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NOTICE: This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Punnett, B.J., Galperin, B., Lituchy, T., Melyoki, L., Senaji, T., Taleb, A. (2022). Global academic virtual teams versus corporate virtual teams. In V. Taras (Ed.), *The X-Culture Handbook of Collaboration and Problem Solving in Global Virtual Teams* (pp. 118-131). Greensboro: UNC Greensboro University Libraries, which has been published in final form at https://doi.org/10.5149/9781469669809_Taras. This section is an excerpt of the original.

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Global Academic Virtual Teams versus Corporate Virtual Teams

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Summary of Key Points

- Most literature focuses on corporate virtual teams (CVTs); this chapter focuses on academic virtual teams (AVTs);
- Virtual teams of all kinds are proliferating, and this is true in academia as elsewhere;
- AVTs are similar to CVTs in some ways, but they are also unique in some aspects;
- Examples of CVTs and AVTs illustrate the characteristics of these teams and highlight the unique aspects of AVTs (membership, outcomes, cultural differences, reward systems, funding);
- Well established AVTs include GLOBE, LEAD, Best Practices in HRM, and X-Culture;
- Considering the unique aspects of AVTs, and our experiences working with such teams, we suggest best practices for AVTs;
- We also use the results of a survey of AVT members as input information on best practices;
- The main takeaways discussed are communication, technology, benefits, satisfaction, goals, relationships, leadership, collaboration, and information sharing.

Overview

Over the past twenty years or so, many academics and practitioners have, in some way, addressed the question, “What makes a virtual team succeed or fail?” Most of this literature has dealt with virtual teams that are associated with businesses/organizations or corporate virtual teams (CVTs). There is less discussion of the unique aspects of academic virtual teams (AVTs) and the best practices for these teams. In this chapter, we focus on AVTs, their characteristics, and approaches for creating and managing them to ensure successful performance. Virtual teams provide significant advantages—reduced travel costs, the enhanced possibility for team members collaborating on projects regardless of distance, and the ability to draw on the best talent from anywhere in the world. Our objective is to make practical recommendations for designing and managing AVTs. This has become even more relevant today in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has resulted in most academic activities moving from in-person to virtual. For example, in the summer of 2020, planned in-person conferences associated with groups such as the Academy of Management and the Academy of International Business were all conducted virtually. We expect that there will be more virtual collaboration in the academic world in the future, and understanding what makes AVTs succeed will be ever more important.

Corporate Virtual Teams Versus Academic Virtual Teams

There are many definitions of virtual teams. Jessica Lipnack and Jeffrey Stamps (1997), the authors of *Virtual Teams: Reaching Across Space, Time, and Organizations with Technology*, described a virtual team as a group of people who interact through interdependent tasks guided by a common purpose. Many authors have said that virtual teams are project-focused and that virtual teams are often formed when the need arises and disbands when the task is completed (see Grenier & Mettes, 1995). This means that virtual teams are usually formed for a temporary period of time to implement a particular task, such as solving a specific problem or to work on new product development. To give an example, a virtual team was formed in the new product development division of the Whirlpool Corporation in the 1990s. The team included experts from around the globe, including the United States, Brazil, and Italy, who came together to develop a chlorofluorocarbon-free refrigerator in response to concerns about damage to the earth's ozone layer.

This team dynamic implies that there is little prior history, and that the responsibilities of each team member may change with each virtual team. For example, a person may be a leader in one virtual team and play a minor, supportive role in another team. The flexible nature of roles is crucial for the attainment of the objectives of a particular virtual team, and research suggests that the structures of virtual teams are typically non-hierarchical and decentralized (Savage, 1996). They are 'non-hierarchical' in that members may all be at the same level in an organization, and there is no superior-subordinate relationship; however, the role of the team leader is often a crucial one. This means that virtual team members often focus on lateral and informal information exchanges to accomplish their work.

In an attempt to better understand virtual teams, experts have outlined their key characteristics. Sze-Sze Wong and Richard Burton (2000, p. 341) from Duke University suggest that virtual teams have a number of characteristics, including: "(1) a set of culturally and organizationally differentiated members, who are (2) grouped temporarily, are (3) physically dispersed, (4) connected by weak lateral ties, and (5) engaged in performing non-routine tasks." To use the Whirlpool example, we see that the virtual team members came from different countries around the globe and were geographically dispersed, but they were from the same division and company. The virtual team was temporarily formed to develop a specific type of refrigerator, a non-routine task. Members of the team shared lateral ties because they were from the new product development division.

Virtual teams are sometimes not as clear-cut as the Whirlpool example, and teams may come in different forms. It is possible to have virtual teams composed of members who are geographically dispersed, but are culturally and organizationally homogeneous. For example, a virtual team at Walmart was composed of members from New York, California, and Arkansas (one company, one country). Wong and Burton noted, however, that some teams may contain members from different cultural and organizational boundaries, but they are physically co-located. In other words, members are from different backgrounds, but team members are close enough together (either physically or virtually) that they can talk to each other within seconds or minutes, rather than hours or days. For example, a team could be made up of members from Brazil, Canada, China, India, and Russia, all working from different offices in Toronto.

Eric McConnell (2012), a project manager who has worked on various projects in the software industry for over ten years and has taken a variety of roles on software projects and project activities, categorizes virtual teams simply into two groups: global virtual teams (GVT) and local virtual teams (LVT). In GVTs, members can be located in different countries and cities around the world. Employees can

come from a variety of companies because their organizations are interested in collaborating efforts and resources (for example, people, technology, and/or money) in order to perform common outsourced projects and achieve shared goals.

A recent incident involving an investigation into the causes of two airplane crash tragedies in a span of five months illustrates how individuals from many different organizations may be affected by a particular event and thus come together virtually to identify and examine that event. The crashes involved the same model of plane, the Boeing 737 Max 8, thus affecting Boeing's reputation and affecting airline associations, aviation bodies, several governments, and passenger groups, insurance underwriters, among others. Data from the black boxes of the Ethiopian Airline Flight ET 302, which, in March 2019, was flying from Addis Ababa to Nairobi when it crashed, killing all 157 people on board, showed "clear" similarities with the crash of a Lion Air jet in October 2018 (Robison & Johnson, 2019). This situation required a team of experts from different countries and organizations to work together to determine the causes of the crashes.

Local virtual teams (LVT) members usually belong to the same country and often the same company. The organization may be either large or small, and it has sufficient resources, namely technology, to encourage virtual teams and facilitate the organization of its employees into productive remote groups. Companies that have been successful at implementing virtual teams include: SAP, G.E., and IBM. SAP, the world's largest inter-enterprise software company, has more than 30,000 employees in 60 countries, and virtual team collaboration is critical to the company's success. G.E. employs more than 90,000 employees throughout the world and has invested in training its leaders and employees through virtual classrooms. IBM uses virtual meeting software and chat tools to enable more collaboration, even as team members work more autonomously during the hours that are best for them (Derosa, 2017).

This trend towards virtuality has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, with many companies requiring that employees work virtually from home. Many employers who had not previously embraced the idea of virtual work have been essentially forced to experiment. News reports and informal conversations suggest that many companies are considering continuing the experiment once the pandemic is over. There seems to be a general agreement that the pluses of virtual work (at least some of the time) outweigh the minuses, although most people argue that some in-person meeting time provides real and important value.

We define an AVT as a team, usually made up of academics, working on scholarly pursuits, usually research, without physically meeting, and with the help of communication technologies. Academic relates to education and scholarship, virtual means it does not physically exist, and team implies an interdependent group of people linked by a common purpose. These teams are seen as collections of individuals who depend on each other, share responsibility for accomplishing outcomes, and see themselves (and are seen by others) as a cohesive body (note that AVTs often develop names for the team and its work). Although our focus is largely on professors and research, much applies to student teams working on projects, or any group working on research or other academically related projects.

AVTs are different in some ways from other virtual teams. The following discussion highlights characteristics that make these teams somewhat unique. We focus on AVTs that consist of professors rather than students, but student teams will find that many of the issues discussed apply to them as well.

Most AVTs are made up of members from different universities, colleges, schools, departments, and so on. These teams are not driven by specific organizational goals, and they may have loose parameters and unclear goals. In contrast, a typical non-AVT is made up of members of one organization (company,

government department, a state-owned enterprise, NGO, and so on) or perhaps a few people working on a collaborative venture. The team is usually working on a specific project that has been identified by the organization(s). As such, the project will have well-defined parameters and outcomes, with rewards and sanctions associated with achieving these outcomes. In sum, non-AVTs have overarching organizations, while AVTs do not.

AVTs have goals and timelines that are self-imposed. There is often no organizational deadline to be met, nor organizational sanctions for not meeting goals and timelines. Self-imposed goals and timelines are easier to ignore than those that are set by someone else who has control over rewards and sanctions. Particularly in cases where there are conflicts between AVT goals and timelines and those of the primary workplace, it is natural that the primary ones will take precedence. We have often noted in our AVTs that when deadlines are not met, the “excuse” is usually something like “I had to finish grading,” “the Dean asked me to head a special committee,” “I had a problem with a group of students and had to meet with them several times,” and other similar statements related to the group member’s primary workplace. The trade-off is not hard to understand as the academic’s Head, Dean, etc., is not likely to accept “I couldn’t get my marks in because I had to meet an AVT deadline,” while AVT members will accept the reverse.

AVT members can sometimes feel isolated and overstretched. The AVT project may have no particular relationship to the rest of her/his Department, Faculty, University, and so on. While members may be working closely within the virtual team, there may be no one “at home” with interest in the project and no one with whom to discuss issues that arise. Even successes may not be particularly relevant to colleagues at the home institution. The team member has selected the broader academic constituency over the more immediate one. If the other choice was made, colleagues might feel that you have chosen to work with others outside your primary institution and that, in some sense, you prefer this to work with those inside the institution. In one case, a Department Head questioned the value of a multiple-authored paper, particularly because the other authors were not from the home institution, and asked, “Shouldn’t you be publishing with your colleagues here?” Another case arose when one of our members attended a promotion interview where the following comment was made: “You appear to be publishing a lot, but you are all over the academic space, in book chapters, journal articles, and special issues, and the Vice-Chancellor does not feel you are progressing.” In this case, it appears a narrow research focus was seen as desirable. The diverse nature of AVTs, including different disciplines as well as organizations, cultures, and more, means that a narrow focus is unlikely, as members will have varying interests, which will be reflected in the project and its outcomes. The AVT member has to walk a fine line between what those deciding on promotion see as positive and what the AVT as a whole decides.

AVTs may not have access to the latest or most appropriate technology. These are not University projects in the normal sense, and funds may not be readily available for the most effective technology. AVTs often depend on small grants and even self-financing, and thus they may settle for what is available at low or no cost. Many grants do not cover access to technology on the assumption that the institution should cover this. In non-academic organizations, technology will be a priority for any virtual team because the project is seen as valuable in terms of profits, and ICT will be built-in to the overall resourcing of the project. Our experience with AVTs is that we rely on Skype, not because we think it is necessarily the best, but rather because it is essentially free. Many of our team members are situated in countries with limited infrastructure, and it is not uncommon to have technical problems during our Skype calls. These problems have included disconnection, degraded voice or video, and other quality issues; nonetheless, we make do because we have little choice.

AVTs are often long-term. Most are focused on research and may be designed as multi-year projects. This means that a long-term commitment is required from participants, and it may be challenging to maintain the commitment over time. Circumstances naturally change, and team members may also change. It has been our experience that team leadership, as well as membership, has to be flexible and that some people will want to continue throughout the lifetime of a project (and beyond into other projects), while others will want to join for a short period or specific aspect of the research. In some ways, the AVT becomes a process that incorporates a series of projects. During the, so far, ten-year duration of the LEAD project, some members have retired, others have accepted administrative positions, still, others have left academia. The current team make-up is quite different from what it was initially. We have published based on our specific research, but we have also published on more general topics and have moved from a largely academic focus to include developing teaching and training materials, such as textbooks.

AVTs are thus somewhat different from other virtual teams. These differences need to be taken into account when designing and managing an AVT. If these are considered at the outset, it is more likely that the AVT will be successful and achieve desired outcomes. The good news is that these challenges can be overcome, and most people feel there is real value in working with AVTs. One author commented, "There are many rewards to being part of an AVT. Not only do you work with interesting people from around the world on interesting projects, but you may be able to visit places you would like to visit. I have been to Peru and Brazil, Kenya and Ghana, thanks to two different AVTs." Yet another commented, "I have drawn very important lessons from leading scholars through AVTs and been able to co-author papers with eminent scholars, and this has enhanced my profile in academia."

Examples of Academic Virtual Teams

There are several well-established AVTs. These include the GLOBE team, the LEAD team, the Best Practices in IHRM project, and the X-Culture team. This is by no means meant to be a complete list, as there are many others that could have been included; however, these teams have written about their experiences as AVTs. These teams have carried out research projects over the past several decades, and although X-Culture is largely a cross-cultural student project, it does engage in a variety of research projects as well. Below, we briefly describe these teams.

Global Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness (GLOBE):

GLOBE is an organization dedicated to the study of the relationships among societal culture, leadership, and organizational practices. With more than 200 researchers from 62 countries studying more than 17,000 mid-level managers in the initial phases, the 2004 study is the largest and most prestigious study of its kind in the social sciences. In the latest 2014 study, more than 70 researchers collected data from over 100 CEOs and 5,000 senior executives in corporations in a variety of industries in 24 countries. This study demonstrated the considerable influence of culture on societal leadership expectations and the importance of matching CEO behaviors to expectations for leadership effectiveness. GLOBE is preparing to undertake a new phase of research ("GLOBE 2020"), while their most recent book, *Strategic Leadership across Cultures: The GLOBE Study of CEO Leadership Behavior and Effectiveness in 24 Countries*, offers essential reading for anyone studying or practicing in the fields of global leadership,

cross-cultural leadership, international business, and organization studies. The results of the GLOBE studies have been used to inform leadership, business, and management practice in an increasingly globalized world (see www.globeproject.com).

Leadership Effectiveness and Motivation in Africa and in the African Diaspora (LEAD):

Following an in-depth study of the management and leadership literature, this group found that the theories and empirical evidence rarely reflected the situation in Africa and the African Diaspora. The project started in 2008 and continues to shape the understanding of the African view of effective leadership. The project comprises researchers from Africa (East, West, South, and North), North America (U.S. and Canada), and the Caribbean, with a core team and regional teams. Members are encouraged to volunteer and take the lead on output, and other members contribute while the team leader coordinates efforts considering various deadlines. The project started with an emic approach comprising of Delphi and focus groups, which led to the development of Africa-specific instruments that have been psychometrically validated and are now being used. The project still welcomes collaborators from Africa and across the world. LEAD outputs have been presented at a variety of conferences, papers have been published in journals, chapters have been contributed to edited books, and a book devoted to the project's early results was published in 2017 (see *LEAD: Leadership Effectiveness in Africa and the African Diaspora*, edited by Lituchy, Galperin and Punnett, 2017).

Best practices in IHRM Project (the experts.asu collaborations):

Housed at Arizona State University, experts.asu is the University's expertise profiling system that promotes research across all continents and is supported by the Arizona Board of Regents (ABOR) and the Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA). In this largely virtual community, researchers collaborate on academic research in various disciplines ranging from engineering, earth sciences, and medicine to social sciences. In this context, Von Glinow, Drost, and Teagarden (2002) looked at the IHRM practices in a ten-country/region sample to identify best practices in IHRM. They found anomalies and counter-intuitive findings, and through their "gap analysis" identified several universally embraced ethics or best practices. These findings made a significant contribution to research, and most notably, the researchers offer a solution to the methodology for conducting globally-distributed IHRM research. The findings signal new directions for those involved in managing within and across different cultures. Their work presents a compelling argument for understanding cultural contexts by seeking and establishing derived ethics (see VonGlinow et al., 2002)

X-Culture:

X-Culture is a successful global collaboration in International Business education. Professors from 140 universities in 40 countries take part in X-Culture every semester, which remains open to new additions. Students are put in global virtual teams of about six, with each member in a different country, and work on real-life international business challenges presented by real companies. No travel is needed, and all collaboration is virtual. The best students are invited to the X-Culture Global Symposium, where they meet their team members and top managers from the client company. Research is also a part of the

X-Culture project, and researchers are invited to participate in their “research hackathon” (<https://x-culture.org/hackathon/>). At the hackathon, attendees are placed together in a conference room at a quiet university campus, phones off, laptops on, and perform research for several days; including brainstorming paper ideas, research design, data analysis, results, and drafting papers. The end results are clearly defined paper ideas, polished study designs, initial results, initial drafts of papers, and new contacts and co-authors. X-Culture recently won Wharton’s Re-Imagine Education Award in the Nurturing Employability category.

Having ourselves participated in AVTs, we can say that participation in such teams is rewarding in a number of ways:

- The ability to collaborate without having to travel, particularly where financial resources are limited,
- The opportunity to publish in prestigious journals, with well-known academics,
- Mentorship from leading scholars and researchers,
- Possibilities to learn and grow professionally,
- Simply getting to know others from different countries and backgrounds.

While there are clear benefits to participating in AVTs, there are also challenges. The diversity in these teams, along with the limited amount of physical interaction, can lead to problems where some team members have a different understanding of expectations. A particular concern is that some team members may not accept the importance of deadlines. These challenges can be mitigated by good team leadership; for example, the leader can track deadlines and remind participants of them. The team leader and core team of the AVT to which we belong have been instrumental in sustaining the momentum of our AVT. Limited funding for occasional face-to-face meetings is also a drawback because face-to-face interactions serve to resolve issues more quickly than emails or Skype calls. Governance is also an issue to be considered, and GLOBE, for example, has recently established a Board of Directors.

Some of the teams referred to earlier have described their experiences, the challenges faced, and the practices identified as contributing to positive outcomes (best practices), and we have personally discussed the experience of working within AVTs with colleagues. The following are some ideas drawn from these discussions.

Early in the development of the GLOBE project, one of the authors of this chapter asked the GLOBE founder, Bob House, about funding for such a large undertaking. She says, “I was expecting to hear that they had received some very large grant to allow them to address the major questions they were looking at,” and goes on to say, “what I received was some of the best advice for all such teams.” Bob House explained that it was very difficult to get major funding for such a project. He said that funds were limited in the social sciences and that competition for these funds was always substantial. He had chosen to apply for many smaller grants for pieces of the project, and to have research partners do the same. Many Universities have funding available, usually up to US\$5,000-10,000, that is relatively easy to access. In the LEAD project, we have been fortunate to get a couple of somewhat larger grants, but we have also relied substantially on these smaller amounts. Paul Hayes (also of GLOBE) suggested setting up a committee with responsibility for finding funding, including writing grant proposals.

As well as issues associated with funding, Paul Hanges presents other suggestions in a presentation entitled *Managing a Multinational Team: Lessons from Project GLOBE* ([www:// globeproject.com](http://www://globeproject.com), 2019). He identified some other challenges associated with the project. Including its long-term nature, the large size and dynamic nature of the team, the virtual nature of communications, and the cultural differences of participants.

Paul Hanges says, “Choose your team members wisely,” and based on our experience, we would certainly concur. The problem is that it is often impossible to tell who will be an effective team member until the project is underway. We have not yet solved this problem in our AVT, but it seems to be an area where more thought is needed—for example, it seems that the tasks to be carried out should be identified early on, and a determination made regarding who can take on those tasks. If skills that will be needed are not available among existing AVT members, then a special effort can be made to attract members with the required skills. We also believe that it is important to identify some way of getting rid of non-productive team members. This could possibly be done by having an “evaluation” subset of members who periodically review members’ performance and report to the AVT as a whole.

A social contract for the team is often considered a hallmark of AVTs, with several people stressing the importance of such a contract. Hanges suggested developing one at the outset. He noted that the GLOBE contract was explicitly discussed, written down, and agreed to, but over time it meant different things to different people. This also has been our experience. We began by considering the development of a social contract as essential, but today we might favor a more fluid and evolving agreement. Interestingly, respondents to our survey did not give particular importance to social contracts.

It is important to build in milestones and tangible evidence of success to share with all members. From our experience, this is absolutely key to the well-being of an AVT. To be effective, this relies on some member(s) with good organizational skills to keep track of progress and outcomes. We have been somewhat less successful on the organizational front in some aspects of our own AVTs and now recognize that identifying a ‘keeper of information’ needs to be an explicit task. Unfortunately, it can be a mundane and rather thankless task, so perhaps, again explicitly, it needs to be rotated through the group. Another closely connected issue is keeping track of who is on the team, when they joined, what they have contributed, and so on. We have found this affects the appropriate recognition of contributions in terms of questions of authorship and the like. In our experience, the main project often leads to side projects involving only a subset of participants, and keeping track is complex. However, keeping track is essential, so again, there is a need for someone with organizational skills to agree to this responsibility.

Virtual communications, particularly in view of cultural differences, is a major challenge to be handled. Our experience suggests that most AVTs use English as the main language of communication, but there are cases where teams include members whose first language is not English. It may sound superficial, but we find that sensitivity to the communication challenges and cultural differences is actually what works. In these cases, the need for sensitivity should be discussed openly among all team members, and the potential difficulties acknowledged. For example, if English is used, those members who are less fluent may find it difficult to follow verbal discussions and to provide input. Slowing down the pace of communication may help, as well as specifically asking all members for input. Summarizing verbal discussions in writing and asking for written comments can also help. Team members should be encouraged to say essentially, “Stop, I am not following;” Hanges refers to this as the equivalent of a “stop the train emergency lever.”

Special Issues and Best Practices for AVTs

AVTs present substantial benefits, including increased publication, more visibility, and enhanced prestige and collegial interactions. There are also several special issues that these virtual teams experience. These include membership, outcomes, cultural differences, reward systems, and funding. We briefly discuss each of these.

MEMBERSHIP

AVT membership is usually voluntary, and members are self-selected; they are not assigned by management/organization. The authors have all participated in AVTs, and this was always the case. Some of our universities encouraged this, but not always. As an example, one university devalued publications with multiple authors, which are the type of papers that AVT collaborations result in. AVTs often arise out of academic meetings, where a group of like-minded colleagues identify a similar interest and an opportunity to collaborate. This forms the nucleus of the AVT, which may then expand membership by inviting others to join. AVTs are thus usually made up of members from multiple organizations.

Outcomes

The “real” outcomes for an AVT may be publications, not project completion. In other organizations, getting the project done satisfactorily and on time is what matters, and is the basis for rewards/sanctions. AVTs look for opportunities to publish throughout the life of the project, and this can sometimes distract them from the project itself. For example, we had the opportunity to publish a book discussing early results, with team members contributing chapters. This seemed too good of a publishing opportunity to pass up, and we all happily agreed, but it meant that some aspects of the project were put on hold while we turned our attention to writing book chapters. In addition, members may agree to work on side projects, such as this chapter.

Cultural differences

Members come from different organizations and are likely to embody varying organizational and national cultures. A member’s primary affiliation is their “home” institution. Each organization may have different priorities and strategies, as well as organizational values. This can mean that there is a clash of cultures within the AVT. For example, some universities value book publications, while others may place more emphasis on refereed journals, or public policy papers, and so on. Imagine members of an AVT, some arguing for a book, some for a journal paper, and others for a public policy paper. How does one decide? AVT members have to balance these conflicting demands.

Reward systems

Cultural differences imply varying reward systems. In academia, performance in some colleges and universities may be judged by the number and status of publications, while others focus on teaching, service to the institution, or service to the public. Consequently, each university will have different requirements. Those that emphasize research often have low teaching loads, where the focus is on teaching, it is considered important to have more classes and interactions with students, and so on. The AVT itself does not usually have a reward system, per se. Members of the AVT work within the established reward system of their home institution. For example, those with high teaching loads have less time to devote to research, yet most AVT projects are research-oriented. There is also the challenge of linking a member’s effort to output, such as with the order of contributors. This “reward” is particularly pertinent

in cases where publication points for promotion are awarded on the basis of the order of listing of the authors on a paper.

Funding

AVTs are often self-financed. There may be funding available from some institutions, as well as from granting agencies, but this funding has to be identified and sought by individuals or groups within the AVT. This takes time, effort, and commitment from team members. Based on our experience, we each have to identify small sources of funds that we can access for “pieces” of the project. In the LEAD project, we conducted focus groups, and one team member secured funding for some Caribbean countries, another for Canada, and so on, while others contributed their own funds. The costs were not onerous; nevertheless, this illustrates the need for commitment from team members, given these types of demands.

The following table summarizes some of the typical contrasts between Academic Virtual Teams and Corporate Virtual Teams. Research-focused academic teams may be different from student-based academic teams on some factors.

Academic Virtual Teams (AVTs)	Corporate Virtual Teams (CVTs)
AVT members from different institutions	CVT members from the same organization or a group of organizations in a strategic alliance
Varied corporate cultures & rewards	Similar corporate culture & rewards
Research AVTs – varied ages, positions/levels	More similar ages, positions/levels
No direct compensation	Compensation tied to meeting goals
Focus on learning & knowledge	Focus on corporate objectives
Difficult to get rid of unproductive members	Can be removed or terminated
Research AVTs – longer term	Short to medium term, project-oriented
Shared, changing leadership	Designated leaders
Self-selected for personal growth	Assigned by superiors for strategic reasons
Self-funded/small grants	Corporate funding as required for tasks
Use of inexpensive available technology	Best technology for important tasks

The main focus in the table is on AVTs that are involved in research (i.e., professors). Student-based AVTs are likely to have younger members and may be quite similar in age and stage of academic level. Student AVTs are also likely to be relatively short-term, working together for one semester in most cases.

In summary, CVTs function within an organizational setting and structure and have the support, policies, procedures, and so on that are part of such a setting and structure. AVTs do not have these, and have to design their own supports, structures, etc. This generally means that CVTs are more planned, regulated, and controlled, while AVTs are more fluid and changeable. There are benefits and drawbacks to fluidity and change. The next section on Best Practices for AVTs seeks to make the most of the benefits while overcoming the drawbacks.

Best Practices

We conducted a survey on AVTs during 2018 with one hundred and fifteen respondents. Respondents were quite varied, with essentially an equal number of men and women, ages ranging from twenty-five to seventy-nine, and coming from a variety of countries and backgrounds. The survey asked about various facets of the AVT experience and the best practices for such teams. We draw on these survey results to develop the Best Practices presented next.

Frequent Communication is Important

Communication involves sharing relevant information amongst the team in order to keep each member abreast of current developments within the team, as well as on the progress of the AVT's activities. Respondents stated that their teams all interacted virtually on a regular basis, and over three-quarters of respondents said communication was the most critical factor for success. Interactions among the team members are especially important because they do not meet physically. Some respondents said that communications between at least two members occurred on a weekly basis (42% of those surveyed), while others interacted monthly (35%).

Technology is Critical for Communicating

Technology is one of the factors driving the proliferation of virtual teams, including AVTs. In the survey, 41% said that technology was important for the success of their AVTs. Teams used a variety of technologies. Over three-quarters of respondents used group forums and email distribution lists, followed by internet phone calls such as Skype. File sharing systems such as Dropbox and Google Drive were also used by more than half of the AVTs, as well as conference calls and social media. Most respondents felt their technical skills were excellent or very good/good. A survey by RW3CultureWizard (2016) found the most effective communication approaches for global teams were face-to-face meetings, conference calls, video-conferencing, and group emails/email discussion groups. Given the situation facing AVTs, these teams have to find the means of communication that works for them and can be supported by technologies and arrangements that members can access. In our research, members plan to meet at academic conferences to discuss progress in a face-to-face setting. Face-to-face opportunities are limited for AVTs, and they should be used every time they are available.

AVTs must Provide Benefits

The majority of respondents (86%) felt that the benefits of AVTs outweigh their challenges. Indeed, most people said they found the AVT to be very important to their productivity in terms of conference attendance, and publications and were satisfied with their AVT experiences. Respondents were most satisfied with goals (over 50%), relationships (47%), leadership (35%), outcomes (34%), and technology (30%). There are tangible benefits for participants, and the interactions with colleagues from other parts of the world result in AVT members who are more productive with the likelihood of increased motivations.

Goals are Important

Respondents (67%) felt that goals are critical for success. While goals are important for all types of virtual teams, they are more critical for members of virtual teams. Having a goal unifies the AVT and motivates members to exert the effort necessary to achieve the desired outcomes. To ensure that goals are acceptable to all members, they must actively participate in a dialogue to develop those goals, which includes setting milestones or steps for assessing progress toward achieving the goals. Specific, identifiable goals help members stay committed, disciplined, and motivated while they work as a virtual team. Clear goals are particularly important because AVT members are separated by large distances and working in isolation, and goals may be the only thing that gives them the motivation to complete a task.

Using the AVT that we are part of, the goals of the team are publications in journals or books, and two approaches have been applied to elicit consensus on the goals. The first is for a subset of interested members to respond to a “call for publication” (conference, journal paper, or book chapter). The second is to work on a specific research project and invite members to express an interest in being part of the research team. By registering interest, the member implies that they agree to the goals.

Build Sound Relationships

Our survey shows that the nature of the relationship that develops among AVT members contributes to the performance of the team (i.e., success or failure), and in reaching their goals. 66% of those surveyed stated relationships were important to the success of their AVT, and a large majority (93%) thought a good team member was “collaborative.” Relationship building and regular chat sessions with all team members lead to greater satisfaction of the individual team members and better team performance. In AVTs, relationships may be hard to build because members do not meet face-to-face. Relationships can still be built through social team-building activities when opportunities arise. For example, team members may meet at a conference and have lunch or dinner together or attend a social event.

Ensure Effective Leadership

Like other teams, AVTs requires leadership, and the survey confirms that leaders play a role in the success of the team. Leaders of AVTs should demonstrate a transformational approach to leadership, that is, one that inspires, conveying a vision and passion for the projects that is contagious, and instilling energy and enthusiasm into team members. At the same time, the leader plays the role of a coordinator more than anything else. Proper coordination of tasks was stated as very important by 71% of the respondents. In AVTs, the leadership role may be shared among the team—understanding, caring about each other’s situations, providing moral support, and helping to inspire members, as well as defining the vision of the AVT, is the responsibility of all team members. AVT members need to recognize that they are operating in a flat, not hierarchical, setting, and that all have to assume leadership roles by giving suggestions, volunteering to lead the production of publications, and recognizing mutual achievements within the team. The AVT leader should still retain the overall coordinator of the team. For example, the authors of this chapter work in an AVT, which has a leader and core team. Members

of the core team often receive information from various sources about opportunities to publish and pass these on to other team members.

Collaboration and Information Sharing Leads to Success and Diversity is an Asset

The survey identified the attributes of a good AVT member. Collaboration was considered to be the most important, followed by sharing information, proactive engagement, providing useful and timely information, and being professional (all mentioned by over 85% of respondents). Slightly fewer mentions (over 75%) were given to caring about teammates, offering assistance, and having good social skills. The majority of respondents considered their AVTs to be diverse in terms of disciplines, countries, and cultures, and demographics such as gender, age, and career stage, and diversity were deemed useful attributes, as 80% felt the team had capitalized on it.

Summary

We discuss AVTs as an emerging phenomenon characterizing academic work. AVTs are described as distinct from non-academic or corporate virtual teams CVTs. AVT members usually work for different institutions; these may be located in different parts of the world and have different cultures. Some well-known examples of AVTs—GLOBE, LEAD, Best Practices in IHRM, and X-Culture—were briefly described. The findings of our survey on AVTs were used to identify best practices for AVTs and the factors that drive their performance and success, including goals, leadership, communication, relationships, and the team's membership makeup. The importance of understanding AVTs is likely to increase in the future, particularly given the impact of the Covid pandemic, which has resulted in decreased travel and in-person meetings.

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