Virtual Leadership in Brazil –
Virtual Intelligence in Multinational Companies

A Field Study on Leadership in a Virtual Context with Focus on its Effect on Teamwork in Culturally Diverse Teams

Authors: Cia Wiltorn – 890605
Ida Wikström – 900605
Tutor: Björn Bjerke
Examiner: Philippe Daudi
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Declaration

We hereby declare that this master thesis was written on our own. Furthermore, we confirm the proper indication of all the sources used.

Cia Withorn

Ida Wikström

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ABSTRACT

As the technology develops, the communication infrastructure continues to innovate and increase competitiveness. For companies in a country such as Brazil, communicating virtually may be very beneficial in order to become more efficient, as well as more global. Due to today’s technological development and globalization, virtual teamwork has increased. For virtual teamwork to be successful, the importance of virtual leadership needs to be addressed by the organizations. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate leadership in a virtual context with focus on its effect on teamwork in culturally diverse teams. Furthermore, due to its emerging market and economic relevance, this study will examine virtual leaders of multinational companies in Brazil.

From our dialogues we found that there is a lack of technological infrastructure, education, and positive attitude for virtual communication and virtual leadership within multinational companies in Brazil. Brazil as a country, as well as companies in Brazil, needs to provide opportunities and possibilities for excellent virtual communication and leadership. For instance, facetual communication and attication are important concepts on the way for companies of becoming virtualized.

KEY WORDS

Virtual Leadership, Virtual Teams, Virtual Communication, Virtual Context, Cultural Diversity, Brazil, Multinational Companies
# Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION............................................................................................................. 1  
   1.1 The Chosen Country of Research: Brazil ......................................................... 3  
   1.2 Problem Discussion ........................................................................................... 4  
   1.3 Research Gap ..................................................................................................... 6  
   1.4 Purpose ............................................................................................................... 7  
   1.5 Research Questions ............................................................................................ 8  
   1.6 Delimitations ....................................................................................................... 8  

2. LITTERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................................. 9  
   2.1 Virtual Leadership ............................................................................................. 9  
   2.2 Virtual Teams .................................................................................................... 10  
   2.3 Team Motivation ............................................................................................... 11  
   2.4 Cultural Diversity ............................................................................................. 12  
   2.5 Language .......................................................................................................... 12  
   2.6 Trust .................................................................................................................. 13  
   2.7 Virtual Communication .................................................................................... 14  
      2.7.1 Face-to-Face Communication ....................................................................... 14  

3. METHODOLOGY ........................................................................................................... 16  
   3.1 Actors View ....................................................................................................... 16  
   3.2 Awareness of the Reality ................................................................................... 17  
   3.3 Qualitative ......................................................................................................... 17  
   3.4 Primary and Secondary Data ........................................................................... 18  
   3.5 Ethical Principles .............................................................................................. 18  
   3.6 Collection of data: Selection ........................................................................... 19  
      3.6.1 Company X .................................................................................................. 20  
      3.6.2 Company Y ................................................................................................. 21  
   3.7 Collection of Data: Dialogues .......................................................................... 23  
   3.8 Development of New Language ....................................................................... 24  

4. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS ............................................................ 25  
   4.1 Virtual Leadership ............................................................................................. 25  
   4.2 Virtual Teams .................................................................................................... 27  
   4.3 Cohesion & Inclusion of Virtual Teams ............................................................. 28  
   4.4 Motivation of Virtual Teams ............................................................................ 28  
   4.5 Cultural Diversity ............................................................................................. 29  
   4.6 Language .......................................................................................................... 31
1. INTRODUCTION

Concurrent with today’s rapid development of communication means, the organizational teams of multinational firms are becoming more and more diverse, geographically dispersed, and virtual. This calls for a need for enlightenment and deeper comprehension on the subject of virtual communication and virtual leadership. In this chapter we will guide you in the problematization regarding virtual leadership, as well as presenting the research gaps, the purpose of this study, and our research questions. Additionally, we will present our research area in context to Brazil.

According to Penley and Hawkins (1985), as organizations and individuals become more and more dispersed, communication becomes the main focus and mean by which individuals exercise leadership. Moreover, Barge (1994, p. 21) claims “leadership is enacted through communication”. In order to understand the relationship between these variables, researchers are developing a more clear understanding of the links between leadership and communication (Neufeld, Wan and Fang, 2008).

By virtue of today’s current global economy, a more complex and dynamic environment has been created, in which most firms are required to learn to compete effectively to achieve sustainable growth (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Since workforces become increasingly larger, more diverse, educated, as well as mobile; the global environment has not only changed the way business is conducted; a need for organizations to manage their workforces in a global context has emerged (Tarique and Schuler, 2010).

OECD’s (2013) report on communications outlook, reports that the communication infrastructure continues to innovate and increase competitiveness both within the industry, but also in the broader economy. The OECD (2013) countries find these developments as helpful; they perceive them as an opportunity to strengthen and maintain their economies, as well as improve social welfare, and challenges related to equity. The shift from using telephone to Internet-based communication took more than a decade to implement, and the Internet connection went from
dial-up to broadband networks. Furthermore, this development created the opportunity to make long-distance calls over the Internet (OECD 2013).

Due to globalization, demands from the environment (Nyström and Asproth, 2013), and the increasingly advances in communication technology; it is more common than ever for global organizations to work together as teams in a virtual context in which some, or all, team members are working in different geographic locations (Mobley, Li and Wang, 2011). In this study, ‘virtual’ in the context as opposed to ‘physical’ means that meetings, communication, information exchange, and leadership is carried out by the support of some sort of technology (Nyström and Asproth, 2013), henceforth, teams or leaders whom operates in a virtual context, will be referred to as ‘virtual teams’ and ‘virtual leaders’.

Due to the rapid development of telecommunications and the Internet during the past 15 years, working in virtual teams has become a commonplace feature of modern business, with approximately over 60% of employees in companies with more than 500 employees working virtually (Jenster and Steiler, 2011). Purvanova (2013) adds that 71% of today’s workforce uses electronic communication technologies. These technologies have made it possible for virtual teams to emerge in the business context.

Virtual teams emerged due to two main reasons according to Purvanova (2013):

- Virtual teams *save money* for the company due to reductions in travel costs, meeting times, duplication costs and other logistical expenses.
- Organizations using virtual teams become *more flexible*, and they can therefore handle the pressures of the increasing business globalization and competition, as well as meeting their customers’ service demand more timely and efficiently.

These reasons make it very likely that businesses will continue to use or adapt to virtual teams in the future.

Notwithstanding the unique advantage of virtual teams regarding the strength of diversity, and making 24-hour operations possible; the nature of
virtual teamwork have also brought unique challenges for leaders to manage
global virtual teams (Mobley et al., 2011).

1.1 The Chosen Country of Research: Brazil

Brazil was colonized by Portugal for more than 300 years, and was
proclaimed independent in 1822 (Cavazotte, Hartman and Bahiense, 2014).
Thus, Brazil is said to have had a top-down societal model, which likely
germinated from Portugal, with little or no ideal of democracy. Throughout
the 1900s, Brazil underwent several dictatorships, where the last one was a
military regime that endured from 1964 to 1985. Therefore, the country can
still be considered a young democracy, and Brazilian’s beliefs regarding
power distance may still reflect upon the experiences during such regimes of
exception. Furthermore, Brazil is described as a country where power,
social, and work relationships are highly intertwined (Cavazotte et al., 2014).

At present, with approximately 201 million inhabitants (Trebat, 2013), Brazil
occupies nearly half (47%) of South America, and is accounting for 60% of
the South American industrial production (Cavazotte et al., 2014). According
to Trebat (2013), Latin America is subject to a transformation of the society,
as well as the region’s role in global affairs. In several aspects, Brazil has
been representative of the “emergence of a new, more inclusive, more socially
mobile Latin America” (Trebat, 2013, p. 127), gaining acknowledgements
regarding the strength of its vivacious democracy, the constancy of its
economic management, as well as the efficiency of its social policies. Trebat
(2013) continues, that Brazil’s image of itself as the dominant country in
Latin America, a frontrunner of the global South, as well as a significant
partner for the United States – and the West overall – “now seems more
within its grasp than at any other moment in its history” (Trebat, 2013, p.
127). Thus, Brazil has attracted considerable direct international
investments, with several multinational companies establishing their
businesses in the country (Cavazotte et al., 2014). Having this context in
mind, cultural diversity and its implications for attitudes and behavior in the
workplace, become a highly relevant and substantial complexity to daily
operations.
Economically, Brazil is one of the most powerful nations in the Western Hemisphere (Landguiden, 2014). It is the largest country on its continent, and also the only country with Portuguese as native language, opposed to Spanish as the rest of South America, which may create a language barrier towards the adjacent countries (Landguiden, 2014). Furthermore, according to Education First’s (2013) ranking of English Proficiency Index, Brazil was ranked as number 38 out of 60, which represents low proficiency. Even though Brazilian adults have improved their English in the past six years, this progress does not match the magnitude of the economic development of Brazil during the same period. Even though the Brazilian government, as well as the private sector have noted and initiated major education programs, these investments target children and university students. Private English tutorials cost between 30 to 50 USD per lesson, which is more than 10% of one month’s minimum wage. Hence, the only ones who can afford lessons are those in the middle or upper classes (Education First, 2013). Thus, despite that Brazil is one of the four largest economies in the world, i.e. BRIC; the infrastructure of Brazil is considerably under-dimensional, as well as under-developed (Landguiden, 2014).

By virtue of its expanding market, where several multinational companies have established their businesses; Brazil presents interesting opportunities for greater interaction with the global community (Trebat, 2013). Although, due to the cumulative development, yet infrastructural and educational challenges, it would be of importance to create an increased understanding of how companies in Brazil manage the development of virtual communication, and virtual leadership. Is Brazil prepared?

1.2 Problem Discussion

According to Mobley et al. (2011), leaders of virtual teams often experience challenges, such as decreased opportunities for meeting face-to-face due to cutbacks in travel budgets, motivational challenges because of reductions in training and development budgets, as well as increased workload and consequential difficulties in reaching team goals by virtue of layoffs and shrinking sales. Yet, Johnson, Chanidrapa, Berret, and LaFleur (2003) made the discovery that the socialization issues in virtual teams are just as
common in face-to-face teams. These issues include the unwillingness to participate in meetings due to schedules, lack of engagement, individual disagreements, or other issues (Johnson et al., 2003).

Several prior leadership theories have been examined in field studies of virtual teams, namely transactional leadership (Allen, 2005), leader-member exchange theory (Moore, 2008), transformational leadership (Bass, 1985), behavioral complexity (Wakefield et al., 2008), as well as inspirational leadership (Joshi et al., 2009). Nevertheless, according to Jenster and Steiler (2011), managers in organizations have expressed frustration regarding the inaccessibility of several of the existing leadership theories, their complexity, scarcity of relationship to reality, and the exertions to apply them to real life situations. Moreover, virtuality is said to ‘change the rules of the game’ concerning effective leadership (Weisband, 2008), which suggest that leaders of virtual teams are in need of more practical, readily applied models of leadership than the ones that are currently in practice (Jenster and Steiler, 2011).

According to Jenster and Steiler (2011), in today’s fast-paced, increasingly virtual workplace, leaders create instant impressions on others through their visible behaviors in at least the three following key areas:

- How they motivate others to participate fully in team activities;
- How they stipulate structure and direction to others;
- How they provide personal support and reassurance to others

It is argued that these impressions are of great importance since they have significant impact on team members’ engagement, motivation, as well as willingness to trust their leader (Duckworth, 2008; Jenster and Steiler, 2011). Nevertheless, Jenster and Steiler (2011) means that it is difficult to measure virtual team members’ perception of their leader’s behaviors. Moreover, there does not seem to exist a reliable way to accurately assess a global virtual team’s situation regarding team aspects such as team member motivation and team cohesion (Jenster and Steiler, 2011).
It is therefore of importance to further investigate how global leaders of virtual teams may keep their team members motivated and how to build the teams into cohesive units that can stay together over the long term.

1.3 Research Gap

Concurrent with the increasing use of virtual teams, the literature has been accumulating (Hoch and Kozlowski, 2012). Yet, most researchers have focused on the advantages and disadvantages regarding virtual teams, where disadvantages are identified as lower levels of team cohesion, work satisfaction, trust, and commitment to team goals; i.e. factors that all can negatively impact a team’s performance. Thus, Hock and Kozlowski (2012) finds it surprising that such relatively limited research has been conducted towards virtual team leadership. Additionally, Purvanova and Bono (2009), argues that the empirical literature on leadership in virtual communication settings, is still young.

Furthermore, Kelley and Kelloway (2012) claims that, even though the information technology is increasingly utilized in order to enable employees to work at a distance; there has been nominal research regarding the nature of working in an environment where the leader and follower are separated by physical distance, and interacts primarily through technology. Research that examines the effect of this context, and, furthermore, identifies and explains the aspects that contribute to its augmented complexity, is very scarce. Thus, leadership in a remote, or virtual context has been particularly underexplored, even though examinations on virtual teams have verified that this is vitally important (Kelley and Kelloway, 2012; Collinson, 2005).

Additionally, extensive research has demonstrated the importance of leadership as a predictor of individual as well as team outcomes (e.g. Kelley and Kelloway, 2012; Dvir, Kass, and Shamir, 2004). Yet, much of this research assumes that the team members interact with their leader and other members on a “face-to-face” basis (Kelley and Kelloway, 2012). Whilst organizations become more and more reliant on electronic communication, the extent to which the traditional leadership model adequately explains leader behaviors and their outcomes is questionable. Hence, leaders simply
cannot lead a team virtually in the exact same way as they do in face-to-face situations (Kelley and Kelloway, 2012; Hambley, O’Neill, and Kline, 2007).

Due to the fact that cultural diversity is regarded as a strategic asset for companies that operate globally, issues related to how to manage cross-cultural organizations and teams have become important aspects in business administration (Cavazotte et al., 2014). Furthermore, the connections between leadership styles and followers behaviors are argued to vary in virtue of cultural factors. Since virtual teams progressively span national boundaries, thus differences in cultural background are becoming more significant to consider as an aspect of virtuality (Hoch and Kozlowski, 2012). According to Chang, Chuang and Chai (2011), there have been very few studies conducted to assess the effect of cultural diversity on virtual teams. Moreover, Hinds, Liu, and Lyon (2011) criticized the lack of inclusion of national and cultural differences in the conceptualizations of virtuality.

Accordingly, we aim to investigate leadership efficiency in an environment characterized by physical distance, and reduced face-to-face interaction between employees and their leaders. We refer to this situation as “virtual leadership”. Based on the evolving view of virtuality, our conceptualization comprises geographic distribution and cultural diversity as an addition to the established components of virtual teams.

Our research will therefore contribute to the areas of leadership, as well as computer-mediated (i.e. virtual) communication. It also extends the leadership literature by connecting diversity and inclusion in a virtual context.

**1.4 Purpose**

To lay the foundation of a deeper understanding of the elaborated problem, the purpose of this study is to investigate leadership in a virtual context, with focus on its effect on teamwork in culturally diverse teams. Furthermore, due to its emerging market and economic relevance, this study will examine virtual leaders of multinational companies in Brazil.
1.5 Research Questions

- How may the perception of efficient virtual leadership be outlined?
- How may a leader manage globally dispersed virtual teams, which are culturally diverse?
- How may the perception of preparedness regarding virtual communication and virtual leadership in Brazilian multinational companies be outlined?

1.6 Delimitations

Regarding efficient virtual leadership; this study will not examine team members’ perceptions, but solely the leaders’ own perceptions of efficient leadership in a virtual context. Furthermore, efficiency will not be conceptualized in this study. Hence, efficient leadership will be based upon subjective definitions from our participants. Conclusively, we have chosen not to follow any leadership model in our study. This is due to Jenster and Steiler’s (2011) argument, that the leadership models in practice today, are not fully applicable to virtual leadership.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter we account for the challenges of virtual leadership, and what defines successful virtual teams. Subsequently, we outline significant problems in the virtual context, such as the lack of non-verbal communication, cultural diversity, language, and trust.

2.1 Virtual Leadership

Leadership is argued to be as much of an art, as a role that has significant impact on individuals, groups, organizations, and societies (Lord and Dinh, 2014). In this study, we have chosen to outline leadership through three principles. Firstly, leadership is socially constructed and shaped by multiple individuals. Secondly, information processing is believed to have a significant impact on leadership. Conclusively, the effects of leaders are believed to often be indirect, and distributed across time as well as people; this since it is shown that the performance of followers often happen over time (Lord and Dinh, 2014).

There is an identified consensus among researchers that virtual teams are more challenging to lead than face-to-face teams (Hoch and Kozlowski, 2012). Previous research has even shown that the effects of leadership tends to be diminished in the context of virtual teams, this by virtue of well-known challenges of virtual teamwork, such as geographic dispersion, computer-mediated communication, time zones, as well as cultural and language differences (Jenster and Steiler, 2011). Furthermore, Nyström and Asproth (2013) suggest that trust, cohesion, and satisfaction are foundational paradigms that needs to function when leading virtually. Yet, the main hindrances and obstacles when creating efficient and successful virtual teams are identified as the following (Nyström and Asproth, 2013):

• Creating efficient team leadership
• Managing conflicts and the dynamics of global virtual teams
• Developing trust and relations
• Comprehending cross-cultural differences
• Developing competencies regarding intercultural communication
2.2 Virtual Teams

Generically, a team is described as a group of individuals who interacts interdependently and is brought together to achieve particular outcomes or attain certain tasks (Berry, 2011). Furthermore, using teams is argued to increase responsiveness, capability, and flexibility within organizations (Maynard, 2006; Berry 2011).

Virtual teams are defined as an interdependent group of individuals, whom works across time, space, and organizational boundaries through computer-mediated communication tools that are heavily dependent on advanced information technologies (Lipnack and Stamps, 2000; Berry, 2011; Jenster and Steiler, 2011). Furthermore, Davis and Bryant (2003) describes global virtual teams as members from multiple nations and cultures whom are required to work together while being separated by time and space. Hence, a virtual team may therefore rarely, or never meet face-to-face (Berry, 2011).

The prevalence of utilizing virtual teams is increasing, since it gives organizations the ability to bridge time and space (Kanawattanachai and Yoo, 2002; Berry 2011). A commonly mentioned benefit regarding virtual teams, is the cost efficiency compared to the expenses and time of travel for synchronous face-to-face teams (Berry, 2011). Furthermore, companies that use virtual teams, claims this offers them augmented productivity; improved flexibility; increased access to talented employees; as well as closer contact with globally dispersed customers (Jenster and Steiler, 2011; Gibson and Cohen, 2003; Weisband, 2008).

Moreover, Klein and Kleinhanns (2003), claims that asynchronous processes often are more effective and resourceful, since participation occurs in parallel instead of serially. Hence, if designed, managed, and implemented successfully, virtual teams may harness talent and knowledge from anywhere in the world to resolve problems or accomplish work tasks on a 24/7 schedule. However, if poorly designed or managed, outputs might be incompetent or nonexistent, and the team dynamic can be weak or may even fail (Berry, 2011).
Yet, virtual teamwork is described to be fraught with difficulties; in particular when crossing geographic and cultural boundaries, namely, communication problems related to cultural differences (Jenster and Steiler, 2011; Jarvenpaa and Lieder, 1999). Moreover, there are identified challenges related to lack of face-to-face interaction; where feelings of isolation, due to the separation by distance and time from fellow team members, occur. Furthermore, information is usually not shared immediately, and is often interpreted distorted in a virtual context, which can result in team members that lack understanding of why certain things occurred, or how decisions were made (Fan, Chen, Wang & Chen, 2014). This has strongly exposed severe challenges and demand for effective management of virtual leadership to keep dispersed, virtual teams motivated. According to (Carron & Brawley, 2000), one way of overcoming some of these challenges is to have a cohesive team. Cohesion is described as a team’s tendency to united work towards a goal or emotional satisfaction of its members. Cohesion is also said to be the next step after the first team bonding, in keeping the team together and prevent group fragmentation (Carron & Brawley, 2000).

Conclusively, organizations are recommended to deliberately create the conditions for efficient virtual teamwork, since failure of virtual teams is described as a consequence of inept leadership or management, rather than a consequence of technology or other factors (Berry, 2011).

### 2.3 Team Motivation

According to Park, Spitzmuller and DeShon (2013), team motivation is the collaboration of the extent, and intensity of the teams composed effort towards a shared goal, via regulatory, interdependent feedback.

The collective team motivation requires that the team members are subjects to influences originated by the team, and therefore, share the same motivational reality. Thus, individual team members influence the overall process of team motivation, which, in turn, implicates the individual motivation of team members, (Park, Spitzmuller and DeShon 2013). Othman, Abdullah and Ahmad (2009) concludes that; the motivation of a team member can show in changes of attitude, behaviors and outcomes in
team performance, well-motivated team members has better attitude, and show better results than non-motivated team members.

2.4 Cultural Diversity

Due to the continuous development of technology and globalization, transnational teams are a reality (Staples and Zhao, 2006). Virtual teams that span national boundaries, create a strong possibility that the team members have diverse national backgrounds. According to Staples and Zhao (2006), aspects of diversity in teams may include observable differences, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and age. It may also comprise unobservable differences, such as skills, information, knowledge, values, cognitive processes, and experience. Furthermore, Klitmøller and Lauring (2013) describe the term cultural difference as the dissimilarities regarding aspects such as core values and beliefs, as well as legal, political, and economic systems.

Furthermore, one should take into consideration that cultural diversity holds both positive and negative aspects; Staples and Zhao (2006) describes how the value of diversity derives from increased creativity, innovation, and flexibility. However, negative aspects of team diversity comprise communication difficulties, misunderstandings, decreased cohesion, as well as increased conflicts (Staples and Zhao, 2006).

Moreover, Staples and Zhao (2006) stress the importance for today's organizations to understand the possible impacts of diversity on team performance.

2.5 Language

The Economist magazine published a survey on virtual team management of teams positioned globally, where miscommunications due to language and cultural differences are the issues that arise most (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013). Although language is considered to be our most overt way of communicating, in a global environment, however, not everyone speaks the
same language or obtains the same degree of linguistic proficiency (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013).

According to Klitmøller and Lauring (2013), language commonality in global teams refers to which degrees individuals share common understanding of the English language. This includes skills, such as proficiency in grammatical structures and pronunciation of words, and knowledge regarding using the language where applicable.

Moreover, Klitmøller and Lauring (2013) claim several studies have provided important insights into virtual team dynamics, yet these tend to neglect the cultural and linguistic aspects of virtual teamwork. Furthermore, in international business research, language has often been labeled as the ‘forgotten factor’.

2.6 Trust

“Nowhere is trust more critical than in teams where members bring divert goals, values, and ideologies” Sarker, Ahuja, Sarker and Kirkeby (2011, p. 275)

Nyström and Asproth (2013) claim that the formation of trust contains a reciprocal element and falls under two behavioral categories. The first category is credibility, where one part believes that the counterpart holds capabilities, expertise, competencies, and resources, which contributes to a successful outcome. The second category regards benevolence, that is the beliefs concerning the emotional aspects of the counterpart’s behavior (Nyström and Asproth, 2013). Many scholars describe trust as the foundation on which all teams develop synergy and become effective (e.g. Nyström and Asproth, 2013; Chhay and Kleiner, 2013). In virtual teams there is often an extra hurdle to build trust in comparison to traditional teams, since the development of trust through sharing social norms and interactions, as well as repeated experiences, is now lacking (Jarvenpaa and Lieder, 1999; Chhay and Kleiner, 2013).
Sarker et al. (2011) argue that it is not until recently that organizational researchers have devoted substantial attention to comprehend the significance of trust. It is furthermore suggested that this trend has arisen due to two crucial developments; that is the prominence on collaboration, and the changes in technology, where the coordination of work across distance and time has been reconfigured (Sarker et al., 2011).

### 2.7 Virtual Communication

Virtual communication is described as the use of computer-mediated technologies to communicate across space, time, as well as organizational boundaries (Lipnack and Stamps, 2000; Berry, 2011).

Kelley and Kelloway (2012) argues that frequent communication in virtual teams results in improved working relationships between team members, strengthen of affective commitment, as well as increased perception of trust in the leader. Nevertheless, virtual communication within a remote environment carries a significant risk of decreased communication frequency.

In addition to the already mentioned hindrances and barriers related to leading teams through virtual communication; when managers are trying to create an effective team and schedule meetings, time zones become a major issue that has to be taken into account. Due to times zones, many teams work through asynchronous communication (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013). However, a case study conducted by Ludwig (1999), revealed flaws in asynchronous communication, where mainly communicating through email led to the free-rider problem.

### 2.7.1 Face-to-Face Communication

The body language provides people with information that is not expressed explicitly, in the verbal component of the message. Scholars claim that nonverbal communication, e.g. body language and eye contact, represents 80 percent of our communication (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013). Furthermore, researchers suggest that electronic communication is inferior to face-to-face
communication, since nonverbal cues are reduced or lost (Kelley and Kelloway, 2012). This may result in misinterpretations, increased role ambiguity, decreased trust, as well as inaccurate perceptions of others. Moreover, there is a risk of lower leader influence, as well as reduced group cohesiveness. Consequently, Kelley and Kelloway (2012) also argue that the degree to which interpersonal relationships may develop is reduced.
3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains a justification and explanation to why we have chosen the actors view, and how this methodology is executed. Further, a description of the organizations and respondents, as well as discussion concerning the analysis and creation of language is provided.

3.1 Actors View

Arbnor and Bjerke (1994) describe the actors view as a dynamic view, where a researcher (actor) is active, and creates the ongoing process of a world seen as socially constructed. Such a world is not independent of a single actor; it is created by every participating actor, together with the co-created experiences she or he has with others. The researcher has the role of the observer\textsuperscript{1}, however, he or she is, of course, also an actor. In comparison to the systems- and the analytical view, the observed subjects are seen as acting rather than behaving. The actors view intends, at best, to create a new language, in order to improve on understanding the process, which is observed. This can be seen as a creative action – a new and creative way of improving the knowledge creating process. (Arbnor & Bjerke 1994)

In order to comprehend the ongoing process; dialogical and face-to-face interactions are very important tools of the actors view. These are seen as instruments to understand the dialectical process, i.e. to recognize the differences and unity of opposites in the process of understanding the world (Arbnor & Bjerke 1994).

In this thesis we used the actors view in order to get deeper into the actual problem, and get a closer comprehension for the issues of virtual communication and leadership, which is our research focus.

\textsuperscript{1} In order to make a complex matter more easily understood, we use the term ‘observing’, when describing what the researcher’s role is.
3.2 Awareness of the Reality

According to Arbnor and Bjerke (1994), there are several views and comprehensions of what methodology is and how it is used. These different methodology views make different assumptions about the reality around us. In order to understand the reality, certain assumptions about how this reality is created, are necessary. These assumptions work as a guideline for the “creator of knowledge”, i.e. the researcher. A knowledge creator is described to create knowledge in a certain area of expertise, when she or he has made conscious assumptions about the reality and hence become a conscious researcher.

The concept of methodology is a complex matter and it is not possible to generalize or favor one specific view. Which view to be chosen, is based on the context of the research and the researcher’s personal perception and views (Arbnor & Bjerke 1994)

Due to the fact that every human being (hence every researcher and reader) has his or her own concept of reality, and their own assumptions, the understanding of reality (in our case, this thesis and our findings), can differ from person to person. That is why it for every researcher is very important to be transparent, and clear in order to communicate the way of understanding the report to make sense to others.

3.3 Qualitative

A qualitative research method is based on words rather than numbers. Compared to a quantitative approach, a qualitative method captures the softer values that are hard to get in a quantitative research. A quantitative study aims to interpret the social reality on the basis of the participants in a certain context interpretation of this reality. A qualitative research method is difficult to define and is rather what quantitative research method is not (Bryman and Bell 2013).

As the qualitative approach advocates the depth in the study, and since our research aims to find the softer values and relations within a complex context, we therefore chose a qualitative approach as our research method.
3.4 Primary and Secondary Data

Primary data contain new material, which is created and intended for this particular study (Arbnor and Bjerke 2009). Whilst secondary data is, according to Arbnor and Bjerke (2009), information created previous to a particular study and not specifically intended for a particular new study. Authors need to be careful when using secondary data, and try to evaluate the trustworthiness of this information source.

The majority of our data is of a primary nature; the collection of data was conducted through dialogues with qualified people from designated companies. Yet, this study aims to consider whether the suggested solutions to the problems in the literature, are perceived as accurate according to virtual leaders in Brazil. Therefore, we will present empirical and theoretical findings, in order to create additional insight and knowledge regarding the virtual context in Brazil.

3.5 Ethical Principles

In this study, we have followed ethical consideration not to intrude on anyone’s personal integrity. Arbnor and Bjerke (2009) explain that every member of society has the personal right not to be inspected.

All participants of this study have been informed of the purpose, and how their participation will be documented and used in the context of the study. We used two companies for this study and they both chose to be anonymous, we signed a confidentiality agreement between the companies and us as researchers, where we stated not to reveal any delicate information about the company, the name of the company nor the participants in this study. Therefore, the companies will henceforth be called Company X and Company Y, and all of the participants will go by the name of their initials. Prior to the publication of this thesis, the participants were all provided with the material, to read through for approval.
3.6 Collection of data: Selection

Arbnor and Bjerke (1994) write that the actors view is primarily interested in specifying the significance of social phenomena, and their subjective logic. Therefore, the argument of representativeness, does not apply to the actors view. The selection of subjects to study will not be representative here. In the selection of subjects to be studied one should take a more pragmatic view. When selecting specific individuals, for instance, from a chosen company one could use one or several of these selection techniques:

- Selection based on recommendation
- Selection based on understanding
- Problem-oriented selection

According to Arbnor and Bjerke (1994), a selection based on recommendation is made by actors who recommend other interesting actors. The understanding selection means to search for actors proving to be of relevance to the research in some way. In a problem-oriented selection, people are selected depending on connection with a known problem. Authors often use a combination of these three types of selection when choosing a selection of people to “observe” in the research.

In our research we selected two multinational companies who are both founded in Sweden and have subsidiaries in Brazil.

Our initial contact with both companies was with people from Sweden, who then referred us further to personnel located in Brazil. Regarding Company X, initial contact was made in December 2013, and the actual dialogues as conducted in late Mars/early April in 2014, thus the process was quite long. With Company Y on the other hand, the initial contact was made in the middle of March, and the dialogues were spread out over the following couple of weeks. In the following section we have included short descriptions of the companies, as well as the participating persons of our study.
3.6.1 Company X
Company X is a multinational company, founded in Sweden. Furthermore, it operates in the steel-business and reaches over 130 countries with 50,000 employees. In Brazil, there are approximately 1,700 employees. We chose this company due to the fact that it is a company that works globally via virtual communication means on a daily basis. We also had some contacts within Company X beforehand, and therefore the access was made possible.

The selection of employees in Company X, Brazil, to be included in the study, was based on all three types of selection mentioned above. It all started with a leadership consultant (M.N) of company X, who became our contact of Company X in Sweden, thereafter, he recommended us to the Vice President of Sales in Brazil (R.Z). R.Z set up two members of his team, apart from himself, to work with us.

Contact Persons
M.N - Leadership consultant at Company X, Sweden, Skype dialogue and email communication.
A.H - Manager Diversity and Inclusion, Sweden. Email communication.
Å.L.N - Manager Change and HR, Sweden. Skype and email communication.

Participating Persons

G.R (2014-03-24)
G.R works as Service manager for one of Company X’s business areas in Brazil. In his virtual communication he mostly uses email and has only had two experiences with teleconference calls (only audio).

R.C (2014-03-25)
R.C works as Application Manager for one of Company X’s business areas in Brazil. He has a team located in different places in Brazil, and communicates mostly via email.
This dialogue was conducted via Skype.
R.Z (2014-04-01)
R.Z is the Vice president of Sales of one of Company X’s business areas in Brazil. R.Z’s boss is located in Sweden; they communicate via videoconferences every month, as well as they have webinars for marketing and sales. He also uses virtual communication to talk to his team members located in other cities in Brazil.

3.6.2 Company Y
Company Y is an industrial group founded in Sweden, which produce sustainable productivity solutions for industrial use. It is a multinational company that reaches over 180 countries all over the world with over 40,000 employees. One of Company Y’s main foci is sustainability, as a part of this; Company Y has a goal to increase employee diversity in both nationality and gender, in order to create a workforce consisting of all cultures, nationalities and religions. A step towards this goal is to employ locally, and encourage mobility across both geographical and organizational borders, in order for the employees to develop further competencies.

Company Y was selected by recommendation and availability. The Corporate Communication Manager in Brazil (A.R.S.), selected participants for our dialogue based on a short draft we sent to her, explaining our research (see Appendix I).

Contact Persons
C.B - Vice President Holding, Brazil, initial contact to the Company, emails, and Face-to-face meeting.
A. R. S - Corporate communication manager, Brazil, email.

Participating Persons

M.L (2014-03-26)
M.L works as Marketing Product Manager of the South America region for one of Company Y’s business areas, and has daily contact with the seven customer centers in South America. M.L’s boss is located in Houston, USA, and he has team members in Belgium and his business-area head quarter is
located in China. His job is dependent on virtual communication, and he spends approximately at least two hours per day with videoconference. He is the indirect boss of the specific team’s members – he leads them toward their goal together with their boss on site.

L.M (2014-03-31)
L.M works as the Regional Business Systems Manager, and is responsible for Company Y’s business system worldwide. He has a team of seven people in the Latin America region (Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Chile). L.M has worked at Company Y for two years; he has one boss in Belgium, and one in India to which he reports to weekly via virtual communication. He and his team are in the beginning of starting a regional team, which benefits from synergies from each other. L.M provides weekly meetings to exchange information between the countries, and manage the work by distance as well as weekly meeting with each country. Every week, he participates in two global meetings (Asia, South Pacific, North America, South Africa and Europe), one hour each with the support group and the leader group. These meeting have the purpose to share information and experiences between the regions.

V.L (2014-04-01)
V.L works as Factory Product Manager in one of Company Y’s business areas, and is currently product manager for a specific business line in Brazil. He is responsible for leading teams in order to make the product visible and produce it in Brazil. He uses virtual communication 3-4 times per week, depending which phase the team is in the current project. Some of his team members are based in India.

E.K is the IT Manager of the service department in Company Y, Brazil; he is, among other things, responsible for the education of the virtual communication tools in Company Y, Brazil. E.K uses virtual communication to communicate with his boss who is located in Chile (regional manager), and a weekly global meeting. He is mostly a team member in the virtual context, and not a leader. This dialogue was done via Skype. Yet, since the connection was too poor the first time, we rescheduled and continued our dialogue at a later date.
3.7 Collection of Data: Dialogues

Arbnor and Bjerke (1994) write that, within the actors view, the researcher uses the technique of dialogue in order to collect data within which the researcher is acting. A dialogical technique consists of the researcher (actor), being one partner of the situation that is being researched. The researcher is as engaged as the other participants and is contributing to the context on the same terms as the subjects being researched. The only difference between the researcher and the other subjects is that the researcher has the interest to interpret, analyze and draw conclusions of the collected data. The findings of such an observation is a new social construction, co-created by the actors involved, and they are interpreted and understood, but not explained. The purpose of these “observations” and activities is to develop a partly new language, at the same time as most other parts of the language being used are confirmed in the social process between all participants, including the researcher.

One important aspect of dialogues is honesty; the knowledge creator (researcher) as well as the other actors needs to be honest and trust each other, in order to get a useful result of the study. As a researcher, one needs to be both within the dialogue but at the same time outside it, in order to analyze the situation. It is not only the spoken or written word that is a part of the dialogue; the researcher also needs to be observant of the body language. Furthermore, the dialogue itself is not an isolated situation; the context around needs to be considered (Arbnor and Bjerke 1994).

In our dialogues, we started out with some basic and open questions, where the participants could tell us about themselves, and their perception of virtual leadership in their daily work. We then had a guideline (see Appendix II) with the aspects and areas of virtual communication and virtual leadership we wanted to touch upon. We asked broad questions and did not have fixed or specified questions. From the open questions, depending on the participants different experiences of virtual leadership, and team work in a virtual context, we asked follow-up questions depending on their answers.
We believe that the participants perceived the dialogue environment as trusting, and safe. However, two of the participants seemed to be insecure, which we believe was due to the fact that they were not as experienced with the subject of virtual teamwork and virtual leadership. This is something we considered when continuing with the dialogues and the analysis of the findings. Two of our dialogues were conducted via Skype, partly due to distance and time management, but also for us as researcher to experience the situation we wish to examine.

3.8 Development of New Language

Arbnor and Bjerke (1994) describes, that the aim of the dialogue within the actors view is to create a deeper understanding and purposeful acting for the future. In order to do this, the actors view aims at creating some new concepts in the language, used by participants in their views of the socially constructed reality at large. With the help of new concepts, it might be possible to create new perspective, and, thus improve one’s own understanding.

To create language you can include new combinations of words, phrases, metaphors, analogies, simplifications and illustrations in combination with artistic expressions. These combinations in a modified, new, language will provide at least the researcher, and hopefully some of the other participants a new basis for understanding their situation in a new light.

We aim to find the gaps and difficulties in the practice of leadership in a virtual context. We hope to outline the most important aspects of how to manage virtual communication and leadership of diverse virtual teams, but also to find improvements that can be made in this context. From our dialogues, we hope to find new and relevant ideas for handling the challenges of virtual leadership that would help leaders in their virtual work. Furthermore, we wish to get an understanding of the overall attitude and preparedness of multinational companies and its personnel in Brazil.
4. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this chapter we aim to connect our empirical findings with the literature regarding the challenges of virtual leadership and virtual communication.

4.1 Virtual Leadership

To become a successful leader of globally dispersed, virtual teams, the literature refers to some specific competencies, skills, and mindsets. Recurring competencies are appropriate and clear communication (Berry, 2011; Gerke 2006), cultural intelligence; in order to create competitive advantages of multicultural teams, a leader must value and integrate cultural diversity, as well as language skills (Guillory, 2013). Moreover, according to Gerke (2006), the ability to build and maintain relationships is one of the most important aspects. Deep and trusting relationships need to be built between the leader and follower, as well as among the team members. Due to the lack of casual encounters in the virtual context, the leader must work on these relationships, since they might not come natural, as they would in a face-to-face context (Gerke, 2006). This is supported by Jenster and Steiler (2011), who suggest a ‘softer’ form of leadership that might improve three important team outcomes; namely team members’ motivation, team commitment and team trust, as well as perceived effectiveness.

Moreover, participative leadership; namely, frequent communication and sharing of information with team members, requesting input from members, as well as affirming communication between team members, has disclosed to have a positive effect on team performance (Cummings, 2008; Jenster and Steiler, 2011). Nevertheless, Jenster and Steiler (2011) emphasize that the more tangible, ‘hard’ aspects of team leadership, such as setting goals, explication of roles, responsibilities and expectations, giving direction, as well as managing team performance, they too, are significant to the study of effectiveness of virtual teams.

Recurring answers among the participants regarding the qualities and characteristics of an efficient virtual leader are someone who is open,
committed, and very organized. Furthermore, a virtual leader is expected to be an effective collaborator, with proficient communicative skills. This entails someone who is good at reading situations, and able to perceive cues and details that often are easier to miss when leading remotely. It is also of consensus that a leader needs to be very clear of what the company wants, as well as with directions; this to make sure that the team members receive the message accurately to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings. V.L claims that a poorly executed project is usually due to that the message and vision were misunderstood from the beginning. Yet, M.L mean that it takes at least 6 months before a team is aligned and aim towards the same goal, before it is effective.

According to the participants, other important traits of a virtual leader is the willingness to listen and learn, as well as discuss and review with the team members. Furthermore, a leader’s goal should be that the team members become autonomous, where they feel confident that their decisions will bring the company forward, in a united direction. V.L elaborates that most people do not appreciate when a leader is very restrictive and directive; instead a leader should trust them with the freedom to execute their tasks howsoever they prefer it, as long as the directions and goals are followed and accomplished.

Three key points were identified as essential to keep in mind as a virtual leader, namely culture, infrastructure, and video. R.Z argues that it is required for you as a leader to comprehend the different cultures of your team members, in order to understand what is important to them. Regarding the infrastructure, the technology needs to be working and seamless, in order to keep remote meetings and conferences with your team. Thirdly, it is of great importance to be able to see the face of the people that you work with; therefore video is preferred rather than audio conferences or mail correspondence.

According to the participants, education and training regarding virtual leadership has been very scarce or lacking completely. The ones whom shared papers regarding virtual leadership, or discussed it during leaderships training has identified this as very helpful, mainly since they
have had to start lead virtually without any initial education. Moreover, the consensus is that companies should prioritize that this sort of training is executed with people whom are about to lead virtually. M.L means that after 2,5 years of leading virtually, it is too late for him to be educated within this area.

Conclusively, virtual leadership training is perceived as a valuable necessity that is lacking, even though multinational companies are trying to enhance their diversity by recruiting people of different age, gender and ethnicity from various places all over the world, which requires virtual teamwork. “Therefore, the companies need to add this education in the agenda”, R.Z explains.

4.2 Virtual Teams

Regarding effectiveness of virtual teams, Berry (2011) outlines important factors that should help build bridges between dispersed team members, to provide a common ground where differences can be learned, accepted, and understood. Firstly, the organization needs to be supportive with standards that are developed in order to enhance a positive culture of virtual teamwork. Furthermore, team members need to have knowledge regarding the technology being used; the characteristics of the task; and the processes of the work and team itself. Educations, trainings, and developments for the team members are therefore relevant to apply frequently (Berry, 2011).

As a virtual leader you need to make sure the team members understands their task, and that they will do their part. The participants state that a virtual leader therefore needs to be even clearer than in a face-to-face context, in order to make sure that the message is interpreted the way that it was intended. Thus, the participants find that continuous feedback from the team members provides a certainty, that the message was delivered and understood accurately.

Furthermore, the participants mean that a leader needs to find team members of a certain profile when compiling a virtual team. The members of a virtual team needs to consist of committed people who works effectively independently, are comfortable with being led by distance, communicates
clearly, and are not afraid to ask questions. Furthermore, the members need to be mature and experienced in their field and have confidence in themselves and the task ahead. The participants mean that it requires a certain mindset, in order to handle the challenges of being led by distance. Hence, the participants mean that some people are not suited for virtual teamwork, usually people who will not complete their job task duly when they are not feeling the pressure of a physically present boss.

4.3 Cohesion & Inclusion of Virtual Teams

Creating a team where everybody feel included and that they are one, is perceived as a challenge, which is handled differently among the leaders. The suggested solutions regarding inclusion of virtual teams are to keep the team unified, to make everyone feel included in the team. The leader should make sure that everyone feels seen and appreciated for the task ahead; that everyone's opinion is valuable. Furthermore, a leader needs to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing perspectives and thoughts. To accomplish this, the participants mean that a leader also needs to build individual relationships with each team member, this in order to know how they act and react in different situations. A leader should know the members well enough in order to tell if they feel excluded or misinterpreted. The participants highlight the importance of feedback and individual conversations to solve and prevent these issues, or as R.Z expressed it: “It is never good for a team member to think that they are alone”. The better the relationship, the better the communication, and in the end, the better the result. Another suggested activity to include dispersed team members according to E.K is to create a project that will benefit the whole region.

4.4 Motivation of Virtual Teams

M.L mean that the struggle with lack of motivation usually occurs after one year. There seems to be a consensus that frequent communication and feedback is key to keep up the motivation among the team members. According to G.R motivation is kept up when everybody has an opportunity to share their point of view and opinions with the group, “communication
must be aligned with democracy”. Furthermore, in order to keep the team motivated, the leader needs to find motivational triggers for each members of the team.

The participants underline the importance of recognition, which should be done in both official meetings to the group as a whole, as well as individually, and should, furthermore, not solely be work related. However, comments can motivate some people, but work on the contrary for others. It is therefore of importance to chose your words carefully as a leader, and not to step on anyone’s toes.

Additionally, R.Z believed that the motivation is kept up by “fighting the distance”; i.e. meeting face-to-face. That is why leaders aim to visit their members, or invites them to their plant, 1-2 times a year so that they are aware of what is going on in the company, and so that they feel that they are a part of the company as well as the team.

Yet, an example is given of how a team member, prior of working virtually, had meetings with his boss once a year, even though they were sitting in the same office together. The fact that this member now is participating in weekly meetings is a big change, which has led to requests for specific trainings or approvals, due to a greater confidence in the leader. Hence, even though the leadership is remote, the work process, results and confidence can be higher than with local face-to-face teamwork. Nevertheless, it is also highlighted that it is very easy to lose the motivation and the confidence if you fail them in delivering what they requested.

### 4.5 Cultural Diversity

The benefits of cultural diversity is explained by several of the participants to mainly be related to the customers; when a team is diverse, different perspectives of the same issue are lifted in discussions, which prevent customers from various cultures to be unsatisfied. V.L mean that when leaders involve people with different perspectives in a project, new synergies are created and the development is at its best; more possibilities are detected, which create the best product possible.
Chhay and Kleiner (2013) assert that team members work better if they are culturally sensitive. Cultural sensitivity training is therefore seen as an effective method to allow two-way communication within a team (Verghese, 2008). Furthermore, raising awareness regarding enculturation and its effect on decision-making is argued to enable the comprehension of different cultures, as well as the communication with team members more effectively (Verghese, 2008).

According to Guillory and Guillory (2013), the concept of a great organization in terms of oneness, instead of sameness, is the culmination of the natural progress of diversity, inclusion and globalization. The aim should be to actively create an inclusive work environment through small acts of inclusion. Small acts of inclusion are exemplified as inclusive relationships on the basis of acceptance, respect, and support of each other (Guillory and Guillory, 2013).

Nevertheless, all of the participants identify cultural differences to be one of the main challenges when leading a global, virtual team. Although that benefits, such as different viewpoints, ways to solve problems, and innovations, are noted by most of the participants; these are said not to occur if the cultural diversity is not handled, accepted, and understood accurately. What is especially highlighted as challenging differences between cultures, are the expectations and speed of work processes. Therefore, it is of importance for the leader to be adaptable to their cultures, and sometimes treat people differently depending on their expectations. Furthermore, it is the leader’s task to make people aware of the differences within the group, which can occur from different company cultures as well as from nationalities.

The importance of understanding cultural differences is also explained by the fact that the relationships within the team are dependent on an open mindedness in the group. M.L adds that the understanding of cultures is a necessity to build trust in the team, which, in his experience, takes approximately 6 months; that is when the team becomes effective.
Out of the participants, only two had received training in cultural diversity, yet none had been in the context of virtual teams; instead it has been a matter of learning by doing when it comes to interactions, and how to include different cultural behaviors. Nevertheless, all of the participants find that it would be useful and valuable to acquire further education within this area. Moreover, trainings regarding cultural intelligence, diversity, and inclusion are requested to be increased as well as frequent, or as L.M states; “it is not enough if you had it a few years ago”. L.M also specified that it would be appreciated to receive a customized training with details and characteristics of the specific area that one works with; instead of an education with a global or general perspective.

4.6 Language

Chhay and Kleiner (2013) argues, that even though English is considered to be the international language of business, which many countries have adopted as an unofficial second language, people might be reluctant to, or not proficient enough to speak English. Hence, managers should recognize that the different levels of proficiency could cause communication delays, and therefore, maybe hire translators to compensate (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013).

There is a consensus among the participants that global leaders in Brazil, are not only expected to be holding a qualified level of English as a language skill; since Brazil often holds the headquarters of the South/Latin American division of multinational companies, the level of Spanish is expected to be conversant at the very least. Additionally, M.L mean that if a leader wants to communicate with the lower levels of the personnel, one needs to learn Spanish. Otherwise, you may solely interact with people on management level, since these are mainly the ones who speak English. Furthermore, several of the participants mention the made-up, yet widespread, terms “Espanguese” where one either speaks Spanish combined with basic Portuguese words, and “Portañol” which works the other way around. Yet, the participants identify Spanish as an additional language barrier.
Therefore, the participants have taken language classes, usually in both Spanish and English, to make it possible to communicate as seamless as possible with their team members. In general, companies support their leaders when they want to take language classes with either financial support, or the course itself. However, according to the participants, this mainly occurs on management level, which induce two things; firstly, managers are sometimes chosen due to their language skills, rather than level of expertise. Secondly, followers are not privileged with language courses to the same extent, which therefore can mean that the language barriers are severe even though the leader is proficient in English. Moreover, several participants have noticed that followers are sometimes insecure due to their level of English, which result in them mainly want to communicate by text instead of audio, that they do not feel comfortable to talk in front of the group, or to ask questions when they are participating in meetings. This too, can cause misunderstandings and be severe on the relationship of the team.

V.L’s answer to the mentioned problem is to “make them talk”; if the team members only want to use text messages, a leader should encourage their team members to speak English by calling them, or using videoconferences. Because even though the company provides language courses, it needs to be put into practice to become a skill. It is seen as the leader’s responsibility to make the team members comfortable to speak, even though the English level is not flawless. Furthermore V.L underlines that “We need to improve, encourage, and create situations that makes it easier for people to talk”.

Since people hesitate to contact people and speak in English, M.L solves this issue by keeping two meetings; one with the team in Brazil, where they speak Portuguese, and then another one in English with the international team members. Furthermore, a presentation tool is mentioned by L.M, where presentations are shown in English as well as the native language of the participants. This reduces the risk of misunderstandings, at the same time as it is seen as a good way of learning the language.

In general, the participants find that the language skills need to be improved within multinational companies in Brazil. This is one of the key issues that need to be addressed regarding Brazil’s preparedness of virtual
communication and leadership. Yet, the lack of language skills is also perceived as a matter of attitude, where people drought the willingness to learn and improve. Therefore, companies and managers are suggested to support and encourage their employees to participate in language courses, in order to ease the communication with other countries, as well as increase their competitiveness in a global perspective.

4.7 Trust

M.L and E.K highlight the main issue as a virtual leader being the trust of team members. Since each one in a virtual team has their own responsibilities; not having a physically present boss, who can verify that they are accomplishing their tasks correctly and accordingly, may become a problem. First of all, the team member might not be able to work effectively without the “pressure” of a present boss, or might claim afterwards that he or she has misunderstood the task. This is exemplified as the free-rider problem; where people are lagging behind or are lazy because the boss or other team members do not observe them.

In Jarvenpaa and Leidner's (1999) case study on communication and trust in global virtual teams, they found that the most effective teams shares a high level of initial, as well as final trust. The effective teams showed reliable and timely communication between members, international experience, and engaged leaders. When the team overcame the obstacles to communicate in a manner that was clear, concise, and task-oriented rather than procedure-oriented; trust was built (Jarvenpaa and Lieder, 1999). Furthermore, Chhay and Kleiner (2013) describes that reliable and clear communication only occurs when members have created a balance between what to express explicitly in the verbal-, as well as nonverbal communications.

The participants emphasize that preventing this from happening, is a matter of shared confidence; team members shall feel assured that they can ask their leader questions repeatedly, to make sure that they have understood their task correctly. Furthermore, it is found to be important for the leader and team members to get to know each other, and to initially let the team members talk more than the leader; this way the leader gets an outlook of
the best way to hold discussions and their difficulties, in order to handle these.

Nevertheless, it was of a general conclusion that relations are best built by meeting each other physically. When meeting face-to-face, both leaders and team members gets a better outlook and understanding of the other's communication pattern, attitude, and cultural background. Ideally, a leader should meet their teammates twice a year. It is also mentioned that the teamwork will most likely be improved if the team members gets to meet with each other and build a relation in a physical context as well. However, nowadays it is common that a virtual team starts working together without meeting face-to-face. The participants therefore enhance the importance of communicating thoroughly with the teammates, this to build a better understanding and relationship from the beginning, which makes it easier to start the work.

4.8 Virtual Communication

The participants identify a paradigm shift where the younger generation will require, as well as be required, to use virtual tools in a much larger extent than what the older generations may be used to. Furthermore, if a company wants to operate globally, virtual communication is a necessity. Additionally, the participants emphasize that Brazil, due to lack of infrastructure regarding transportation, really can take virtue of the virtual communication, because it reduces the distance. There is a consensus that Brazil is going in a direction where virtual communication will be an increasing part of people's work.

When communicating virtually, the literature identifies that a difficulty for the followers is to interpret the leaders message, and make a decision based on that message (Avolio and Kahai, 2002). In order to facilitate these decisions, the followers need to have the latest information on the subject. Therefore, organizations and leaders must keep information up-to-date, and keep up with the speed of the changing information (Avolio and Kahai, 2002).
Since the method of communication chosen may create an additional temporal barrier, managers shall be cognizant of this and choose a communication method that easily connects team members, while accounting for the distance between them (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013). Web conferences are furthermore enhanced to be able to reduce the distance between members, since they allow them to see and interact with each other (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013). Furthermore, Gerke (2006) mean that leaders should ask their followers and team members in which way they would prefer to be contacted, both for scheduled meetings and for urgent situations. This information should preferably be shared with all members of the group, in order to speed up the communication (Gerke, 2006).

However, the participants stress that the infrastructure of virtual communication tools still has great potential for improvements. One of the most important tools when communicating virtually has been identified to be the video, this since it is as close one gets to physical face-to-face meetings, where non-verbal communication is possible to obtain, and the risk of misinterpretations is reduced. Therefore, a strong Internet connection, as well as technology that allows teams to seamlessly work and communicate via video, is required.

The participants identify a lack of competence regarding virtual communication among large parts of the personnel in multinational companies. In addition to education in virtual leadership to people on management level, there is a consensus that training regarding virtual communication should be offered to the members of virtual teams, as well as leaders; this in order for them to have a better comprehension, and to make the teamwork more effective and seamless. Furthermore, V.L argue that this also is a responsibility for the leader of virtual team; “One part of being a leader is to close the gaps and prepare them for the work”.

35
4.9 Time Zones

The adaption to time zones, when communicating globally, is managed differently among the participants. Some mean that due to Brazil’s GMT position, they are not affected, whilst they recognize that countries like India or Australia are affected in a larger extent to the adaption to others’ time zones. However, this seems to depend on where the person who leads the meeting is positioned, or whether the meeting includes a customer. Other participants, on the other hand, participate in meetings that start at 4 a.m., or are holding the same meeting twice a day as an adaption to others’ time zones.

4.10 Face-to-Face Communication

When lacking visual contact, managers of virtual teams are required to adapt their communication style and methods, this to fill the gap that is created by the absence of nonverbal communication. Otherwise, misunderstandings concerning a project’s goals, purpose, and how to implementation these, may occur. Therefore, web conferences and teleconferences may help adding nonverbal cues, such as posture and tone, which benefits the team communication (Chhay and Kleiner, 2013).

Yet, the participants find that virtual communication cannot completely replace face-to-face interaction. Furthermore, the participants mean that relations and trust also are better built by meeting physically. Therefore, the questions occurred regarding when, and how often a virtual leader should meet the team face-to-face. The opinions regarding these questions varied to some extent. Some mean that it is important to meet physically when it is at an intermediate or advanced level of the teamwork, whilst it usually works seamlessly in the beginning of the teamwork, since this segment is mainly about giving directions and information. Others meant that the relations are built easier by meeting face-to-face initially, which contributes to a better understanding, and foundation to build trust upon.
4.11 The Preparedness and Attitude in Brazil

As already mentioned, the participants find virtual communication essential due to the global, as well as national situation in Brazil; in particular regarding multinational companies. However, there is an agreement that most companies in Brazil are not prepared for handling and managing virtual communication. Furthermore, there is a difference of perception between Company X and Y; whilst participants from Company Y argues that the virtual communication is a key point for success in Brazilian companies, participants from Company X are of the opinion that virtual communication will become key in order for companies to operate globally.

Nevertheless, there is an agreement that there is a need for improvements and a change of attitude among companies and its personnel for virtual communication to be as effective and seamless as possible. Yet, the perception of attitude regarding virtual communication differs. E.K from Company Y, who is holding trainings for virtual communication tools to managers and leaders, advocate that there is a positive attitude towards communicating virtually. On the other hand, participants from the same company finds that the general attitude is resistant towards the use of virtual means. There is however an agreement that, at present, the virtual tools are not used to their full extent.

Furthermore, the attitude is believed to heavily depend on company culture at department-level, and whether or not there is a language barrier. To some employees, it may be very common to discuss with people from different countries on an everyday basis, whilst some departments do not hold this kind of culture at all. Therefore, some departments and companies can, and should, use virtual means to a greater extent than what they are used to. However, the willingness and/or tools are not there. There is an identified need for companies to set up additional technology that makes it possible for teams to work virtually, such as videoconference-rooms, or allowing software programs such as Skype or its equivalent to be installed on employees’ computers. L.M explains that most people are only expected to use emails, and are therefore not familiar with videoconference-tools. Moreover, it is not yet custom to work outside of the office hours to suit other’s time zones. The
participants highlight that not attending to your office is sometimes perceived as lazy by other co-workers. Also, management does not always approve that employees are working from home, in order to attend meetings at inconvenient hours. This issue is mainly identified as a matter of company culture as well as trust in your employees.
5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Language, trust, handling of time zones, education, attitude, and technological aspects, are all factors that need improvement in order for Brazilian multinational companies to become proficient and efficient, virtual communicators as well as virtual leaders. In the chapter below, you can find our recommendations on how to improve these.

5.1 Suggestions for Multinational Companies in Brazil

Companies in Brazil that wish to operate globally need to face the challenges of virtual leadership by mainly focusing on the following areas:

- **Infrastructure**, in the form of a strong, and functioning Internet connection, as well as usable, high-end tools for communicating.
- **Educations** regarding virtual communication, and virtual leadership.
- An improvement of **attitude** towards virtual communication within the company cultures.
- Efficient and trusting teamwork requires a certain set of **characteristics** and **qualities** of the leader as well as the team members.

Overall, Brazil’s infrastructure regarding Internet connection is described, as well as experienced, as poor. Therefore, it is not solely up to the companies, but to the country's government to invest in better infrastructure regarding high-speed Internet, in order for Brazil to be equipped and able to cope with the advanced technical ways of communicating.

In our study, we found it necessary to have a strong Internet connection, in order to communicate via Video, which is perceived as the ideal, and most effective, form of virtual communication and teamwork, since it reduces many of the barriers that are created by distance. Therefore, it is of most importance that companies in Brazil support their employees with usable, high qualitative video-conferencing-tools, as well as innovative software that enable leaders and teams to share, and edit each other’s documents and information in a seamless manner. Access to helpful tools and a high-speed Internet connection, where the disturbances in the
virtual communication were put to a minimum, could change the attitude amongst the personnel for the better, as well as allow efficient leadership.

Educations regarding virtual leadership, would most likely not only enhance the knowledge about the tools, and how to lead by distance, but also play a big part in the overall globalization of the company. After conducting our study, we found that educations regarding Virtual communication and Virtual leadership should mainly focus on the following subjects; trust, motivation, culture, language, time zones, diversity, and inclusion. These are all described as competencies that are essential for efficient leadership in a global context. Participating in these kinds of educations would provide an understanding about building trust from a distance, how to keep the team motivated without being physically present, the differences and similarities between cultures (e.g. national, regional, companies), as well as how to build team cohesion and work together as a functioning group.

Since the study could identify a paradigm shift regarding the younger generation, we anticipate that current and future employees that belong to Generation Y; whom are described by Bolton et al. (2013) as digital natives rather than digital immigrants, will require leaders who are educated and prepared to lead a generation who have spent their entire lives in the digital environment. We therefore stress the importance of leaders receiving educations regarding virtual leadership.

There are large parts of personnel within multinational companies whom are uncomfortable in the virtual setting, since the communication is mostly done in another language than their native language. At present, companies offer courses, or financial support, for leaders who want to improve their language skills. This must, however, be on the leader’s initiative, and is only available on management level. We believe, that in order for the employees to seize the opportunities given to them, the companies should show their support, and encourage people even further.

Furthermore, there is a need for communication through all levels, not only manager-to-manager. For this to be possible, employees on lower levels also need to be given opportunities to develop their language skills. Increasing the language skill and ability to communicate over country borders, may
also change the attitude towards communicating virtually. The resistance and hesitation people feel, since they are not comfortable communicating in a language they do not master; will most likely decrease and make the virtual communication more seamless. In Brazil, the use of *Portañol* or *Espanguese*, is essential for communicating across borders, one might even say that they have created new languages in order to cope with the difficulties of language barriers, and therefore becoming more efficient.

In order for a company to become truly global, virtual communication trainings is an identified demand from the leaders. Furthermore, our study shows that the educations regarding virtual communication should not only be for leaders, but also for team members, this to make them feel more comfortable in the virtual context. This could also save time in the aspect of building trust, and confidence in a virtual team, since educations regarding this area would prepare the team members for challenges ahead.

The technological part, as well as the educational part, would most likely benefit the change of attitude. However, it is of utter importance that the whole company, from the top down, changes their attitude. The attitude within a company has most likely deep roots in the company culture; therefore, changing the attitude could mean changing a part of the company culture. Thus, the company need to be clear about *why* it is important with virtual communications, and *what* benefits it could have; both for the company in general, but also in the leader’s and team member’s daily effectiveness. Moreover, companies need to implement a company culture that accepts flexible office hours when working with, or in, a virtual team. When doing so, the attitude toward virtual teamwork will hopefully be perceived as more incorporated by the company. Furthermore, this would indicate that the company *trusts* that the employees are taking their responsibility when working from home.
5.2 The Virtual Leader

When outlining what qualities that are required of an efficient virtual leader, both quite traditional ones, as well as context-specified ones were of importance. However, the traditional qualities, namely being organized, clear, a good communicator and committed; need to be even more profound in the virtual context to be effective. More context-specified qualities for an efficient, virtual leader, is to be able to read situations and people from a distance; you need excellent listening skills and people-reading skills, in order to pick up nuances and differences in messages from a distance. Thus, a virtual leader needs to sense changes in attitudes, and to hear the tone of voice changing in order to react to it before losing the team’s motivation, trust or will to contribute. Furthermore, a virtual leader shall have a high level of cultural intelligence, in order to manage a diverse team, and make the team cohesive despite cultural barriers. Moreover, it is crucial to be able to build trust from a distance, but also to be perceptive of when it is time to meet face-to-face.

Moreover, an efficient virtual leader needs to have proficient language skills, in order to seamlessly communicate with team members from different parts of the world. In Brazil, these language skills mainly concern English and Spanish.

Furthermore, in our study we could outline specific characteristics that a virtual leader should search for when assembling a virtual team, namely expertise (in appointed area); independence; commitment; communicative; as well as effective and comfortable when led by distance. The team members too, need to be open-minded, culturally sensitive, and have a confident attitude towards virtual teamwork and its technology. Furthermore, they usually need to handle more responsibility, and be autonomous when taking decisions. Also, it may require working outside of the office hours, due to different time zones, which need to be accepted by the team member. Even though a leader should search for a certain profile, a leader should also keep in mind that a team ought to be prepared and educated in order to handle challenges ahead.
6. LANGUAGE CREATION

In this chapter, we aim to develop a new language, by creating new conceptual words that are applicable in the virtual context, on the basis of our findings. Communicating facetually together with virtual attication, the importance of an infrastructive state, and prepeneration are all examples of a newly developed language from our findings of this study.

6.1 The Virtualization of Multinational Companies

This study has been conducted in order to lay the foundation of a deeper understanding of efficient virtual leadership, in multinational companies in Brazil.

However, we believe that in addition to Brazil, our findings could also be applicable to other emerging markets, vast countries in need for more developed communication, or countries that are attractive for international investments. Hence, our language creation might be relevant for other countries and regions as well, and not solely Brazil.

One main factor to why virtual communication is of such importance to companies is to keep up with today’s globalization. What we have come to realize, is that even though a leader, or team member, has the required qualities and characteristics to be a part of an efficient virtual team; the foundation to work in a virtual context, has to be laid by the company. Thus, we believe that in order for a company to become truly global, a virtualization of the company is required. A virtualized company is prepared to globally manage efficient virtual teamwork; regarding tools, infrastructure, attitude, education, as well as language skills. Below, we have outlined some particular concepts that we believe are necessary for a company to adapt in order to be virtualized.

In our study, the infrastructure of Brazil’s and its companies’ Internet connection, as well as of virtual communication tools, has been identified as far behind in development, and improvable. One might even describe this situation as infradestructive. We believe that there is a need for Brazil and its companies to transfer from an infradestructive state into an infrastructive
one, which is a more constructive way of managing and developing one's infrastructure.

We also found that face-to-face interaction is crucial for the teamwork and building of the relationship. Furthermore, video is found to be the most important tool when communicating virtually, since videoconferences reduces many of the barriers that are created by distance. This creates a sense that face-to-face in a virtual context is a key factor for successful virtual communication and leadership. Hence, *facetual* communication, and *facetual* leadership would be a useful term in the context of communication and leadership that is carried out, and dependent on, virtual face-to-face interaction. By communicating *facetually*, we combine the advantages of virtual communication, yet overcome some of the challenges by making it as close as possible to face-to-face communication.

As previously mentioned, two of the most essential factors the companies should detect and provide for their virtual leaders and communicators, are a change of the attitude (for the better), and educations regarding how to be a leader, as well as a team member, in the virtual context. These two combined could result in a change of company culture, as well as usage of the tools provided; therefore, *virtual attication* could be a focus and a motto to strive for within the companies in order to have a leading position in the global market.

Yet, we do not only believe that virtual leaders will be leading team members with a resisting attitude towards virtual communication; quite the contrary. As this study also could distinguish a paradigm shift, where the companies need to prepare their leaders for a generation, i.e. Generation Y, that is known to be proficient in virtual communication, we believe that leaders need to be offered prepeneration. There needs to be a preparedness towards the different generations, which means the forthcoming as well.

Since language skills is identified as something that needs to be improved on more than solely management level, in order for a more thorough communication through all levels over boarders; we believe there is a need for langucation. Further, if educations regarding language are offered in a broader extent, we believe that the virtual communication would be
enhanced in the company, which in turn would lead to a more globalized company.

Another detected challenge, that may become a valuable advantage, is the cultural diversity of a team. A virtual team and its leader are often required a high level of cultural intelligence, since the team members often span over national borders. When team members and leaders learn how to cooperate and how to take advantage of the cultural differences in a virtual context; this may create a distinct type of _virture_, i.e. a virtual culture. Further, this would mean that the level of _virtual intelligence_ would be of significance for leaders and team members within this context.
7. CONCLUSIONAL REFLECTIONS

We, as researchers, learned together with the subjects of our study. We created knowledge together in the process of enlightening each other on the subject of virtual communication, and virtual leadership. In this chapter, we will reflect, and explain in more detail regarding the contexts and situations of our dialogues. We will also discuss the limitations of this study, as well as give suggestions for further research.

7.1 Reflections

For each dialogue that was conducted, we acquired more knowledge about the area, which helped us prior to the subsequent dialogue. All participants stated that the subject was very contemporary, interesting, and of substantial importance. Yet, our dialogues seemed to trigger a demand for further investigations of the subject. Furthermore, the participants were eager to read and share our finalized dissertation with its findings within the area, since they want to learn more about the subject. We hope, and believe, that our dialogues have contributed to a knowledge sharing, and an aid regarding virtual communication in our participants’ daily work. Being aware of the problems and challenges within an area, often help the process of overcoming them. Hence, by discussing the difficulties and benefits of being a leader in a virtual context, we hope that our participants reflect over this when executing their virtual meetings.

To acquire a better comprehension of the virtual context, two of our dialogues were conducted via Skype, i.e. a service that offers voice-over-IP and videoconferences online. In these cases, we experienced a clear difference in attitude between the two participants. The first participant, R.C, from Company X, seemed to be more uncomfortable, and expressed feelings of uncertainty and inexperience with this type of communication. Noteworthy is, that R.C was one of the least experienced participants regarding virtual communication, which may have affected his attitude towards the situation. Moreover, this was the first dialogue we conducted in
this study, so we had not had the opportunity to learn from our mistakes from previous dialogues in this situation.

Our second Skype dialogue was with E.K from Company Y, who had a lot more experience regarding communicating virtually and a more positive attitude towards the situation. The dialogue had to be divided in to two parts since the connection in the first interview (2014-04-11), was too poor to be continued. We therefore arranged a second Skype-meeting to continue our dialogue (2014-04-18). Since it was Easter celebrations at the time, E.K took the time to call us from his home in the middle of the preparations for Easter. We believe that this shows a positive attitude both towards communicating virtually, but also to flexibility, which is perceived as necessary when communicating globally.

Regarding our dialogues, and our own knowledge creation as researchers during the process, we learned increasingly more about the subject after each dialogue, but also how to optimally approach the participants. For instance, after the first two dialogues, we sent out a draft with a short summary of the subject, to provide an outline of what was about to be investigated. Also, at this point we started out by asking the participants to tell us about themselves, in an informal manner. These differences were very beneficial, and we believe we noticed a change of attitude in the participants; however, this could also be due to the fact that the first two participants had less experience in the area of virtual communication and virtual leadership.

Each dialogue was customized, with regards to experience and comprehension. Furthermore, no questions were predetermined, but instead adapted to the participant’s role and experience with the subject; depending on what they chose to talk about within the subject we asked questions to go deeper into the issue, or find solutions to it.

The process of analyzing the data and listening to the recordings of the dialogues helped us become better at asking relevant follow-up questions; when listening to the dialogues, we sometimes detected gaps where we could have asked more questions to gain a deeper understanding. When these gaps were too big to not follow up, we sent an email to the participant in question for further questions.
7.2 Limitations

One explicit limitation of our study was the language barrier between the participants, and us as researchers. Since we are merely conversant in Portuguese, and the level of English varied amongst the participants, there was a risk of misinterpretations during the dialogues. To avoid this, we have sent our findings, and results to each participant for approval, before publishing our thesis. The number of participants in this study may also be regarded as a limitation. Yet, this was due to the fact that there were only a certain number of relevant participants, with enough experience of virtual communication and virtual leadership, available within the companies examined. Unfortunately, a third company that we had booked several dialogues with, canceled the meetings one day prior. However, we believe that we found the sought result with distinct perspectives of Brazil’s virtual communication, its challenges, as well as suggested solutions.

Since the two companies that were examined are founded in Sweden, there might be an influence of a company culture that has originated from Sweden. Yet, none of the participants made connections to the Swedish company culture of their companies; rather, they highlighted that Sweden, among other countries, are far more developed in managing virtual teamwork. Therefore, we do not believe that the origins of the companies have affected the result.

In this study, all of the participants are male. This may implicate a skewed distribution of the gender equity within the companies. It could also mean that men communicate more virtually than women. However, we believe that it is due to the fact that there are more men than women in managing positions. We do not believe that this affected our study to any greater extent. Possibly the discussion regarding cultural diversity, would provide a perspective of how men and women are treated differently in diverse cultures, if our study included female participants, which of course would be of value. However, this outcome is not possible to predict.
7.3 Suggestions for Further Research

For further research regarding the perception of virtual leadership, it would be interesting to study the problem from other perspectives than the actual leaders; thus, either the team members, or the top management in the companies, in order to examine if their perceptions and attitudes are the same as the middle managers in this study.

A different perspective would be to compare the top management's attitude, and what they believe they provide for their employees, and how the actual, virtual leaders perceive the attitude and possibility to lead from a distance.

Furthermore, a study to assess how attitude and opportunity differs between different countries in multinational companies would be of use for the examined companies, as well as for researchers in the field of virtual communication.

Though, we believe that the phenomenon efficient virtual leadership, and possible improvements of the virtual context in companies, is at the very beginning of being examined. Therefore, larger quantities of participants, various sizes of companies, and countries with diverse economic growth, should be examined in order to develop language creation, suggested solutions, and managerial implications even further. Hence, we hope our study will contribute to the picture that is in the very beginning of being painted.
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APPENDIX I: Draft

Introduction
Due to globalization, demands from the environment, such as a wish to share core competence, or a need for process innovations (Nyström and Asproth, 2013), combined with the increasingly advances in communication technology, it is more common than ever for global organizations to work together in virtual teams, in which some, or all, team members are working in different geographic locations (Mobley, Li, and Wang, 2011). Notwithstanding the unique advantage of virtual teams regarding the strength of diversity, and making 24-hour operations possible, the nature of virtual teamwork have also brought unique challenges for leaders to manage global virtual teams (Mobley et al., 2011).

Virtual teams emerged due to two main reasons according to Purvanova (2013):
- Virtual teams save money for the company due to reductions in travel costs, meeting times, duplication costs and other logistical expenses.
- Organizations using virtual teams become more flexible, and they can therefor handle the pressures of the increasing business globalization and competition and meet their customers service demand more timely and efficiently.

These reasons make it very likely that businesses will continue to use or adapt to virtual teams in the future.

Research Gap
Concurrent with the increasing use of virtual teams, the literature has been accumulating (Hoch and Kozlowski, 2012). Yet, most researchers have focused on the advantages and disadvantages regarding virtual teams, where disadvantages are identified as lower levels of team cohesion, work satisfaction, trust, and commitment to team goals; i.e. factors that all can negatively impact a team’s performance. Thus, Hock and Kozlowski (2012) finds it surprising that such relatively limited research has been conducted towards virtual team leadership. Additionally, Purvanova and Bono (2009), argues that the empirical literature on leadership in virtual communication settings, is still young. Moreover, Jenster and Steiler (2011) claim that no studies have formerly examined global virtual team members’ perceptions.
regarding the leadership of their leader. Rather, the perspective of the global virtual leaders’ point of view concerning their teams’ performance has been taken (Jenster and Steiler, 2011).

Since virtual teams progressively span national boundaries, thus differences in cultural background are becoming more significant to consider as an aspect of virtuality (Hoch and Kozlowski, 2012). According to Chang, Chuang and Chai (2011), there have been very few studies conducted to assess the effect of cultural diversity on virtual teams. Moreover, Hinds, Liu, and Lyon (2011) criticized the lack of inclusion of national and cultural differences in the conceptualizations of virtuality.

Accordingly, we aim to investigate leadership efficiency in an environment, characterized by physical distance and reduced face-to-face interaction between employees and their leaders. We refer to this situation as “virtual leadership”. Based on the evolving view of virtuality, our conceptualization comprises geographic distribution and cultural diversity as an addition to the established components of virtual teams. Our research will therefore contribute to the areas of leadership, as well as computer-mediated (i.e. virtual) communication. It also extends the leadership literature by connecting diversity and inclusion in a virtual context.

**Purpose**
To lay the foundation of a deeper understanding of the elaborated problem, the purpose of this study is to investigate leadership in a virtual context, with foci on its effect on teamwork and cultural diversity.

**Research Questions**
- How may the perception of effective virtual leadership be outlined?
- How may a leader handle cultural diversity of virtual, dispersed teams?
- How is the perceived preparedness regarding virtual communication and virtual leadership in multinational companies in Brazil?
APPENDIX II: Guidelines for Dialogues

Introduction
Presentations,

Could you tell us about your role at the company?

Are you familiar with the concept of virtual communication and virtual leadership?

Virtual Leadership:
How would you define virtual leadership?

What are your experiences of virtual leadership? (Do you have a leader position of a team?)

To leaders: Have you received any education regarding virtual leadership?

How do you think efficient virtual leadership is created? / What is important to create efficient leadership?

What kind of qualities do you think is important? Why? (How should a leader behave?)

What may be the challenges of virtual leadership? – How are these solved?

Do you think that virtual leadership can be improved? How?

How would you describe a successful leader in a virtual context?

How would you describe a non-successful leader in a virtual context?

(Would you assign a virtual leader any specific characteristics to become successful?)
(Do you think that a leader has the same challenges as a leader of a traditional team? If not, what are the differences?)

Is there a difference in how to set and communicate goals? How should this be done in a virtual context?

How does a virtual leader best motivate its team members?

How does a leader make sure that the team members feel like a visible part of the group?

How does a leader support the team members virtually?

**Virtual teams:**
How would you define it?

Have you received any education regarding virtual teamwork?

What would say are the benefits?

How would you describe the difficulties?

How may a leader handle these difficulties?

What is important to make a virtual team effective and motivated?

Do you think virtual teams could be improved/ be more effective? How?

Does the planning or reporting system differ from traditional teamwork?

How would you describe a successful virtual team? What characterizes them?

How would you describe a non-successful virtual team?
**Virtual communications:**

How do you prefer to communicate virtually? (What means works best etc.)

Have you received any education regarding virtual communication?

What are the benefits when communicating virtually?

What are the challenges opposed to face-to-face communication?

What should a leader keep in mind regarding virtual communication?

How do you think time zones are handled? Is this the most effective way?

How are language barriers handled effectively? Do you think this can be improved?

**Cultural diversity:**

Have you received any education or training regarding cultural sensitivity/cultural intelligence?

What is your experience of cultural diversity in virtual teams?

What are the benefits?

What are the challenges?

How should a leader handle this?

How may a leader gain advantages from the diversity in virtual teams?
Trust:

How should a leader develop relations and trust in virtual teams?

Is there a difference between trust in traditional teams opposed to virtual?

How do you think trust is built effectively between team members and their leader in a virtual context?

How does leaders prove their credibility (i.e. their expertise, competencies) in a virtual context?

How does a leader prove their kindness and compassion in a virtual context?

Non-verbal communication:

What do you think happens when there's less non-verbal communication in a team and from your leader?

How may this be handled?