THE NATURE AND INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIP ON PERCEIVED SUCCESS IN A VIRTUAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

Carol Locher Ransone
Dissertation Defense
January 2014
Overarching Research Question

What is the nature and influence of relationship on success in a virtual work environment?
Positionality of the Researcher

- Mobile Upbringing
- History of Working in Virtual Work Environments
- Senior Operations Project Manager
  - Flexible Work Program - Operational Excellence Team
    - 2007 – 2010
  - Alternative Workspace Team
    - 2012
Virtual Work Environments

The virtual continuum description of primary work location. Adapted from Zigurs (2003).

Workers conduct business from centrally located offices with leadership on-site.

Geographically dispersed satellite established and led by leaders from headquarters.

Independently directed and geographically dispersed teams are connected technologically.

Geographically dispersed workers are connected technologically.

The Virtual Continuum
Virtual Work Environment & Relationship

• “Relationships play a key role in a team’s success” (Maznevski & Anthanassiou, 2003, p. 199).

• “It is necessary, especially in virtual environments, to add a human link to coordinate and build relationships among virtual team members” (Kleinhanns, 2003, p. 384).
Relational Cultural Theory (RCT)

Enlarged Vision of Human Possibility

- Sense of Purpose and Self-worth
- Engagement
- Empowerment
- Clarity
- Desire for More Connection

Good Conflict – Power as Shared – Mutuality – Fluid Energy – Creativity - Productivity

Five good things and resulting outcomes.
Research Questions

What is the nature and influence of relationship on success in a virtual work environment?

1. What is the profile of a virtual worker in terms of demographics, virtuality, relationship, and perceived success?

2. How important is it to virtual workers to experience high-quality relationships in a virtual work environment and how does it align to their perception of relationship?

3. What is the correlation between perception of relationship quality and relationship as measured by the Relational Health Indices and the Connectivity component?

4. What factors influence success in a virtual work environment?

5. What suggestions do virtual workers have for building and maintaining high-quality relationships or to improve productivity?
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Method of the Study

Measures
- Relationship
- Demographic
- Perceived Success
- Virtuality Profile
- Qualitative

Survey Instrument
- Questionnaire
  - Powered by SurveyMonkey®
  - Included QUAN(qual) Items
  - Survey Prototype

Participants
- Member of a Virtual Work Team
- Convenience Sample
- LinkedIn Network

Data Capture
- Website Hosting
- LinkedIn Cascading
- Specialized Business Cards
Methodological Fit: QUAN(qual)

Performing a mixed study enriches each of the data.

Quantitative data is generalizable and qualitative data is transferable.

Leverage the benefits of quantitative research obtaining specific data surrounding relationship and virtual work environments.

Non-experimental method as it is much more useful to examine participants who are on virtual work teams in business organizations who are performing meaningful tasks.

“The underlying premise of mixed-method rationale for mixed-method inquiry is to understand more fully, to generate deeper and broader insights, to develop important knowledge claims that respect a wider range of interests and perspectives”*

* Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 7
A virtual team is a group of individuals who are in different locations and who work together through technology-facilitated communication to achieve common goals.
Five Categories of Data

Demographic
- Team Demographics
- Personal Demographics

Relationship
- Perception of Existence of Relationship
- Importance of Relationship
- RHI & Connectivity Items to Create RHI-TEAM

Virtual Profile
- Geographic Detailed Items
- Interaction Detailed Items
- Technology Tools Detailed Items
- Overall Perceived Virtuality & Subparts

Outcomes / Success
- Perceived Goal Achievement
- Perceived Job Satisfaction
- Perceived Relationship Satisfaction

Qualitative Commentary
- Building / Maintaining High-quality Relationships
- Routines / Tools
- Suggestions to Improve Productivity
Instrument and Website Hosting

Virtuality Profile and Relationship

Introduction

Calling those who work in virtual team environments! Please take this opportunity to reflect upon and share your experience with working virtually by responding to this survey. By responding to this "virtual work" survey you will be participating in cutting-edge research that fills an information void in the field. Your voice will help describe the importance and quality of relationships as well as what factors contribute to success in the virtual work world. Participation is voluntary and one may withdraw from the study at any time.

The Ransone Group, LLC

Research

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This study is being conducted by Carol Locher Ransone, a doctoral candidate in the Leadership and Change program at Antioch University, Yellow Springs, Ohio. The results of this study will be used for her doctoral dissertation and possibly other future publications. If you have questions or would like further information about this study, please contact us.

Member of a Virtual Team

1. A virtual team is defined as a group of individuals located in different locations who work together virtually. Please indicate if you are involved in communication to achieve common goals. Are you a member of a virtual team?

- Yes
- No
Participant Recruitment

LinkedIn

Carol Ransone has sent you a message.
Date: 4/20/2013
Subject: Research Survey
I hope you are doing well to research virtual work - RansoneGoup.com/Research
https://www.surveymonkey.com who work in virtual work environments. Please take this opportunity to share your experience by completing the survey...
Your voice will help illuminate relationship quality and what factors contribute to success in the Research Survey - Virtual Work Environments

I have been asked to post the following message:

I hope you are doing well. My dissertation proposal was approved and I have just posted 14 days ago.

Carol Ransone 6 days ago • Thank you so much, Vaughn. We have captured some great information so far...

Calling All Who Work in Virtual Teams
Virtuality & Relationship Dissertation Research

- Take this opportunity to reflect upon and share your virtual work experience.
- Please share the survey with other virtual workers so they may also participate.

Thank you so much for your participation!
Carol Locher Ransone (cransone@antioch.edu)
Doctoral Candidate - Antioch University - PhD in Leadership & Change

Business Cards for Events

LinkedIn Cascading
Respondent Overview

410 Started the Survey

-62 Dropped Up Front

-46 Dropped @ Relationship

-27 Dropped @ Virtuality

-19 “Cleansed”

256 Complete!
Detailed Analysis & Summary Themes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. What is the profile of a virtual worker in terms of demographics, virtuality, relationship, and perceived success? | • Virtuality variables  
• Relationship variables  
• Perception of successful outcomes variables  
• Demographics (team and personal) | • DESCRIPTIVE  
• PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS (PCA) WITH FACTOR LOADING |
| 2. How important is it to virtual workers to experience high-quality relationships in a virtual work environment and how does it align to their perception of relationship? | • Importance of high-quality relationships  
• Perception high-quality relationships exist  
• Demographics (team and personal) | • DESCRIPTIVE  
• CORRELATIONAL |
| 3. What is the correlation between perception of relationship quality and relationship as measured by the Relational Health Indices and the Connectivity component? | • Demographic  
• RHI-TEAM\textsubscript{W} components  
• Perception high-quality relationships exist | • BIVARIATE CORRELATIONAL |
| 4. What factors influence success in a virtual work environment? | • Independent variables  
  o Control: Demographic variables  
  o Mediating: Virtuality variables  
  o Research question: Relationship variables  
• Dependent variable: Perception of Success variables | • MULTIVARIATE CORRELATIONAL |
| 5. What suggestions do virtual workers have for building and maintaining high-quality relationships or to improve productivity? | Commentary on:  
• Building / maintaining high-quality relationships  
• Routines / tools  
• Suggestions to improve productivity | • DESCRIPTIVE – THEMATIC ANALYSIS |
Key Findings

- The Role of Relationship in Virtual Teams
  - Components of Virtuality
  - Adaptation of the RHI to Virtual Work Team Environments
  - Demographic Difference in Relationship
  - Relationship Importance versus Perceived Existence
  - Measurement of Success
Key Findings

- **The Role of Relationship in Virtual Teams**
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Perceived Virtuality & Interaction

- **% Face-to-face Meeting Frequency**
  - None: 35%
  - 1/ Year: 38%
  - Several/ Year: 10%
  - 1/ Month: 8%
  - Few/ Month: 5%
  - Few/ Week: 3%
  - Daily: 1%

- **Perceived Virtuality (1-10 Ratings)**
  - Technology: 8.6
  - Interaction: 8.5
  - Geographic: 8.0
  - Overall: 8.4

- **% Time Allocation**
  - Individual Work: 51%
  - Communicating Virtually: 37%
  - FTF with Other(s): 11%
  - Misc.: <1%
Geographic: Primary Work Location (PWL)

- Primary Work Location of Participant
  - Home Office: 56%
  - In an Office Building: 38%
  - Flexible Work Center: 6%

- Geographic Location of Teammates
  - Same Country: 58%
  - Different Countries: 30%
  - Local: 12%

- Locations of Teammates
  - All Different: 41%
  - Most Different: 33%
  - One or a Few: 26%

- Participant Location Compared to Team
  - Most Work: 8%
  - Few Work: 30%
  - No Other Team Members: 62%
Technology Tools

• How Many Times Do You Use…

• How Comfortable are You With…

• Our Team Successfully Uses…

• Gap between use of text versus video
  • Team success was highest with audio conferencing followed by text tools
  • Personal comfort with the tools is higher than the team’s success

• Legend:
  - Text Tools
  - Audio Conferencing
  - Video Conferencing

* Ratings Supplied Only For Those Who Use The Tools
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Development of RHI-TEAM \(_w\)

- **Initial Design – Modification of Items**
  - Relational Health Index (RHI)*
    - RHI-Mentor
    - RHI-Friend
    - RHI-Community
  - Connectivity**

- **Study Included**
  - RHI-TEAM
    - Based on RHI-Community
    - 14 items
  - Connectivity: 4 items

* Liang et al. (2002)  ** Carmeli et al. (2009)
RHI-TEAM\textsubscript{W} Relationship Measures
Original RHI Grouping

**Engagement**
- If members of this team know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.
- It seems as if people in this team really like me as a person.
- This team provides me with emotional support.

**Empowerment**
- I feel better about myself after my interactions with this team.
- I have a greater sense of self-worth through my connection with this team.
- My connections with this team are so inspiring that they motivate me to pursue relationships with other people outside this team.
- This team has shaped my identity in many ways.

**Authenticity**
(Reverse Scoring)
- Members of this team are not free to just be themselves.
- There are parts of myself I feel I must hide from this team.
- There is a lot of backbiting and gossiping in this team.
- Members of this team are very competitive with each other.

6 Options: Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree
RHI-TEAM₇: RHI-EE₇ & RHI-A₇
Correlation Between Engagement & Empowerment

Engagement/Empowerment

• If members of this team know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.
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Adaptation of the RHI to Virtual Work Team Environments

• Foundation for Measurement of Team Relationship in Work Environments

• Two Components
  - Engagement/Empowerment
  - Authenticity

• RHI-TEAM\textsubscript{W}
  - RHI-EE\textsubscript{W}
  - RHI-A\textsubscript{W}
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Demographic Details

- **Team has Existed**
  - 0-3 months: 3%
  - 3-6 months: 10%
  - 6 mo-1 year: 20%
  - 1-2 years: 30%
  - > 2 years: 37%

- **Tenure with the Team**
  - 0-3 months: 5%
  - 3-6 months: 15%
  - 6 mo-1 year: 25%
  - 1-2 years: 20%
  - > 2 years: 25%

- **Country/Cultural Background**
  - Different: 57%
  - Same: 43%

- **Team Position**
  - Leader: 39%
  - Member: 61%
Demographic Details - continued

- **Age**
  - Under 50 years: 55%
  - 50 years or over: 45%

- **Gender**
  - Male: 41%
  - Female: 59%

- **Team Size and Industry**

  - Team Size: 51-200
  - Team Size: 21-50
  - Team Size: 11-20
  - Team Size: 6-10
  - Team Size: 3-5
  - All Other Industries
Demographic Difference in Relationship

- **Significant Difference**
  - Respondent Team Position
    - Team Leader ($M=5.28$)
    - Team Member ($M=5.10$)
    - $t_{(1, 254)} = 1.833, p =0.068$
  - Country/Cultural Background
    - Same ($M=5.33$)
    - Different ($M=5.04$)
    - $t_{(1, 254)} = 2.988, p =0.003$

- **No Significant Difference**
  - Age
  - Gender
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Perceived Relationship Importance versus Perceived Existence (Mean)

- Dependent t-test results
  - Importance Higher Than Existence
  - Significant Difference Overall and Among All Demographics ($p = 0.000$)
Perceived Relationship Importance versus Perceived Existence (%)

- Analysis of the Percentage Differences Identified the Largest Difference within:
  - Under 50 Years of Age Group (20.5%)
  - Males (19.3%)
  - Team Members (19.2%)
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Perceived Success Measures

- **Team Goal Achievement**
  - My team achieves its’ goals.

- **Personal Job Satisfaction**
  - I am satisfied with my job.

- **Relationship Satisfaction**
  - I am satisfied with the relationships we have in our team

10 Point Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree and 10=Strongly Agree
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Success & Factors that Influence Success
The Role of Relationship in Virtual Teams

- Perceived Success Ratings (1-10 Rating)
  - Goal Achievement
  - Job Satisfaction
  - Relationship Satisfaction

- Factors that Influence Goal Achievement*
  - Team Tenure
  - Overall Virtuality
  - RHI-EEw
  - RHI-Aw

- Factors that Influence Job Satisfaction
  - Team Position
  - RHI-EEw
  - RHI-Aw

- Factors that Influence Rx Satisfaction*
  - Team Tenure
  - Overall Virtuality
  - RHI-EEw
  - RHI-Aw

* Excluded Team Position
Narrative on:
what builds or makes it difficult to have high-quality relationships and routines teams use to stay connected

Team Routines
Builds
Makes it Difficult
Personal Lives
Limitations

- Anonymity of Respondents
- Inability to Account for Environmental Differences
- Sample Size and Characteristics
- Nature of Self-report of Success
- Bias: Respondent & Researcher

If I had known then what I know now!
Recommendations for Future Research

• Use Data Acquired by Study for Additional Research
• Address Study Limitations
• Include Other Relationship Dynamics of Peer and Leader
• Deep Drill Relationship Through a Longitudinal Study
• Incorporate Additional Tools
• Study and Compare In-person versus Virtual Workers
Implications for Practitioners

- Personal Knowing
  - Relationship
  - Trust
  - Respect
  - Cultural inclusion
  - Technology Tools
  - Sustainment & Balance

- Team Structure
  - Team Processes
  - In-person Interaction

- Virtual Teammates

- Virtual Team Leaders

- Leadership & Change

- Organizations that Employ Virtual Workers

- Importance of Relationship
  - Virtual Team Literature Assumes Short-term Teams
  - Cultural Inclusion

- Provision of Technology Tools
  - Support for In-Person Interaction
  - Work/Life Balance
Significance of the Study

Impact of Relationship on Perceived Success
- Illuminated the impact of relationship on perceived success across the virtual continuum and provided guidance to those working in virtual environments on how to improve connections.

Introduced Relational Cultural Theory to the Business World
- Highlighted the importance of Relational Cultural Theory, pulling it into mainstream research and providing visibility and applicability to the business world.

Added to the Body of Knowledge about Virtual Work
- Added to the body of knowledge about virtual team environments.

Recommendations for Virtual Workers
- Provided valuable insights and recommendations to those working in virtual work environments.

Existence & Importance of Relationship Gap
- Provided visibility into the importance ratings of specific items and identify and understand the gap between current and desired states.
Many Thanks!

Many Thanks to My Committee and to My Circle of Family & Friends!

Dr. Elizabeth Holloway

Dr. Carol Baron

Dr. Laurien Alexandre

Dr. Ron Rabin
Questions?