

The Influence of Information Technology on Organizational Behavior: Study of Identity Challenges in Virtual Teams

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to examine the effects of virtual team dimensions on social identities of its members. A review of the literature shows that the geographically dispersed, culturally diverse as well as temporary dimensions of virtual teams do not match with their stability as members have different ethnic, social, or cultural backgrounds. Sources like culture, place, and time seem to continuously acquire social identities. Due to the importance of social identity, an attempt has been made to examine its influence on organizational variables (i.e. job satisfaction, job involvement, job commitment, and organizational citizenship behavior). Questionnaire-based data have been accomplished from 149 members of 44 teams. The hypothesized relationships among the proposed variables are tested via a structural equation model (SEM). Results show that the geographically disperse and culturally diverse variables are negatively related to the social identity as against those of temporary and organizational variables which are related positively.

Keywords: *Information Technology, Job Satisfaction, Social Identity, Structural Equation Model, Virtual Teams*

INTRODUCTION

The ever increasing de-centralization and globalization of work processes have caused many organizations to respond to their dynamic environments by introducing virtual teams, in

which members are geographically dispersed but coordinate their work via electronic information and communication technologies (Hertel et al., 2005). A virtual team is often consisted of a geographically dispersed, culturally diverse, temporary, electronically communicating work-group (Shin, 2005; Harvey et al., 2004). However, little is known about human resources within these teams, despite the level of

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research interest and growing of this new work form (Hertel et al., 2005; Lin et al., 2008). In other words, having different human resources challenges, the study of virtual teams with its diverse memberships has become an emerging trend these days.

Team members may have different sexes and racial groups, with different ethnic, social, or cultural backgrounds. Based on the social identity theory, members of a team with heterogeneous characters may find it difficult to integrate their diverse backgrounds, values, and norms and work together (Eckel & Grossman, 2005). Social identity has been defined in many ways; the common element in these definitions is inclusion of group membership as part of one's self-concept (Meyer et al., 2006). However, the virtual teams with geographically dispersed members from different cultures find it difficult to integrate socially.

The social identity involves one as part of a larger whole (Rousseau, 1998; Tajfel, 1978). Since they belong to multiple or collective groups such as an organization, division, and team, employees can form multiple social identities, one or more of which might be prominent at any given time (Meyer et al., 2006).

The present research intends to address the following major questions related to the effects of virtual team on social identity and organizational behavioral variables (satisfaction, job involvement, commitment and organizational citizenship behavior).

1. What are the sources of social identity acquisition and how they affect virtual teams?
2. What is the social identity status in virtual teams?
3. Is there any significant correlation between social identity and organizational behavior variables in virtual team and what is the status of these variables?

Literature review of virtual team and necessary resources for the identity acquisition is given along with the research methodology. Re-

sults are discussed with concluding remarks and a brief avenue for future research is highlighted.

DEFINITION OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

Globalization has transformed not only the market structure, rather customers' needs, and technological innovations have made organizations choose a new structure to respond to rapid environmental changes (Harvey et al., 2004; Bauer, 2003; Shin, 2004; Kock, 2008). Virtual organizations are one of the new entities shaped on this basis. The formation of virtual organizations requires information technology and qualified and knowledgeable personnel and leaders (Wickham & Walther, 2007; Kahai, et al., 2007; Hambley et al. 2007; Glückler & Schrott, 2007; Konradt & Hoch, 2007) for inter-organizational group activities (Larser et al., 2002).

The virtual organizations are often defined as the one, constantly interacting with the environment, and whose internal structure is based on virtual teams. In other words, virtual teams constitute the core of virtual organizations (Larser et al., 2002; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997). Researchers have variably defined the virtual organizations and there analysis indicates that the main part of those definitions is highly analogous, except in some cases (Martins et al., 2004).

As such, a virtual team consists of a group of geographically dispersed people utilizing communication and information technologies in order to perform their organizational tasks (Jong, 2008; Kelley & Sankey, 2008; Martin et al., 2004). Most of the definitions introduce the virtual teams as of having the characteristics of temporal structure, cultural variety, geographical dispersion and electronic communications (Hertela et al., 2005; Shine, 2005; Harvey et al., 2004). In other words, they are considered as the combination of distributed specialties in temporal, geographical and cultural domains. Consequently, their characteristics can generally be defined in four dimensions of spatial,

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