructure and digital channels. Which is good because I think that there is a benefit in terms of how the employees feel in the company. So I have the freedom to organize my day, or my week, because I can use digital instruments to work remotely."

"I like to work in this digital environment and the main difference that I see from my previous experience is in terms of tools. Because here in (Company X), we have a well defined list of tools that we can use to improve our digital life."

Additionally, *Company X* also recognizes that employees need aid in improving their physical set up in their homes as it contributes to their overall work productivity and effectiveness. It showed employees that the company is invested in their employees, ensuring that they have the right tools to grow and develop in their job. Evidence of this were mentioned by interviewees in the quotes below.

"The good thing is that, you know, (Company X) has arranged a lot of setup for us at home. So, we were provided with an office setup, with desk chairs from the office as we were allowed to move the office desk and chairs to home with us and then work from there."

"If you have a good setup at home for your office, it's beneficial to work from home, I would say. If you don't then it's a challenge. I have some back problems. So I was struggling, you know, with my arrangements. Then the company actually helped us with our setup and everything. So then I felt good."

Moreover, as mentioned in previous sections, social interactions play a critical role in facilitating OCB in virtual work environments. When employees feel connected to their colleagues and the organization, they are more likely to engage in OCB. Organizations can facilitate social interactions in virtual work environments by providing opportunities for virtual team-building activities, social events, and informal interactions. These activities can help to build relationships between employees, create a sense of community, and foster a culture of collaboration. As shown in the quote below, *Company X* have attempted to create some social interactions virtually outside of working hours, such as having a virtual get-together where they converse casually with one another.

"We organized some sort of virtual drink together. So everybody from his home has a drink. It's not the best experience that you can have but it's an option. It's an option so we can try to feel the same group spirit, the same emotions, the same feelings to not feel really isolated."

However, it seems that *Company X* can do a better job of facilitating virtual social interactions. Many interviewees believe that any online meetings cannot substitute for in-person get-togethers. Currently, with a hybrid work setup, many can participate in in-person interactions, as highlighted below.

"We have Fun Fridays at work sometimes. We even tried organizing a tasting of Italian wine. ... We are already social but we should have more engaging activities. When you are all working in different locations, it's very important that we should meet up, and do something together."

"Physically and mentally for me, it's always good to be in the office. There is more variation in the office, like when you sit together at lunch time, you talk about your culture, you talk about the people, what you did, and different ideologies and beliefs. So that's actually very interesting."

These physical get-togethers can provide opportunities for colleagues to bond and build relationships outside of the workplace. However, these events can also have the unintended consequence of alienating coworkers who do not live in the same geographical area. These colleagues may feel excluded and unable to participate in the same way as those who are able to attend in person. It results in further disconnect as their colleagues who meet up more frequently form closer bonds with each other. The sense of camaraderie seemed to be lacking in virtual interactions due to the lack of intimacy and connection from using video calls or other online tools, and potential technical difficulties that may arise.

To summarize, organizational support plays a critical role in facilitating OCB in virtual work environments. Organizational support in virtual work environments can also extend beyond providing the necessary technology and tools. It also involves promoting a culture that values and recognizes the importance of OCB. This study shows the importance of allocating proper resources, fostering effective communication channels, and cultivating a supportive culture, in order to create an environment where employees feel empowered and motivated to engage in behaviors that go beyond their formal job roles.

5 DISCUSSION

This discussion section provides a comprehensive analysis of the data collected from participants, shedding light on the key themes, patterns, and relationships that emerged during the research process.

The chapter is organized into distinct sections, each focusing on specific aspects of the research questions. The findings highlighted the insights obtained through the exploration of cross-cultural communication, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and the effectiveness of global virtual teams (GVTs). By delving into the complexities of these phenomena, this chapter offers valuable contributions to the existing literature and lays the groundwork for the subsequent discussion of implications and recommendations.

The interview findings can be compared with the GDT (Global Dispersed Teams) Model introduced in Section 2.1. (Cohen and Gibson, 2003). The model emphasizes the importance of design factors, including context, group structure, technology, and people process, in enabling effective team performance. The findings from the interviews conducted align with this model as participants discussed the significance of these design factors in their virtual team experiences. They acknowledged the influence of contextual factors, such as the degree of virtuality and differences among team members, in shaping the team dynamics and effectiveness. Furthermore, the interviews highlighted the role of enabling conditions, including shared understanding, integration, and trust, in promoting effective outcomes within virtual teams. This corresponds to the relationships outlined in the GDT model, where the design factors contribute to enabling conditions, which, in turn, influence the level of team effectiveness.

Moreover, the findings also aligned with the Virtual Team Competency Inventory (VTCI) model proposed by Hertel, Konradt, and Voss (2006) discussed in Section 2.1.1.. As discussed, the VTCI model focuses on identifying the knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) necessary for effective performance in virtual teams, consisting of five main groups of competencies: taskwork-related KSAs, teamwork-related KSAs, telecooperation-related KSAs, intercultural skills, and independence and interpersonal trust (Hertel *et al*., 2006). In the interviews, participants highlighted the importance of reliability and task-oriented skills

in virtual team environments, which aligns with the taskwork-related KSAs identified in the VTCI model. They also emphasized the significance of social skills and effective collaboration, which corresponds to the teamwork-related KSAs. Furthermore, the participants recognized the criticality of intercultural skills, independence, and interpersonal trust in virtual teams, supporting the telecooperation-related KSAs outlined in the VTCI model.

Another finding relates to how participants' experiences underscored the significance of cultural differences within virtual teams. They acknowledged that diverse cultural backgrounds could impact communication styles, decision-making processes, and overall team dynamics. The interview findings align with Hofstede (1980)'s cultural dimensions, particularly in terms of power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance. Participants expressed how power dynamics influenced team interactions, with some cultures exhibiting a greater power distance and others emphasizing egalitarianism. The presence of individualistic and collectivistic values also surfaced, impacting team cohesion and the balance between individual contributions and collective goals. Moreover, the varying levels of uncertainty avoidance among team members affected their tolerance for ambiguity and risk-taking.

Additionally, in light of the House *et al.* (2004)'s GLOBE framework, the interview findings reflected the influence of cultural norms and practices on virtual team collaboration. Participants mentioned differences in communication styles, levels of assertiveness, and the importance placed on hierarchical structures. These cultural dimensions influenced the team's ability to establish trust, engage in open dialogue, and resolve conflicts. However, it is important to note that while cultural differences undoubtedly play a role in virtual team dynamics, it is crucial to avoid oversimplification or stereotyping. Culture is a complex and multi-faceted construct, and individual variations within cultural groups must be acknowledged. Moreover, cultural factors should not be seen as determinants of behavior but rather as contextual influences that interact with individual differences, team dynamics, and other situational factors.

Related to the nature of GVTs, a hidden power structure emerges based on linguistic skills and English proficiency. Employees who possess advanced language skills tend to be more confident in communicating. In turn, they exert greater influence or power within the team.

Their ability to effectively communicate and articulate ideas in the team's shared language provides them with a privileged position, impacting decision-making processes, information access, and overall team dynamics. This linguistic power asymmetry can lead to the marginalization or overshadowing of team members who are less proficient in the shared language, limiting their contributions and participation. This finding is in line with Marschan-Piekkari *et al*. (1999)'s research on how language can be a facilitator but also a barrier and a source of power.

Therefore, despite the necessity of requiring a common language for communication, it is equally important to address differences in language proficiency to avoid creating power imbalances. Organizations in turn must actively work towards creating an inclusive environment which supports individuals with diverse language abilities, considering the impact of linguistic skills on decision-making, information access, and overall team dynamics.

The interviewees particularly highlighted the importance in building a good social climate and managing communication processes. Participants emphasized the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive social climate to mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance team collaboration. This finding resonates with the literature that highlights the significance of group cohesion in determining group effectiveness (Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002) . Additionally, the interviews shed light on the challenges faced in coordinating and managing communication within virtual teams. Participants expressed the need for effective communication strategies, tools, and processes to overcome the limitations of virtual interactions. This aligns with the literature's emphasis on the heightened significance of managing and coordinating the communication process in virtual team settings (Järvenpää & Leidner, 1999; Morgan *et al.*, 2014).

However, existing literature tends to provide a more idealized view of virtual team leadership, highlighting the significance of creating a cohesive and unified team (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Kayworth & Leidner, 2002). The interviews shed light on the complexities and difficulties faced by leaders and team members in actually achieving this unity. Participants highlighted the inherent challenges of building a social climate and fostering team cohesion in a virtual setting, where physical distance and limited face-to-face interactions can hinder relationship-building and trust development.

The interviews also revealed that managing communication processes in virtual teams is not as straightforward as suggested in the literature (Spinks & Wells, 1997; Popescu *et al*., 2012). While the literature emphasizes the importance of effective communication strategies, tools, and processes, the interview findings highlighted the practical difficulties of ensuring smooth and efficient communication in the virtual context. Factors such as language barriers, time zone differences, and technological limitations emerged as significant challenges that leaders had to navigate. These critical differences between the interview findings and the literature underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of virtual team leadership, taking into account the practical realities and complexities faced by leaders in these settings.These disparities between the interview findings and the existing literature raise a question on whether virtual teams can ever truly operate like face-to-face teams, or should there be a new framework for effectively managing them? The practical complexities in managing GVTs call for a more nuanced understanding of virtual team management.

The subjective nature of this study is further highlighted in the context of individual productivity as evident through the diverse perspectives shared by the interviewees. The findings align with the idea that remote work has the potential to enhance individual productivity due to fewer interruptions and increased control over the work environment (Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Harvey *et al*. 2004). However, the study brought to light the importance of also having to consider cultural influences on perceiving productivity. Some interviewees expressed a preference for the structured office environment, perceiving it as more conducive to focus and concentration. They believed that the office provided the necessary atmosphere to enhance their productivity. On the other hand, working from home was seen as more casual and potentially distracting for some individuals. They found themselves more productive when working from home, appreciating the flexibility and convenience it offered. They were able to manage their time and work in a manner that aligned with their needs and preferences.

These diverse perceptions highlight the subjectivity of productivity and underscore the importance of considering individual preferences, work styles, and the specific nature of tasks. It emphasizes that what may enhance productivity for one person may not necessarily be applicable to others. Therefore, organizational leaders and managers should acknowledge

and accommodate these subjective experiences. By providing flexibility and options for different work environments, organizations can support employees in finding the settings where they feel most productive. When employees feel that their work environment is positive, prosocial behavior like OCB can occur (Organ *et al.*, 2006).

The findings also suggest that the relationship between communication, OCB and national culture is complex and multifaceted. While individual personality traits and work styles play a significant role, cultural factors also influence individual perceptions and behaviors, as shown in the study's findings. Cultural values, norms, and expectations can shape individuals' attitudes towards work, time management, and productivity (Oetzel, 1998; Kress, 2010). Additionally, cultural differences in communication styles, decision-making processes, and work-life balance also affect productivity. Nonetheless, it is important to note that cultural influences on productivity are not deterministic, and individual personality and work styles also play a significant role. While some individuals may align more closely with cultural norms and expectations, others may deviate from them based on their unique personalities and preferences. Therefore, when considering OCB and communication methods/styles in the context of GVTs, it is crucial to take into account both individual personality traits and cultural influences.

All in all, the impact of cross-cultural communication and OCB on the effectiveness of GVTs is significant. Participants agreed that trust and cultural awareness are major factors in effective virtual communication. Such factors allowed colleagues to build positive relationships and connections between each other. In turn, when there is a sense of community in the team, members are willing to engage in OCB. OCB that was observed in the study encompassed actions such as proactively creating opportunities to share information, being understanding and supportive to struggling colleagues, and going the extra to ensure a positive onboarding experience for new hires.

The findings from this study reveal that cross-cultural communication challenges exist within GVTs, often stemming from differences in language, cultural norms, and communication styles. In turn, these challenges can hinder effective collaboration and coordination among team members. Despite this, the study also demonstrated that when GVT members engage in positive interpersonal relationships, demonstrate empathy, and foster trust, it enhances the overall effectiveness of the team. Organizational citizenship

behavior, such as knowledge sharing, supporting team members, and exhibiting proactive behaviors, is found to be crucial in promoting team cohesion and performance in GVTs. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of organizational support in providing resources, creating a supportive virtual environment, and facilitating social interactions to enhance OCB in GVTs. Overall, the findings suggest that by addressing cross-cultural communication barriers, nurturing positive relationships, and fostering OCB, organizations can optimize the effectiveness of GVTs and achieve successful outcomes in a global virtual work context.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Research Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of cross-cultural communication and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) on the effectiveness of global virtual teams (GVTs). The main motivation derived from the lack of research combining the three themes, particularly after a massive crisis event such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, by focusing on GVTs, cross-cultural communication and OCB, the three sub-questions arose were:

R1. What are the unique challenges and opportunities presented by virtual work teams in a post pandemic context?

R2. How do cultural and linguistic differences influence communication within cross-cultural virtual work teams?

R3. To what extent does the virtual context of cross-cultural work teams influence employee organization identity and impact the prevalence of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)?

All three questions led to the main research question:

What is the impact of cross-cultural communication on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) within global virtual teams (GVTs)?

To find answers to the research questions, a study of a GVT was conducted. The main research involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of 7 participants who were employees within a single team at Company X. The interviewees represented a range of nationalities, backgrounds, and experiences, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of cross-cultural communication and virtual teamwork within the context of GVTs. The participants shared their personal experiences, perceptions, and insights, offering unique perspectives that complemented the existing literature and provided a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. By engaging in a qualitative approach, the research captured the rich and nuanced experiences of the participants,

allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of the research topic. The interview findings provided valuable context-specific information, highlighting the practical realities and challenges faced by team members in their daily interactions and collaborative efforts within the GVT. This qualitative data enriched the research by adding depth and authenticity to the findings, enabling a more accurate portrayal of the complexities and dynamics at play in the team.

The findings highlighted the distinct nature of GVTs, with a focus on the functions, cultural and linguistic differences, and the presence of OCB. It was evident that GVTs required specific competencies and skills for successful collaboration, as outlined in models such as the Virtual Team Competency Inventory (VTCI) and the Global Dispersed Teams (GDT) Model (Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Hertel *et al*., 2006. However, the interviews revealed critical differences between the idealized views presented in the literature and the practical challenges faced by team members and leaders in GVTs.

The interviews shed light on the importance of cultural intelligence, language proficiency, and intercultural communication skills in GVTs. Participants emphasized the need for mutual understanding, empathy, and respect for diverse perspectives to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. Additionally, the role of leaders in fostering a supportive social climate and managing communication processes was recognized as vital. However, the interviews also highlighted the complexities and difficulties in achieving team unity and effective communication in a virtual setting.

Furthermore, the findings emphasized the significance of organizational support in facilitating OCB within GVTs. Providing employees with adequate resources, opportunities for social interactions, and a supportive virtual environment was crucial for fostering OCB. It was evident that a strong organizational culture and values, along with effective onboarding processes, played a critical role in integrating newcomers into GVTs and promoting their sense of belonging and motivation.

In conclusion, this research contributed to the understanding of the challenges and dynamics of cross-cultural communication and OCB in GVTs. The findings underscored the need for a nuanced approach to leadership, taking into account the practical realities and complexities of virtual teamwork. The practical implications of this research suggest the importance of

investing in training programs, cultural competence development, and the implementation of structured digital onboarding processes to enhance the effectiveness and success of GVTs.

Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the complexities and nuances of cross-cultural communication, organizational citizenship behavior, and virtual teamwork. It offers practical implications for organizations seeking to optimize the performance and effectiveness of GVTs in an increasingly global and digital work environment.

6.2   Practical Implications

Based on the findings and discussions in the previous sections, several practical implications can be made to aid organizations in optimizing the effectiveness of their GVTs by improving cross-cultural communication in order to promote OCB. These practical implications are grounded from the insights gained from the research and aimed to provide actionable recommendations for organizations operating in virtual work environments. The following paragraphs outline the practical implications derived from the findings, highlighting specific areas of focus for organizations to consider in order to maximize the potential of their GVTs.

First, organizations should invest in training and development programs that enhance cross-cultural communication skills among global virtual teams. This can include providing language and cultural sensitivity training, promoting awareness of different communication styles, and encouraging active listening and empathy. Moreover, language lessons to improve English proficiency can also be created. However, for such programs to be used by employees, organizations must actively allocate sufficient time and resources for employees to engage in it. Otherwise, employees are likely to prioritize other work-related tasks over it.

Additionally, organizations can also provide other forms of ongoing training and development. Continuous learning and development opportunities should be offered to global virtual team members. Additional training programs can be on virtual collaboration tools, and leadership skills. By investing in the professional growth of team members, organizations can enhance their skills, knowledge, and overall effectiveness in a virtual work

setting. After all, the ability to adapt to an increasingly digital work environment relies on developing new skills, bridging the talent gap, and safeguarding the potential of employees.

Recognizing and addressing these cross-cultural communication challenges is crucial for the success of global virtual teams. Strategies that promote cultural sensitivity, awareness, and effective communication can help mitigate misunderstandings and foster a collaborative and inclusive team environment. Encouraging open dialogue, providing cultural training or cross-cultural communication guidelines, and utilizing technology tools that facilitate cross-cultural understanding can all contribute to enhancing communication effectiveness and reducing potential challenges in global virtual teams.

Secondly, organizations must provide virtual onboarding support. Given the challenges of virtual onboarding, organizations should develop structured and comprehensive virtual onboarding processes. This includes providing new hires with the necessary resources, information, and support to help them integrate into the team and organization effectively. Clear goals, measures for success, and a multi-departmental onboarding team can contribute to a positive onboarding experience.

This also relates to creating a supportive virtual environment for GVT. Organizations should prioritize creating a virtual work environment that supports team cohesion and social interactions. This can be achieved through the use of collaborative tools, regular virtual team meetings, and opportunities for informal interactions. Building a sense of community and camaraderie among team members is essential for fostering trust, knowledge sharing, and overall team effectiveness. Moreover, a supportive work environment enhances the likelihood of OCB amongst team members. Hence, organizations should also find ways to proactively recognize and reward OCB behavior.

Lastly, organizations should focus on giving the right support to leaders and managers. Leaders and managers play a crucial role in facilitating effective global virtual teams. Organizations can support leaders by enhancing their skills in managing diverse teams, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and fostering a positive team culture. Additionally, providing resources and guidance to managers in effectively managing and supporting virtual teams can contribute to their success. As a result, leaders can help employees harness the potential of technology in this digital age. They can guide and support employees in

understanding how to effectively utilize technology to enhance productivity, collaboration, and overall team performance. By prioritizing the development of digital skills and providing necessary training and resources, leaders can empower their teams to leverage technology to its fullest extent.

By implementing these practical implications, organizations can optimize the effectiveness of global virtual teams, enhance cross-cultural communication, foster organizational citizenship behavior, and create a supportive virtual work environment. This, in turn, can lead to improved team performance, employee engagement, and overall organizational success in the global virtual work context.

6.3   Limitations

The following section presents some limitations of this thesis' research, giving insights to any shortcomings. These limitations should be acknowledged when reviewing the findings and analysis of the study. Nevertheless, they should not diminish the study's overall trustworthiness. As mentioned in an earlier section (Section 3.4.), trustworthiness is gained through heightened self-reflection and preparation.

The research is only made up of a single study from a single work team in a single company. The research findings from participating employees' experience may not be representative of others and thus, cannot be generalized too heavily. Despite the varied demographic, the sample pool only contains 7 participants. The smaller sample size reduces the power of study and increases the difficulty of determining whether a particular outcome is true.

Moreover, there was difficulty and complexity in organizing interviews amongst participants. Interviews were on a strict time limit which did not leave much room for deeper conversation and additional probing questions related to the research. Moreover, not everyone contacted were able to participate due to cancellations and other priorities.

Lastly, the study's findings rely heavily on interpretations. The author acknowledges that biases may be present. On that account, self-reflection was done throughout the study. The author is aware and continuously reflects any biases they might have prior, during and after

the study and how their background (i.e. age, gender, ethnicity) affects their interpretation of the research findings.

6.4   Suggestions for Future Research

Following the limitations, the study can be further improved in the future to gain a deeper and dynamic understanding of how cross-cultural communication affects OCB in GVTs.

To enhance robustness, future studies could adopt a larger sample size, allowing for greater reliability and a more comprehensive understanding of emerging trends. Additionally, expanding the scope of investigation to encompass other work teams within Company X or exploring teams in diverse multinational companies would provide a broader perspective. Furthermore, exploring the experiences of employees within organizations located in different countries outside of Europe, as well as other industries beyond IT, would also enrich the understanding of cross-cultural communication and its impact on OCB in GVTs.

As this research only studied non-native employees, it may provide some valuable insight to also interview native employees and compare their experiences with their non-native colleagues. It would also be valuable to incorporate the perspectives of both native and non-native employees, enabling a comparative analysis of their experiences. Incorporating a more diverse range of societal clusters within the sample would also contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between culture, virtual communication, and OCB.

7 FINAL REMARKS

As the world becomes increasingly globalized, organizations are recognizing the importance of diversity and the challenges it brings. The findings of this study have shed light on how global virtual teams navigate communication barriers, adapt to virtual work environments, and maintain relationships to effectively collaborate and partake in proactive organizational behaviors.

However, due to the limited size and scope, this study only scratches the surface of a complex and evolving topic. With hybrid work models becoming the norm, there is further need to explore the trade-offs and implications that this type of work has on employees' overall work experiences. Moreover, the effects of virtual work on cross-cultural teams extend beyond the immediate context of this study. The interviews were conducted in spring of 2022, thus, the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the impact on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and career development, have not yet been explored.

In conclusion, this thesis served as a starting point for understanding the complexities of cross-cultural communication and virtual work. It highlighted the need for ongoing research and a dynamic approach to studying the effects of virtual work on diverse teams. By continuing to explore these topics, organizations can develop strategies and practices that support effective communication and overall well-being in GVTs to promote desirable OCB.

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