



## **Chapter XI**

# **Mediating Complexity: Facilitating Relationship Building Across Boundaries in Start-Up Virtual Teams**

David J. Pauleen

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Lalita Rajasingham

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

## **Abstract**

*Virtual teams are playing an increasingly important role in organizations. However, virtual teams' increasing team member interaction beyond traditional organizational boundaries has outpaced our understanding of their interpersonal dynamics and unique communication characteristics. Research shows that the development of interpersonal and group communications between team members is an important factor in effective working relationships; however, little research has been done on the effects of crossing organizational, cultural, and time and distance boundaries on relationship building in virtual teams. This chapter reports*

*on a field study of New Zealand-based virtual team leaders working with boundary spanning virtual teams. From a team leaders' perspective, boundary-crossing issues (organizational, cultural, language, time and distance) can affect relationship building in many important ways. These effects are explored and the implications for practice and research are also discussed.*

## Introduction

---

In this chapter, we look at how virtual team leaders assess and respond to boundary crossing issues when building relationships with team members in start-up virtual teams. To give a sense of the revolutionary nature of virtual teams in this regard, similarities and differences with traditional colocated teams will first be examined. Virtual teams are a relatively new phenomenon, and by definition, are groups that work across time and distance via information and communications technology (ICT) (Townsend, DeMarie, & Hendrickson, 1998).

Groups are a basic human societal structure, heterogeneous, based on human communication, and associated with decision making. Cooperation becomes essential to achieve goals. Team creation and maintenance can be considered as a group communications system, subject to group dynamics. Teams are task oriented. Hirokawa and Poole (1996) suggested that the creation and maintenance of teams require rules and protocols, opinion leaders and gate keepers for decision making. With a complex communication process, even in a colocated environment with visual cues such as body language and gestures, in technology-mediated virtual environments, complexity assumes a greater dimension (Tiffin & Rajasingham, 1995, 2001). Sapir-Whorf's (1921, 1956) theory of linguistic relativity argues that the structure of a culture's language determines the behavior and habits of thinking of that culture and is an important consideration in building relationships across boundaries in virtual environments.

With rapid advances in information and communication technology allowing for alternatives to face-to-face communication, virtual teams are playing an increasingly important role in organizational life and are often assigned the most important tasks in an organization, such as multinational product launches, negotiation of mergers and acquisitions among global companies, and management of strategic alliances (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). However, their use has outpaced the understanding of their dynamics and unique characteristics (Cramton & Webber, 2000). This chapter adds to this understanding, particularly as related to leader-facilitated relationship building with team members.

The following section backgrounds relationship building, boundary crossing, and leadership in virtual teams. This is followed by a brief explanation of the

23 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/chapter/mediating-complexity-facilitating-relationship-building/30903](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/mediating-complexity-facilitating-relationship-building/30903)

## Related Content

---

### Motion Cueing Algorithms: A Review: Algorithms, Evaluation and Tuning

Sergio Casas, Ricardo Olandaand Nilanjan Dey (2017). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 90-106).

[www.irma-international.org/article/motion-cueing-algorithms-a-review/169937](http://www.irma-international.org/article/motion-cueing-algorithms-a-review/169937)

### Grid Computing for Social Science

Kenneth J. Turner, Paul Lambert, K. L. Tan, Vernon Gayle, Richard O. Sinnott, Ken Prandy, Erik Bihagenand Marco H.D. van Leeuwen (2008). *Encyclopedia of Networked and Virtual Organizations* (pp. 643-651).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/grid-computing-social-science/17671](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/grid-computing-social-science/17671)

### VR Presentation Training System Using Machine Learning Techniques for Automatic Evaluation

Yuto Yokoyamaand Katashi Nagao (2021). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 20-42).

[www.irma-international.org/article/vr-presentation-training-system-using-machine-learning-techniques-for-automatic-evaluation/290044](http://www.irma-international.org/article/vr-presentation-training-system-using-machine-learning-techniques-for-automatic-evaluation/290044)

### An Immersive Tractor Application for Sustainability: A South African Land Reform and Learners' Perspective

Ofentse Mabiletsa, Sarel J. Viljoen, Jason Arthur Farrell, Lwando Ngqwemlaand Omowunmi Elizabeth Isafiade (2020). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 35-54).

[www.irma-international.org/article/an-immersive-tractor-application-for-sustainability/262623](http://www.irma-international.org/article/an-immersive-tractor-application-for-sustainability/262623)

### The Role of Mechanics in Gamification: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

Miralem Helmeffalk, Siw Lundqvistand Leif Marcusson (2019). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 18-41).

[www.irma-international.org/article/the-role-of-mechanics-in-gamification/228944](http://www.irma-international.org/article/the-role-of-mechanics-in-gamification/228944)