Cape Peninsula
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THE INFLUENCE OF VIRTUAL TEAMS ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN A SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN FINANCIAL ORGANISATION.

by

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DECLARATION

I, <u>Nazley Hendricks</u>, declare that the contents of this thesis, 'The influence of virtual teams on business communication in selected South African financial and other organisations', represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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Signed

<u>13 July 2020</u>
Date

ABSTRACT

This study focused on the influence of virtual teams on business communication in selected South African financial and non-profit organisations. The aim of the case study was to observe and understand business communication practices, in terms of the creation of meaning, the development of relationships and how messages are received and interpreted (Mastersincommunication.com 2019), among virtual teams, as a basis to recommend effective and efficient guidelines to improve the use of communications technology practices, that is, the technology, systems, and channels used to deliver different modes of communication (Mastersincommunication.com 2019), to enhance trust and shared identity within these organisations in South Africa as well as adding much needed research data on virtual teams in the South African context.

This study was conducted using a descriptive research process with a core purpose to describe the situation as it was at the time of the research. The researcher used empirical and ethnographic research since she had personal experience and observation opportunities in both companies in daily operations. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in questionnaires for the purpose of measuring feedback and responses to questions and analysing the themes of open-ended questions.

The main findings confirm existing literature and respond to the key research questions, namely, what the existing communication practices in the organisation are, what communications technologies do these organisations incorporate to enable effective virtual team productivity and how do communication practices in virtual teams affect trust and shared identity in these organisations. The study revealed that the organisations in this study incorporated adequate communications technologies but did not incorporate sufficient training on the technical aspect of utilising these technologies. The organisations in this study incorporated most of the common technologies for virtual teams, that there is a high level of shared identity in co-located teams compared with their virtual team members and while trust levels in these organisations are acceptable for individuals to work together, more work can be done to improve trust to enhance productivity

The implications of the study reveal that there are still trust issues in the South African organisational environment and the biggest contribution of this study was to add insights from the South African perspective to existing literature on virtual teams.

Key words: Communication practices; Information and communications technologies; Virtual team culture; Geographically dispersed teams; Globalisation

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Et al.	And others
GIF	Graphics Interchange Format
IM	Instant Messaging
IT	Information Technology
Mbps	Megabits per second
n.d.	No date
OHFB	Occupational Human Factor Benchmark
PC	Personal Computer
PDF	Portable Document Format
RICA	Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act, No. 70 of 2002
TTYL	Talk to you later
VoIP	Voice over Internet Protocol

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1   Introduction

Globally, it has been established through various studies that human beings find themselves compelled to interact with one another as a core need (Tissington & Senior, 2011: E89-E90). Even as we evolve and disperse over the globe, there is a need to continue this interaction across distance through various communication methods. Historically, communication over distance was established with the development of language itself, by means of codes, signals, and primeval dialects (Thompson, 2016). This demonstrates that humans have always found ways to communicate and to bring messages across to another person regardless of factors like proximity. The core, however, of any communication practice is, are we bringing the intended message across to the intended recipient?

In the business world, bringing the correct and intended message across to the correct and intended recipient is core to survival as part of any product or service, that is, does the business world know and understand what the client wants and needs and is it delivering as required? Owing to globalisation and competition in the business world, organisations' market share has decreased on a global level, forcing organisations to be more innovative through accessing broader skills and knowledge sets ranging across borders and cultures where they can bridge this gap by incorporating virtual teams (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017:570).

From a South African perspective, bridging the gap of globalisation through incorporating virtual teams is key to staying competitive; unfortunately, not enough research has been done to support South African organisations in adopting virtual teams successfully. Most of the studies conducted on the implementation of virtual teams has been done from a global perspective and not many from a South African perspective (Tekeh, 2015:1). With this said, this study sought to understand the effect of virtual teams on business communication within selected organisations in South Africa and use the data as a basis for recommendations. The scope of the case study was limited to two organisations in South Africa over a long period of time which allowed for the observation of the communication channels in these organisations through various changes of management and structures. The main focus of the study was Company A because base studies from this company, which showed communication challenges, initiated the research. Company B was selected as a contrasting organisation, smaller in size and different in operating structure to compare to the results from Company A

in order to establish consistencies or inconsistencies in results from a South African context. The researcher provides a brief overview of the two organisations studied, as follows:

1.1.1 Company A

A chief executive of a financial organisation in South Africa was asked what he felt the lessons had been over the past four years after a merge. The chief executive responded as follows:

> "The first thing is that going into something as stressful as this, you must have a strong business case. But it must be as strong strategically as it is on paper when looking at the numbers. While it is an absolute must for the strategic rationale and numbers to add up, it's the softer issues that are difficult to deal with" (Armstrong, 2014:1).

So how do South African organisations deal with the softer issues such as communication, trust, and identity building?

Before one can answer the aforementioned question, one needs to understand where it started for the organisations in this study. Company A resulted from a merger between two large organisations to increase market capitalisation and embedded value (Company A, 2015). This organisation is a leading organisation in its field in South Africa and is listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) (Company A, 2015). Company A's core business is financial services in insurance, investments, and healthcare areas. The organisation manages its trade through "operating brands" and to gain and maintain a competitive advantage positions itself as a financial wellness partner with a client-centric focus (Company A, 2015). The organisation has offices in the Western Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal.

1.1.2 Company B

Company B is a combined initiative of "industry, labour and government", which has the mutual interest of promoting the development and growth of a South African manufacturing industry for the benefit of all stakeholders. The company was established officially in 2016 on the foundation of a provincial non-profit entity serving its industry. Owing to unforeseen funding challenges, the provincial organisation was reconsidered and transitioned onto a national organisation. They have offices in the Western Cape and Gauteng.

The organisation's vision is to be recognised locally and internationally in specific market segments by 2025, resulting in employment, productivity growth, and positive transformation

across their value chain, through advanced design and manufacturing capabilities. As the organisation is expanding, the communication barriers of functioning across multiple locations have become more evident as explained in discussions with the Chief Operating Officer (B Isaacs 2018, personal communication, 21 September 2018).

1.2   Problem statement

During March 2014, Company A carried out their annual employee climate survey in the IT infrastructure division. Company A used the Occupational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB) survey, which is a "scientific-based organisational diagnostics suite developed since 1998 by Afriforte and the WorkWell research unit at the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences of the North-West University in South Africa" (Afriforte, 2015). A concerning result emerging from this survey showed that on average only 29% of employees (Ekkerd, 2014:8), across all ages, felt positive about communication practices in this financial organisation.

Further data was collected in May 2015 from employees in a Story Collector exercise using the Applied Influencer process as part of the Influencer Model. The core of the Influencer Model is about "changing behaviours to achieve measurable results". One of the biggest concerns emerging from this process was engagement, communication, and respect among employees in the organisation. Do employees listen, pause, speak up and ask if they don't agree or understand by engaging in an open and honest way with mutual purpose and respect?

It is evident from the above-mentioned information from company A that they face challenges and barriers with communication and engagement practices in their organisation. This led the researcher to study how virtual teams, based across multiple locations (Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal) communicate and build trust with other team members in the same organisation compared with a smaller non-profit organisation that is also based across multiple locations (Western Cape and Gauteng) in an endeavour to better understand the challenges and barriers in order to make recommendations.

The expansion of globalisation emphasises the need for organisations to form virtual teams to remain competitive, that is, teams that contain geographically dispersed members (Huang, 2012:1); however, with this need come challenges. Therefore, the main research question of this case study is to understand what influence virtual teams have on business communication practices in Company A then compared to Company B to establish consistencies or inconsistencies of results in the South African context.

1.3   Rationale for and significance of the study

In order to address the challenges of the research question mentioned above, the goal of this research was to study what influence virtual teams have on business communication practices in selected organisations in South Africa and to provide supportive guidelines for strategic planning for the future. Therefore, it is envisaged that this research report will provide information to Management on their current business communication practices and guidelines to improve them. The study will also offer insight into the opportunity to enhance trust between individuals and the building of one identity between virtual team members in an organisation.

1.4   Research aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the case study was to study business communication practices among virtual teams and to recommend effective and efficient guidelines to improve the use of communications technology practices to enhance trust and to build one shared identity within the studied organisations in South Africa.

To attain this aim, the following sub-goals were formulated:
- To undertake a comprehensive literature review on existing communication practices, barriers/challenges used among virtual teams in organisations.
- To investigate how existing communication practices could affect virtual team trust within organisations.
- To investigate the development of a shared identity between virtual team members within organisations.
- To investigate possible recommendations for the use of efficient communications technology practices in business communication between virtual teams in organisations.

The main goal and empirical research question of this ethnographic case study was to understand what influence virtual teams have on business communication in Company A then compared to Company B in order to establish consistencies or inconsistencies in results from a South African context.

Sub-questions and outcomes for this research case study:
- How do the organisations apply business communication practices in virtual teams? Outcome: To identify corporate communication practices/challenges in the organisation.

- How do the organisations enhance trust between colleagues in virtual teams? Outcome: To determine what factors would enhance trust within the organisations.

- How do the organisations create a feeling of closeness, namely a shared identity in virtual teams?

Outcome: To identify factors that contributes to shared identity in the organisations.

- ▪ What communications technology practices are used in business communication in virtual teams?
  Outcome: To compile a report to determine current technology practices/challenges in the organisations.

Therefore, an empirical study was conducted within the sub-domain of ethnographic research with the use of exploratory questions (Mouton, 2001:149; Sangasubana, 2011:567).

1.5   Research design and methodology

1.5.1   Research design

A research design can be defined as a strategy of how the researcher will conduct the research (Mouton, 2001:55-65; Kothari, 2004:31), where the researcher focuses on the end product. This study was conducted using a multifaceted approach (Kothari, 2004:2-4) as the most appropriate design to achieve the envisaged aim brought together in the form of an ethnographic case study. This is a descriptive research process with a core purpose to describe the situation as it was at the time of the research. The researcher used empirical and ethnographic research as she had personal experience and observation in both Company A and B on daily operations (Flick, 2009:233-234). Questionnaires used quantitative and qualitative methods for the purpose of measuring feedback and responses to questions and analysing the themes of open-ended answers (Berg, 2001:3, Kothari, 2004:3). A detailed explanation is provided in Chapter 4. The research strategy is then translated into various techniques that are explained below.

1.5.2   Research methodology

Research methodology can be defined as the universal technique adopted by the researcher in researching the problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:12). This study was divided into two phases: the primary phase, where the existing research available from Company A was reviewed and used as a guide to the research problem; and the secondary phase, where a literature review, data collection (in the form of qualitative and quantitative questionnaires) and data analysis (in the form of a report of the findings and recommendations based on findings) was done, as displayed in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1: Research Methodology Design

1.5.2.1 Literature review

The literature review provides the opportunity to critically review and summarise the existing information on the topic under exploration, detecting and noting any strengths and flaws in prior research completed, thus assisting in detecting the strengths or potential flaws in the proposed new study. In that way it removes the potential flaws, while simultaneously highlighting the potential strengths (Fink, 2019:6-7). Furthermore, a comprehensive literature search will offer the background and framework within which to situate the new research (Fink, 2019:6-7).

In this case study, Chapter 2 examined the existing literature available on communication in virtual/geographically dispersed teams and Chapter 3 explored trust and shared identity in relation to virtual/geographically dispersed teams in South Africa. An important aspect of this research study was that not many resources or literature were available on virtual/geographically dispersed teams in a South African context; most literature was on virtual/geographically teams worldwide. The literature review was taken as a basis in conjunction with the primary research available to draft the key evaluation questions posed in

the questionnaire, which overall answer the following questions as discussed in Chapter 7.

- How these organisations deal with the softer issues, namely, business communication practices in virtual teams to identify corporate communication practices/challenges.
- How these organisations enhance trust between colleagues in virtual teams to determine what factors would enhance trust within the organisations.
- How these organisations create a feeling of closeness, namely, a shared identity in virtual teams to identify factors that contribute to shared identity.
- How does exposure to communications technology affect the business communication process in virtual teams to determine current technology challenges in the organisations.

1.5.2.2   Data-collection methods

In this study, existing research from Company A was used as a driving force behind the research problem of how virtual teams influence business communication practices in South Africa; however, the core data collection was via quantitative and qualitative questionnaires in the two organisations, studied.

1.5.2.2.1   Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a respectable tool that can be used for finding evidence and eliciting opinions on a topic question (Olsen, 2012:9-10). The questionnaires of this study were executed via an online survey as the reply rate is ten times higher with web surveys, statistics can be collected immediately, one can reach a larger geographically dispersed audience and it's a cost-efficient alternative to paper-based surveys (Stiles, 2013). The quantitative and qualitative raw data provided by the questionnaire was processed and analysed by the researcher using the Microsoft Excel computer program to provide a statistical analysis and to determine themes. A more detailed discussion of the questionnaire follows in Chapter 4.

1.5.2.3   Data analysis

Data analysis can be described as the breakdown of data into controllable "themes, patterns, trends and relationships" (Mouton, 2001:102). The core data collection of this study was through questionnaires; therefore, the reliability and validity of the questionnaires was important (Mouton, 2001:108; Dikko, 2016:521). Even though reliability and validity are co-related in terms of legitimising data, they are not mutually exclusive as validity supersedes reliability as a requirement for research (Taherdoost, 2016:33). In other words, reliable data has to be valid, but valid data does not have to be reliable, as defined as follows: reliability can be described as the degree to which a "measurement of a phenomenon" delivers "stable and

consistent" outcomes (Dikko, 2016:521; Taherdoost, 2016:33-34), whereas, validity is the explanation of how soundly the "collected data" covers the actual range of the study, that is, does it measure what was planned to be measured, and did the researcher observe what was expected to be observed (Flick, 2009:387; Taherdoost, 2016:28)? The researcher used a Likert scale in the questionnaires of this study, therefore reliability had to be established; this was done and is discussed in detail in Chapter 4, Section 4.6.1. This study, more importantly, assumed content validity by way of the study proposal submission by the researcher, including the draft questionnaire, which was reviewed and finally ratified by the faculty ethics committee before the questionnaires were distributed (see Appendix C).

1.6   Clarification of terminology

1.6.1   Communication

In general, communication is a means of connecting people or places. In business, it is a key function of management – an organisation cannot operate without communication between levels, departments, and employees. Communication is the foundation on which individuals can establish and maintain relationships with other human beings around the world (De Klerk-Weyer & Le Roux, 2008:147; De Beer & Rossouw, 2012:68). It can be defined as the conveying or swapping of "thoughts, opinions, or information via verbal, written or symbolic means (Dictionary.com, 2002a) or a "two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, news, ideas and feelings but also create and share meaning (*Business Dictionary*, 2015a). This study investigates the processes that companies incorporate to communicate across virtual teams in geographically dispersed locations. The technologies incorporated and how they are used are key to communication. Communication is seen as the cornerstone of trust, a fundamental quality in strengthening relationships and building a cohesive and highly functional environment (Perra 2001:69-71; Barrett, 2005:386) for virtual teams.

1.6.2   Virtual teams/geographically dispersed teams

Virtual teams work through borders of "time and space" by using contemporary computer-driven technologies. They consist of members who are located across numerous physical locations and thus they make use of computer-mediated communication to aid geographically dispersed team members to organise their individual inputs (Sessa et al., 1999:1; Ebrahim et al., 2009:2654; *Business Dictionary*, 2015c). Virtual teams in the context of this study were dispersed across three locations in South Africa, namely, the Western Cape, Gauteng, and

KwaZulu-Natal, rendering the virtual teams in these organisations physically distant from one another.

1.6.3 Proximity (distance)

Proximity can be defined as the nearness in place, time, order, occurrence, or relation (Dictionary.com, 2002c.; I Word. 2015b). Proximity is derived from the Latin *proximus*, meaning 'nearest', or 'close to the actual' (Vocabulary.com, 2019b). Proximity is the core of this study, and as globalisation has extended the physical closeness required for business, the study investigates how one decreases the emotional distance to build trust and maintain relationships within an organisation.

1.6.4 Identity

Identity can be defined in numerous ways, that is, the individual "character or personality" of a person, (Dictionary.com, 2002b; I Word, 2015a, Lexico.com, 2015a). However, it is formally defined as the core of one's individuality, self-recognition, and being, overall. How one identifies oneself, determines how one exists and lives in this world. Therefore, critical in building and sustaining relationships is determining where individual identity fits into the virtual team identity.

1.6.5 Technology

Technology consists of two primary components:
"1) a physical component which contains things such as products, tooling, equipment, blueprints, techniques, and processes; and
2) the informational component which contains know-how in management, marketing, production, quality control, reliability, skilled labour, and functional areas" (Wahab et al., 2012:62).

In summary, it is the "tools and practical applications one uses to accomplish output required, especially using technical processes, methods, or knowledge" (I Word. 2015c; Business Dictionary. 2015b). Technology enables the existence of virtual teams and has increased capacity and productivity with it; however, the *how of use* is usually overlooked or minimised in terms of importance and that is what was observed in this study.

1.6.6 Trust

Trust is the firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2011; Lexico.com, 2015b; Merriam-Webster.com, 2015). It is gained through honest and transparent communication, the sharing of information, the creation of an understanding and the giving and receiving of feedback (Perra, 2001:69-71; Barrett, 2005:386). Establishing trust in relationships opens the door to taking risks with the unknown, and when working within virtual teams where so much is unknown owing to physical dispersion, trust is core for virtual teams to succeed.

1.7 Ethical considerations

Researchers in a research study have an ethical obligation to their participants, because one probes the "social lives" of others. For this reason, researchers have to safeguard the rights, confidentiality and well-being of the individuals that are at the centre of their research (Berg, 2004:43; Gajjar, 2013:10; Roberts, 2015:314). According to Brynard and Hanekom (1997:4), the most important ethical requirements for a researcher are honesty and confidentiality. With honesty it is important that the researcher reports the truth about the whole research process and the results. Owing to the confidential nature of all organisations data, the researcher could stumble upon data and information that, if shared publicly could be harmful to the organisation, persons or groups involved. Therefore, it is vital to remember that the interests of the participants and organisation always prevail, and that no confidential information should be recorded (without prior approval) or published (Brynard & Hanekom, 1997:4). The researcher in this study included a permission agreement as a cover letter to the questionnaire that outlined the background and objectives of the study, the objectives of the questionnaire, and what would be done with the data. It further stipulated that the questionnaire was voluntary with no coercion, that participants could extract themselves from the research at any time, that they were not obliged to answer all the questions and could skip questions that they were uncomfortable answering, and that their personal data would be confidential. If the responses were published, such responses would not be identifiable as theirs (see Appendix D).

1.8 Outline of the study

Chapters 2 and 3 further explore the research topic through comprehensive literature reviews. Chapter 2 examines communication in general and in virtual teams, as well as what technology and practices are used, including barriers faced in virtual communication. Chapter 3 concentrates on the understanding and role of trust and shared identity in improving

communication in virtual teams. Chapter 5 includes the framework, research methodology and practices used to address the research process. In Chapters 5 and 6, the results of the questionnaires are reported and analysed, and in Chapter 7 the final interpretations of the study and specific recommendations are summarised with regard to the entire communication practices and how virtual teams affect these practices

1.9   Conclusion

The research process is a very personal and investigative process for the researcher. In using a multi-faceted research approach, as explained in Section 1.5.1, this is truly a case of immersion for the researcher investigating this case study. This chapter provides an overview of the background of the organisations in South Africa that were studied. It showed that expansion does not automatically equate the success of the 'softer' issues but highlights the need for investigation into the human communication practices of the organisation as demonstrated by existing research from Company A.

The focus of the study was to understand the influence of virtual teams on communication practices in these organisations. The focus was to investigate the actual situation and identify the uses of and barriers to communication in virtual teams so that recommendations/guidelines could be presented to management to assist with developing improvement strategies for the organisations.

Furthermore, this chapter provided the background to the study and an outline of the research methodology and literature review. It gave clarity regarding key terms used in this research study through concise definitions to support the reader in understanding what prompted this research and gave some indication of the content of subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 2

COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

"A lack of clarity could put the brakes on any journey to success" (Maraboli, 2010:1).

2.1   Introduction

This chapter provides a conceptual orientation of efficient business communication practices and gives an indication of how they are embedded in the virtual team context, taking barriers and challenges into consideration as indicated in the extract above from Steve Maraboli.

Research notes that humans are compelled to socialise as a basic necessity (Tissington & Senior, 2011:E89-E90), that humans are naturally inquisitive regarding what other people are thinking, and that our individual characteristics are shaped by the principles we adopt from the groups we identify with (Lieberman, 2013). The researcher agrees that communication is an integral part of that social connection that we as human beings crave, and that we communicate on a fundamental basis to fulfil our desire of conveying our physical and emotional states, building our shared connections, collecting data for intellectual decisions and justifying behavioural actions. To truly understand this concept, one first needs to identify what communication is. Many definitions of communication exist, the researcher focused on the following definition as a base and shown in the transactional communication model in Figure 2.1 below:

> [Communication is a] two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange (encode-decode) information, news, ideas and feelings through various means (channels) but also create and share meaning (message) (*Business Dictionary*, 2015a).

This two-way communication process is termed transactional communication, which can be affected by physical noise (distracting sounds around the individual) or emotional noise (preconceived biases) that could limit and /or affect the intended meaning vs the understanding of the message. It also factors the context of the environment and individual in the communication (Crowley, 2019; Ashman, 2018; Viswanathan, 2010:5).
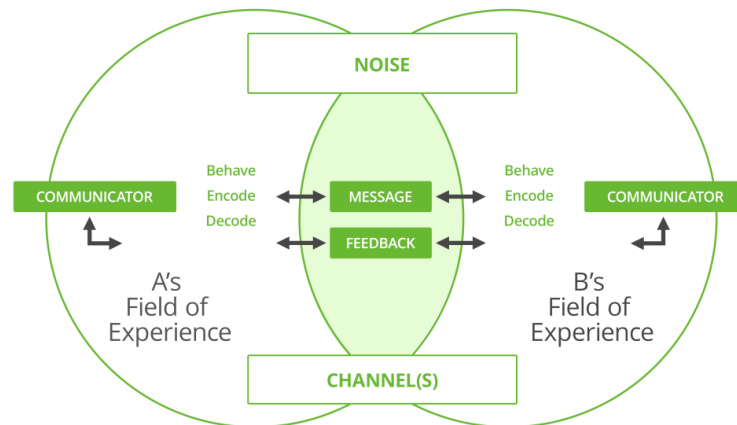
Figure 2.1: Transactional communication model 1

(Crawley: 2019)

For the researcher, communication is the foundation on which people initiate and continue relations with other people. It is essential to the creation and growth of trust between people, and indispensable to strengthening relationships. In the corporate environment, communication plays a vital role in management both internally and externally. What this means is that an organisation cannot function adequately in the absence of good communication internally. Communication is crucial between levels, departments, and employees, to establish and share knowledge and skills in the organisation and to share and ensure understanding of policies, practices, and strategies for implementation. From an external, client perspective, Management require good communication practices to promote relationships with their stakeholders in order to build a solid reputation (Omotayo, 2015: 10, 14; Ovando, 2018:259; Varvara, 2018).

These communications are furthermore divided into synchronous and asynchronous communication; synchronous communication is easiest explained as "real time" communication where there is an instant or live exchange, for example, face-to-face, telephonic and video conferencing communication, whereas in asynchronous communication there is a delay or non-instant response, for example, email, text messaging, etc. (Szatar, 2020:1; Otto, 2017:9; Shore, 2016:1). *When* to use synchronous or asynchronous communication is dependent on the context of the communication, for example, if an instant response is required like a husband needing to know from his wife if he should buy milk while he is in the store; a telephonic discussion (synchronous communication) may be most efficient compared to a financial report that is required for future decision making; then an email (asynchronous communication) is most efficient for

records keeping and planning purposes. These types of communication and uses is discussed in detail below.

2.2 Primary communication Channels used in organisations

These days, with globalisation ubiquitous in business, organisations, and people in general communicate through two main channels: in-person communication, that is, face-to-face, and virtual communication using communications technologies like telephone, email, and video conferencing. For the purpose of this study, the literature review focuses on virtual communication in virtual teams within organisations is explored, following a review of existing literature on face-to-face communication.

2.2.1 Face-to-face communication

There is a plethora of research contending that face-to-face communication is the ideal form of communication (Perra, 2001:69-71; Barrett, 2005:386; De Klerk-Weyer & Le Roux, 2008:147; De Beer & Rossouw, 2012:68; *Business Dictionary*, 2015a). Daxini (2018: viii) supports previous authors' views that we converse and connect through various means, but predominantly via verbal, for example, tone of voice, and non-verbal communication, such as body language (Daxini, 2018: viii). Daim et al. (2012:203) concur and explain that face-to-face communication encompasses these verbal and non-verbal fundamentals to a large extent, and permits us to obtain a wealth of specific information and meaning from tone of voice and body language, even if the tone of voice and body language contradict the words the individual says; for example, if an individual is not being truthful (Daim et al., 2012:203).

The researcher realised, while reviewing the existing literature on communication, the importance of accurate communication practices: body language, tone of voice, facial expressions and tension in the room add meaning to the communication message and are imperative to allow individuals to build trust, as most individuals require the added stimuli of the face-to-face environment. Therefore, in virtual teams, organisations need to copy these face-to-face stimuli as closely as possible in another way so that individuals can create similar meaning in virtual communications.

Face-to-face communication is vital for constructing trust between team members in an organisation and to create shared objectives (Daim et al., 2012:204). Research

incontrovertibly displays the influential effect of face-to-face discussion on cooperative choices in social problems. It is assumed that these effects stem from both the obligation individuals' sense when they make social agreements face-to-face, and from upturns in "group identity" that build up from face-to-face interactions (Kiesler & Cummings, 2002: 64). So, the question arises in this ever-developing worldwide community where team members are virtually located, how does one incorporate face-to-face communication across distance? Therefore, it is incumbent to establish what constitutes a virtual team in the business world of today and how members communicate virtually.

2.2.2   Virtual communication and virtual teams

A virtual team is a group of individuals that are tasked to work together, with one or more of the following team characteristics: geographically dispersed (different locations), different time zones, and where the core communication tool is not face-to-face communication because of the location and time difference (Uber Grosse, 2002:25-26; Jones et al. 2005:189; Hambley et al., 2007:1; Isotalo, 2013:7). Virtual teams primarily communicate via virtual communications in the form of computer-mediated communications technologies like email, telephone, video conferencing, and others (Hambley et al., 2007:1; Isotalo, 2013:7).

The majority of research demonstrates that in-person, face-to-face meetings are best scenarios for any team (MacPhail, 2007: 568; Dubikovsky & Friesel, 2018) and similarly for virtual teams in an organisation. Research indicates that colleagues benefit from face-to-face interaction, predominantly at the commencement of a task or assignment, as this contributes to create functioning relationships and building trust (Uber Grosse, 2002:25-26) between members. Therefore, virtual team members need to have regular face-to-face meetings to retain and build on personal relationships (Uber Grosse, 2002:29-30; Brewer, 2015:191), specifically at the start of a project.

Face-to-face interactions could also overcome a feeling of seclusion and isolation, which is a possible effect of being part of a virtual team (Cascio, 2000:81-90). Jarman (2005: 336) reports that team members feel "the physical distance", and not being able to socialise with co-workers adds to a feeling of isolation. Furthermore, Zaugg and Davies (2013:228-229) support the significance of face-to-face communication by emphasising the importance of growing soft skills like body language and tone of voice as team members to form a connection. For example, in communication via virtual means, namely

telecommunications, non-verbal signals in the communication process are absent and these non-verbal signals are key in assisting team members in forming trusting connections with co-located team members (Purvanova & Bono, 2009:344; Zaugg & Davies, 2013:228-229).

For the most effective leading of virtual teams, the researcher's view is that leaders are obliged to go the extra mile by selecting communication techniques and technologies that best suit the related requirements of team members, the organisation, and the situation. The main reason for good communication practices is to align team members with the common purpose and goals of the organisation with their contributions in order for them to feel encouraged and inspired to be fully engaged in future conversation (Thompsen, 2000; Ruggier, 2009:1018; Isotalo, 2013:3,19).

To sum up, the research suggests leaders need to select the most suitable communications technologies based on their situation, the organisation and what their employees require in terms of productivity and personal motivation. Team members also need to confirm that they understand the intended message and expected actions to facilitate positive and productive results as well as build on team cohesion and relationships. For the best communications technology selection to be made, leaders and individuals need to know what barriers they may face within virtual teams and how organisations can overcome these barriers.

2.3   Communication factors and influences

Zigurs (2003:339-351) declares that accountability lies with leaders to inspire consistent communication and feedback among team members and that leaders have to highlight and establish aligned standards for communication practices to decrease the probability of misunderstandings (Zigurs, 2003:339-351; Carter et al., 2015:233-236).

In the above, the researcher's stance is that leaders need to be accountable in virtual communication practices to decrease the probability of misapprehension (Carter et al., 2015:226); to see the validity in virtual team communications one needs a clear picture of what accountability means in this context. A simple description of accountability is the duty to present an explanation of and response for the implementation of tasks and responsibilities, basically to explain and justify progress or delivery of tasks/outcomes and individual responsibility (Bovens, 2006:3,9; Lewis et al., 2014:401-407). As leaders are

ultimately responsible to explain and justify their virtual teams' progress or delivery of tasks/outcomes, they must be cognisant of the influences on communication practices, and in this case specifically the influence of virtual teams and technology on communication practices.

2.3.1 The influence of virtual teams on communication practices

As stated above (see Section 2.2.2), a virtual team is a group of members that work together within different locations, predominantly communicating via computer-mediated communications technologies (Uber Grosse, 2002:25-26; Jones et al. 2005:189; Hambley et al., 2007:1; Isotalo, 2013:7). In order to showcase the influence of virtual teams' communication practices, the researcher reviewed traditional communication practices across time and distance. From "tribal villages to military organisations" (Sessa et al., 1999), collective groups have used whatever means at their disposal to communicate across distance, from smoke signals or drums, to carrier pigeons. In the context of this research, distance is considered locations that require the use of communications technology as their main form of communication as individuals cannot walk or drive short distances to meet face-to-face; in other words, people are located in different cities, provinces or countries.

In this progressive world, the means to communicate across distance has evolved with the increase of available communications technologies. Some researchers acknowledge that communicating effectively is vital to virtual teams so that trust and team cohesion can be established for productive team performance (Thompsen, 2000; Hambley et al., 2007:6). However, the mere presence of these advanced communications technologies does not automatically result in effective communication within virtual teams. For this reason, effective communication guidelines and practices are vital for organisations in the use of communications technologies in virtual teams. Organisation policies and practices should outline how and when a specific technology, platform and tool should be used to foster team trust and cohesion to result in high performance.

Teams with a strong team cohesion will achieve better results because of open communication arrangements, including deeper, personal, and more engaging communication. Team members have a greater sense of satisfaction when there is a "personal touch" in communication (Bergiel et al., 2008:102), rather than when there is just an exchange of data among members. According to Paul (2006:143-176), a successful

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virtual team delves deeper into layers of subjects and ensures more synthesis, where discussions are of meanings, consequences, opportunities and modifications of procedures, and spends less time on routine and technical information, just exchanging workflow procedures (Paul, 2006:143-176). With these types of meaningful discussions, team members can create and grow a positive work atmosphere by being open to different ways of thinking (Boule, 2008:28-31).

To cultivate this open way of thinking within virtual team communications, it is essential that virtual team members network frequently and stay engaged in the communication process; a great example is regular check-ins within the team to support members and to provide or receive feedback about work development and objectives (LaBrosse, 2010). Dedication, efficiency, and accountability increase when members check-in regularly with the rest of the team, specifically through fast-changing periods in the organisations (Thompsen, 2000; Majchrzak et al., 2005:9-27). If clear expectations are set beforehand and everyone knows what they need to accomplish in a specific time frame, teams can achieve remarkable results within very short check-ins (LaBrosse, 2010).

A good foundation for check-ins is building trust in a face-to-face introductory interaction, therefore, it's key that team members have face-to-face interactions at least once a year (Uber Grosse 2002:29-30; MacPhail, 2007:568; LaBrosse, 2010). LaBrosse (2010) further mentions that during face-to-face meetings, often one understands something not evident previously, and when members go back to their distant locations they have a better understanding that they likely would not have acquired without the face-to-face meeting (LaBrosse, 2010).

Traditionally, co-located colleagues had a better understanding of their peers within their teams because of consistent and spontaneous interactions like daily talks at the watercooler, which were significant in building trust among colleagues (Jones et al., 2005:189). As a result of individuals interacting with one another more often and getting better acquainted, they are more likely to build a positive relationship and solid bonds (O'Connell, 1996:53-54; Kiesler & Cummings, 2002:68). Individuals claim that once they have formed solid bonds, they can continue conversations through telecommunications like telephone or email (O'Connell, 1996:53-54; Kiesler & Cummings, 2002:64; LaBrosse, 2010). O'Connell (1996:53-54) claims that over a period of time, electronic communications allow for spontaneous communication to develop or renew close bonds with other individuals. Research illustrates that regular spur-of-the-moment or casual

communication has influence on the power of social and work relationships, and with the development of communication and commitments that individuals have together, they support one another, which builds trust, shared identity and familiarity within the group (Kiesler & Cummings, 2002:68; Purvanova & Bono, 2009:344-345).

In virtual teams with solid social relationships, team members feel safe enough during virtual team meetings to ask other members to clarify or recap information to ensure correct understanding. Zaugg and Davies (2013:232) explain that virtual team members are encouraged to permit time for explanations to be processed and for adequate feedback to be given, and to limit their use of colloquial speech or informal talks to avoid misunderstandings. The authors also advise sending important documents to team meetings prior to the meeting so team members are able to assess and review the information and take the time required to comprehend the information within the documents (Zaugg & Davies, 2013:228-233). It is common practice in these organisations studied that presenters send documents and information prior to meetings so that time is used effectively to raise questions, concerns, and recommendations. Team members are usually open to feedback and ensure that colleagues understand what is discussed or what message is communicated.

The opportunity to build a social network is vital to enable team harmony and collaboration in an organisation with virtual teams as it brings a sense of unity and better understanding of one another in engaging in the social network. The challenge is there is an assumption that the majority of employees know how to use these technologies and/or what circumstances require a specific technology.

2.3.2 The influence of technology on communication practices

Technology is fundamental to virtual teams. Without it, these teams cannot function (Daim et al., 2012:200). Before delving into the influence of technology, clarity is required on what is meant by technology. Technology can be summarised as the practical use of information and knowledge in addition to an aptitude assumed by the practical application of knowledge or a method of achieving a task specifically by means of technical procedures, methods, or knowledge consisting of two primary components: a physical/technical component and an informational/know-how component (Wahab et al., 2012:62; I Word, 2015c). Basically, technology is a means to an end, using physical (hardware) components and data expertise, like scripting and formulae, to formulate an

outcome (product or service). Now that technology is clarified, the next step required is to unpack how it can influence the communication process.

Technology can enhance communication and even assist in building stronger links/relationships among virtual team members, but it can also break down team cohesion and trust through misunderstandings as a result of ineffectual use of a communications technology or the incorrect tool. It is therefore essential that "rules of engagement" are established within a virtual team as information technology has the ability to alter the context of human relations (MacPhail, 2007:569). The fact is, effective communication in virtual teams necessitates guidelines and practices like vigilant attention to listening, clear presentation of views, effort in conveying productive intent, selecting the correct technology to bring across communication concisely, and guaranteeing comprehension and expectations for action (Thompsen, 2000; Isotalo 2013:12-13). Some guidelines that research has provided for the most common communications technologies used in these organisations, are telephone, email, and IM, discussed below.

2.3.2.1 Telephone or teleconference communications

Telephone and teleconferencing communications are communications through a medium that links people at multiple locations in an interactive two-way communication; an example is a telephone with conference call software (Tabiri, 2017:33). Daim et al. (2012:203) and MacPhail (2007:568-569) offer valuable guidelines for the use of telephone and/or teleconferencing to assist with effective communication in the absence of visual cues, as follows:

- Members have to be conscious of the lack of visual indications, thus identifying oneself when speaking and steering clear of side conversations are good practices.
- The manager or leader should demonstrate proactive listening, by clarifying and assisting members comprehend ideas and recommendations made by the team.
- A clear timeline for feedback to a sender should be clarified, for example, mention someone's name and ask for their feedback or pause after a point and ask if there is feedback from anyone in the teleconference.
- Clarify what actions are to be taken if the receiver is not able to deliver all the information required, or not timeously; possibly send questions beforehand so that participants can prepare and commit to a follow-up email to confirm any actions or additional information required with due dates.
- In what manner and at what time senders may be available – pre-booking details.
- What actions to take if the sender thinks a communication may possibly be misinterpreted, for instance, decide how much 'call' time to use and when to relate the issue to another 'offline' discussion.
- What actions to take if a receiver does not comprehend a message.

These guidelines are simple to implement at no cost to ensure effective use of telephone or teleconferences to benefit from its advantages as a low cost means to communicate across distance rather than travelling. Telephone or teleconferences also includes a factor of personal communication in the form of the tone of voice of speakers and most importantly interactive real time interaction, providing and getting feedback instantaneously.

2.3.2.2 Email

Email seems to have become the safety net of new age communications technologies as it provides users with time and space to mentally prepare what they want to say and how they want to present it. It simultaneously offers the safety of recorded documentation, and for these reasons, guiding principles for email communications are vital. Sometimes people are bombarded with emails and may not have the time to read each email in detail. The following authors provide clear principles to be followed (LaBrosse, 2010; Daim et al., 2012:203).

- Use a clear, descriptive subject line and place the most important points at the top of the email.
- All actions should be found in the last paragraph and only relevant sentences from prior emails are to be repeated in responses.
- Don't copy people in the email that do not have a direct link to or role in respect of the email or subject matter. This avoids generating unnecessary work for your team members with extra reading if they are not required to be included in the email.
- Do not use email as a platform to vent frustration; use the telephone to settle matters, especially if there are only one or two members involved.
- Within a project team, determine and clearly communicate the agreed response times – the feedback time frames.
- Always consider your audience: levels of management and familiarity will play a role in how formal the communication can be as it is more likely that misunderstandings occur with various levels of audiences and unfamiliar individuals (Uber Grosse, 2002:27).
- Carefully consider when requesting a 'read receipt' as it may put the sender's mind at ease that the communication has been sent and read; however, most recipients do not appreciate this tracking method in business communication. Read the recipients' responses to determine whether to continue with 'read receipts' in future. For example, if one did not receive a read receipt from a recipient, but the recipient responds to the direct email, do not send 'read receipt' requests in future to that recipient (Guzman, 2018).
- To 'humanise' communication via technology, virtual team members can make use of personal inputs within their email communication, namely, pictures (Uber Grosse, 2002:26) and emoticons, as they express sociability and support, thereby creating or maintaining a personal relationship (Wadsworth & Blanchard, 2015:389).

The guidelines above can empower virtual teams in email communication as an effective means to communicate with others.

2.3.2.3 Instant messaging (IM)

Even with guidelines in place, team members need to find the best-suited tool for the job and sometimes the simplest one works the best. If a team requires a quick conversation regarding a matter, a lower-tech solution may be more suitable, like instant messaging (IM), than the more advanced Web conferencing tools available. Instant messaging is a form of online chat, a "real-time exchange of text, images, video and voice transmission". Common examples are WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Microsoft Lync, to mention a few (Piwek & Joinson, 2016:358).

Instant messaging, though casual and low-tech, offers the chance for equal debate among all members participating, whereas a webcast, for example, is merely one-way information delivery from one individual to the team (Majchrzak et al., 2005:9-27.) Instant messaging can also be used as a "virtual water cooler", where casual personal exchange happens (Jones et al., 2005:189; LaBrosse, 2010), as it allows for exchanging of emoticons, GIFs, and IM stickers instantly. An IM sticker is a realistic drawing of a character, representing feelings or behaviours. There is a greater variety of stickers than emoticons, and IM stickers have the capability to depict body language with "facial reaction" (Van Grove, 2013). An added functionality in some IM platforms that can set the scene for the sender in terms of where the communication is in the communication process, is delivery and read receipts. In the case of WhatsApp, when an individual sees one tick, the message has been delivered to the recipient; however, there may be a connection problem, like no data, on the recipient's side. If there are two ticks, it was successfully delivered to the recipient. Finally, depending on both individual settings – if activated to show read receipt – confirmation that the message has been read is indicated by two blue ticks (Press Association, 2019).

As mentioned previously, technology can greatly enhance communication; however, the influencing factors are *how* and *when* these communications technologies are used. If these factors are not managed correctly, these great enhancements can become a barrier to or challenge in effective communication across distance.

2.4 Barriers to and/or challenges in communication practices

As with anything in life, there will always be the possibility that what you have planned may encounter some obstacle. These obstacles may lead to your planning being completely wrecked or to misunderstandings that hinder progress.

Similarly, there are numerous obstacles or challenges that impact effective communication, such as, gender variances, generational differences, ethnic diversity, language variances, differences in ethics, lack or absence of trust, noise, information overkill, individual prejudices, distance, and technology (Uber Grosse, 2002:22-23; Daim et al., 2012:203; Hills, 2013:99-103). In gender, for example, communication is experienced differently by men and women: men view communication as a way to solve a problem – it should be concise and engage men to provide the answer. Women 'feel' communication, it's about their emotions; a woman wants to discover through communication and feel heard and understood, regardless of how long it takes. These differences usually result in misunderstandings between the genders (Merchant, 2012:17; Drobnick, 2018; Leightner, 2018).

In terms of communication between different ages, the older generation prefer face-to-face, in-depth, personal touch communication, whereas the younger generation grew up with new age technologies using shorthand, and can transition more easily between communications technologies like IM, video conferencing and virtual reality, and traditional face-to-face communication, like memos and long meetings (Sawayer, 2017; Venter, 2017:498; Tarrell, 2019). Conflict and/or misunderstandings occur when generations are not open to address communication from the other's point of view, even in the South African context.

In the South African context, location also plays a role in how people interact with their virtual team members, owing to financial inconsistencies between the provinces, specifically the Gauteng, Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. This is reflected in research noting that KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape employees are paid less for the same jobs than Gauteng employees (Businesstech, 2019; Careers24.com, 2019). Gauteng is the wealthiest province, with the most opportunities for employment (Sen Nag, 2018; Statistics South Africa, 2018:15), while KwaZulu-Natal has the highest adult poverty level compared with Gauteng and the Western Cape (Statistics South Africa, 2018:13-15). However, this study focuses on proximity (distance) in virtual teams, technology, trust, and

shared identity, as these are the biggest communication barriers or challenges within these organisations.

2.4.1 Proximity (distance) as a barrier to and/or challenge in the communication process

As established previously, face-to-face communication is the ideal communication process, thus one could argue that proximity/distance can be a barrier to and/or challenge in communication if not compensated for. However, one first needs to understand that this is not limited to physical proximity/distance, but may include psychological proximity/distance, namely how close or distant one feels to another person. Traditional understanding and years of investigation convey that one feels closest to someone in near physical proximity (Wilson et al., 2008:979), "yet we increasingly find ourselves in paradoxical situations where we are geographically far from someone with whom we feel quite close ('far-but-close')" explain Wilson et al. (2008:979). This dichotomy is aligned with the opinions of other authors, who feel that viewing proximity/distance as physical only offers an inadequate outlook on how individuals experience it. It should include the emotional reflection observed and understood also (Wilson et al., 2008:980; Siebdrat et al., 2014:765).

In effect, research has revealed that "cognitive distance estimates" vary greatly from "actual distance measured", and that intellectual or psychological distance appears to be a mental depiction of "actual distance" formed by a person's social, ethnic, and wide-ranging life experiences (Harrison-Hill, 2001:3-17). Accordingly, the researcher's view is underscored by research as stated above, and further supported through descriptions of "perceived proximity" and "psychological distance" that basically translate into an individual's view or perception of how near or far away another individual is. This not only is based on rational assessment but is dependent on moods and feelings which influence trust and team members' rational and emotional keenness and capability to give-and-take information (Wilson et al., 2008:983; Chong et al., 2012:205-215). Taking the above into consideration, how does proximity/distance become a barrier to or/and challenge in communication practices in the organisations studied?

Easy and effortless physical social exchanges like cafeteria/lift/watercooler conversations, which form trust, mindfulness, and cooperation, constitute the ideal. It is thus the researcher's understanding that if one can substitute these physical social interactions

with quality virtual ones, supported by sporadic physical social exchanges, trust can be constructed, leading to further cooperation, and sharing.

Distance between headquarters and work sites possibly has the highest influence on team co-operation and sharing because of the impact or restrictions on casual, unprompted communication openings (Kiesler & Cummings, 2002:76). To be exact, individuals who work in neighbouring workplaces come across one another more frequently in communal office places, like the water cooler, coffee machine, and copier/printer. These spontaneous meetings increase the ease and preference of communication, and they permit unintended and flexible exchanges. According to Kraut et al. (2002:137-162), the work it takes to start a discussion is less onerous when co-workers are physically closer to one another. Co-workers can be more proficient in sharing data and adjusting misunderstandings (Cramton, 2001:346-371) when they can meet face-to-face by simply walking or driving a short distance. Individuals in close physical proximity are inclined to experience team mindfulness – being aware of what a co-worker is dealing with at present through face-to-face observation and casual discussions. These individuals also do not need as much effort to start discussions and feel a solid sense of group identification as they can align their interaction with the mood of co-workers (as observed) in the form of not disturbing them if they seem busy or distracted or making them smile with a joke or compliment if they seem unhappy.

Olson et al. (2002:113-135) stress that co-workers situated in close physical vicinity are inclined to have a better comprehension of others' strengths, working methods and tempers than of co-workers situated far from one another. Likewise, Covi et al. (1998:53-65); Yu and Zellmer-Bruhn (2018:324), and Rupprecht et al. (2019:36) established that awareness or mindfulness of one another's work aids co-workers to distinguish "when, what and how" to connect with one another. The aspects mentioned above clarify the direct link between proximity and communication practices (Chong et al., 2012:205-215). Consequently, even though individuals who are virtually dispersed have to put greater effort into getting their co-workers' attention to have an opportunity to influence them (Wadsworth & Blanchard, 2015:392), sometimes, co-workers learn that it is possible to create lifelong friendships with individuals they have not yet encountered face-to-face (Uber Grosse, 2002:26) by putting in the added effort.

In summary, the usefulness of solutions for physical distance in work groups will hinge on the amount of current social reserve or unity in the group; if unity is great, that is, if the

work group members have a solid obligation to the group or to one another, then facilitated communications technologies offer an acceptable solution in the absence of near physical proximity as they will address the "when, what and how" of the use of technology to create the connection with one another, making technology fundamental in virtual teams (Kiesler & Cummings, 2002:76).

2.4.2   Technology as a barrier and/or challenge in the communication process

"Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master
Christian Lous Lange" (2017:1).

As per Christian Lange, above, the researcher is of the view that technology is only useful if used with the correct guidelines and support, or it will become a barrier ("dangerous master") in the communication process. There are numerous communications technologies available to members of virtual teams, which may include telephone, video conferencing, IM, file and application sharing, and other virtual reality options (Wadsworth & Blanchard, 2015:387). The key is understanding when and how technology should be used, ensuring seamless integration in work processes, reaching critical mass. Critical mass in general, as redefined from nuclear physics, refers to the least number of something required to commence or sustain any project (Dictionary.cambridge.org, 2019; Interaction Design Foundation, 2019; Vocabulary.com, 2019a). Critical mass in the context of this study can be defined as the use of technology to the extent where it becomes an expected part of the communication process. If one cannot accomplish critical mass, it may be as a result of the specific technology not being implemented appropriately, and continual use of the technology may become a barrier or/and challenge to the work of the team (Grudin, 1994:93-105; Van Slyke et al., 2007:270).

2.4.2.1   Telephone and teleconferencing

A voice is a more personal connection and a key driver of the use of telephone or teleconferencing (Daim et al., 2012:203). Research shows that even though limited resolution of differences occurred during teleconferences (Majchrzak et al., 2004:131-137,152), some virtual teams experienced video conference interruptions and delays off-putting, and favoured teleconferences. Teleconferences are easy to set up, efficient and cost effective (Hoffman, 2002:10; An et al., 2017:797; Mamulai et al., 2017:3). One can also use recordings of calls as record-keeping mechanisms for easy reference at a later

stage; however, individuals need to be cognisant of the fact that even though legally, according to South Africa's Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act, No. 70 of 2002 (RICA), a conversation may be recorded without consent, it is better to request consent at the beginning of the meeting to establish trust (Roodt, 2017).

The main obstacle to communicating by telephone is that it is difficult to determine which individual is saying what, when there are more than two or three people in the teleconference (Uber Grosse, 2002:29), especially with the interference of external noise and when participants are not familiar with one another. Additionally, if individuals speak different languages and/or have accents, this makes understanding what is said difficult, as sometimes observed by the researcher in these organisations.

The researcher's view is that pre-established trust compensates for the absence of visible cues, such as body language, making the participants more open to questioning to ensure uniform understanding. The challenge for organisations is that trust is not easy to establish in virtual teams, and in virtual teams in organisations where trust has not been established, individuals tend not to participate actively or add to the conversation during teleconferences, leading to useless and wasted team meetings.

2.4.2.2 Email

The foremost reason for the current increase in the use of email in a virtual team is that it is easier to use for people with different first languages, as it offers them an opportunity to plan their communication better, adding to the pool of information exchanged. It also provides individuals with an opportunity to investigate and provide support to the feedback/response in the email as well as serves as a form of recorded documentation, for instance, in the human resources process, an oral warning can be confirmed via email and the email can serve as evidence of the discussion.

Virtual teams meeting face-to-face can be a great advantage to the team to establish relationships, particularly at the start of a project. Once the team has reached standard levels of understanding, email communication can be use more frequently and successfully later to share information and to stay connected across distance (Uber Grosse, 2002:35; Mitić et al., 2017:88).

2.4.2.3 Video conferencing

Computer-based video conferencing is enabled from computer to computer and can house a greater number of real-time uses. It incorporates web conferencing and IM (Hambley et al., 2007:6; Fernández et al., 2014:2). The practice of this kind of conferencing is restricted by computer connectivity, camera, and headset capabilities.

Venue-based video conferencing is facilitated from venue to venue and incorporates a smaller number of real-time uses. The biggest advantage of video conferences is that they offer a superior communication experience to teleconferencing for larger groups, as it mimics face-to-face communication more exactly which can create an effective communication channel that forms trust and assurance (Hoffman, 2002:8,6,10; Hauber, 2008:61; Daim et al., 2012:203; Hills, 2013:103; Fernández, et al., 2014:2).

Challenges in the South African context are bandwidth speed and high data costs, as these affect the quality of video conferences in ratio to the cost of video-conference technology. South Africa is the most expensive in terms of data costs compared with other leading African economies (Chair et al., 2016:3-4, Vermeulen 2017). South Africa is positioned within the top 100 countries globally for broadband speed; however, still remains below international average download speed of 9.10Mbps (McKane, 2018). This means that video conferencing is expensive, and because of poor internet speeds, is not able to facilitate virtual face-to-face communication due to lags or breaks in transmission. For this reason, it is key that the challenge of bandwidth is addressed by the organisations.

2.4.2.4 Instant messaging (IM)

As mentioned above (see Section 2.3.2.3), Instant Messaging (IM) is an online chat platform that offers instant, casual, and personal one-on-one and group communication. Instant messaging is a communication tool/platform that facilitates real-time communication (typically script based). Users are required to install a platform or use a browser-based program on their processor (PC, laptop, smartphone, or tablet) and make a list of individuals or groups to 'chat' with. They are able to see who's "available, idle, busy and offline" when they log in. The simplicity lies in the fact that all one requires to start a discussion, is to "click on a name and begin typing" (Henke, 2007:56; Zhang et al., 2010:44). Although this technology can create opportunities for regular, easy, low-cost, twenty-four-hour communication, it can also be an unreliable and risky variable that could

disrupt effective communication and cooperation (Uber Grosse, 2002:24; Hunt, 2009:69; Zhang et al., 2010:44) when individuals forward unsolicited information without checking its validity or the reliability of its source.

Instant messaging may be suited to teams who are very familiar with one another, with a strong communication foundation, and who require a quick, short, informal communication platform to support daily activities such as coordinating meetings (Zhang, et al., 2010:45). Employees need to be trained for it to be truly effective, for example, individuals should not use IM to highlight sensitive information and have to make extra effort to archive and save the messages for corporate compliance (Hunt, 2009:69).

Further challenges or/and barriers could be that all participants may not understand IM abbreviations, such as TTYL (talk to you later), and participants tend to "talk over one another", for example, multiple individuals responding to one question at the same time. Thus, the chat communication may not flow, which can lead to misunderstandings.

In conclusion, IM is a good means of quick and informal communication within limited time frames; however, the biggest challenge seems to be the over-use of IM out of office hours, leading to employees being available 24/7, which militates against work–life balance.

2.5 Conclusion

Team communication and output can break down as a result of misinterpretations stemming from increased dependence on electronic communications; this in turn can constrain the kind of social communication required within a team for innovation and success (Daim et al., 2012:203). Complications occur when the network goes down, the technology doesn't function, or the team members require more training and practical experience in the use of the electronic tools (Hoffman, 2002:11; Uber Grosse, 2002:24). For example, if one is not familiar with IM, one could send long messages that people don't read or personal/sensitive messages not appropriate for the audience.

Individuals may also lose the opportunities that technology brings if they don't understand the capabilities of the technology, for instance, speaking very loudly during a video conference with the mindset that the other participants are physically distant and thus you need to speak more loudly. Visible cues are available via video conferencing to engage

participants fully. Therefore, training on how to use the technologies and context guideline policies for when to use the technologies are vital in an organisation.

Generally, communication in virtual teams is to some degree less mutually attentive, less sociable, less regular, and requires more work than collocated teams in close proximity with more opportunities for face-to-face communication. In the present day, even though communications technology allows virtual teams to interchange a large range of data, the successful use thereof increases when teams have a strong social foundation, where existing relationships and connections offer motivation and commitment (Kiesler & Cummings, 2002:71; Hambley et al., 2007:6). The choice of communications technology is shaped by the understanding, functionality, and practicality of the selected communications technology (Zaugg & Davies, 2013:228-230). For that reason, it is vital that teams are aware of and understand the benefits and limitations of the selected technology for achieving their desired output.

The researcher's view that once one acknowledges the barriers, one can put practices in place to overcome them that will lead to success, as individuals can sometimes be their own worst constraint.

"There are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect" (Reagan, 2017:1)

Research demonstrates that in terms of communication, face-to-face interaction has a strong influence on collaboration through its effects on social agreements, bonds and group identity (Perra, 2001:68-73; Barrett, 2005:386; De Klerk-Weyer & Le Roux, 2008:147; De Beer & Rossouw, 2012:68; *Business Dictionary*, 2015a). It is also assumed to be one of the most influential media for organising work within co-dependent teams, to the extent that when virtual teams lack opportunities to interact face-to-face, they also lack the simplest and easiest course to collaboration and organisation (Kiesler & Cummings, 2002:65).

The answer seems to be that to have the most effective communication across distance, one has to mimic face-to-face communication in communications technology to create a sense of close proximity. It is clear from the above and other research that technology can accomplish this effect as there are numerous technologies available to members of virtual

teams, for instance, telephone, video and telephone conferencing, chat rooms, and IM, and other virtual reality options (Wadsworth & Blanchard, 2015:387).

If accurate support is in place, namely, effective systems, training, and most essentially trust and mutual objectives/identity, team communication across distance can flourish. However, it is key that psychological safety occur within a team before vulnerable dialogue can be expected to take place, thus team members should not be anxious about receiving criticism or rejection for having opposing views to other members (Daim et al., 2012:204). Ultimately, the role of technology should not be to replace or reduce human participation, but to offer more "flexibility, productivity and efficiency" in the communication (Hoffman, 2002:17).

To succinctly sums up this chapter, it ends with a quote from Thompsen (2000:1),

> "Leading effectively from a distance or with a virtual team is much like operating a camera with a telephoto lens. To secure a clear, focused image of a far-off situation, effective leaders have to adjust their communications and technology."

CHAPTER 3

TRUST AND SHARED IDENTITY IN ORGANISATIONS

"… you trust them because you feel like you can be yourself around them. You can express your values, desires, comforts, and discomforts, and even though they may disagree, they won't judge you, and you will never feel like you're being judged. This is what we all seek, as human beings—this is what we all desire. We want this in our relationships, we want this in our friendships, and frankly, we want it at work too..."

Simon Sinek (Harbinger & Sinek, 2018:1).

3.1 Introduction

As stated in the previous chapter, technology should not substitute or diminish human involvement, but enhance the communication process (Hoffman, 2002:17). This led the researcher to realise that the cohesion of virtual/geographically dispersed teams within an organisation requires special consideration owing to their impact on the communication process in an organisation. As previously stated, communication is the basis on which people initiate and sustain their relationships with other people for the creation and growth of trust, which is vital to reinforce these relationships. In view of this, how do organisations embed the trust, which Simon Sinek refers to above, where individuals can be themselves without judgement and create a unified identity when their team members are geographically dispersed?

Trust in a team can be clarified as a mutual intellectual state characterised by a willing openness to vulnerability, founded on hopes of intent or actions with other team members, where teams will not exploit one another (Webster & Wong, 2008:46; Erez et al., 2013:337). Trust is deliberated as a significant social means that can enable teamwork and empower corresponding social dealings (Erez et al., 2013:337). It is therefore a vital component in the organisational context for teams to be successful in surviving competition. It permits people to validate their choice to contribute and to easily share information that may be vital to the success of teamwork (Robert et al., 2009:242). Interestingly, some scholars believe that simply having embedded trust within a virtual team can avert the physical distance of virtual team members from transforming into psychological distance (Erez & Gati, 2004:595) that creates gaps in the communication processes in the organisation.

Team members who trust one another remain problem centred and encourage more proficient communication and harmonisation, leading to improved quality of joint results, as team members see themselves as jointly accountable for the results they produce. On the other hand, the absence of trust in a team can lead to labelling other team members as the "out-group", preventing team members from developing a shared identity (Adler, 2007:108; Erez et al., 2013:337). Shared or group identity can be described as the extent to which individuals align themselves with a group; this classification is an effect of "category-based information processing", in which individuals classify themselves as affiliates of a "categorical group", resulting in cooperation and trust in their group identification (Thomas & Bostrom, 2008:1; Robert et al., 2009:247; Levely & Bartos, 2018:2-3). Organisations with virtual team members need to create a shared or group identity, in order for individuals to form a positive bias and assign constructive characteristics to members of their own group, resulting in an individual's psychological welfare being positively influenced (Robert et al., 2009:247; Leach et al., 2010:538-539; Grant & Hogg, 2012:538). In simple terms, virtual teams require a shared identity to nurture trust.

In summary, trust is required for optimal cooperation in teams, especially virtual teams, and shared identity fosters trust in teams. The above aspects display, with the literature review that follows, the connection and importance of trust and shared identity in breaching the physical distance that exists among teams and team members and that impacts the communication process and practices in an organisation.

3.2   Trust

"Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships"
Stephen R. Covey (Goodreads.com. 2019:1).

Undeniably, trust is essential to establishing relations amongst strangers in order to grow long-lasting bonds (Alarcon et al., 2016:309). It is therefore core to societal interactions, as many social problems could be resolved when trust is present in a social exchange (Batsaikhan, 2017:369). As trust is a dynamic aspect of human interaction, it can be defined in various ways, such as confidence in the goodness of other individuals and the willingness of an individual to be open to the behaviour and actions of individuals or groups on the basis of the expectancy that the person or group will complete a certain task or

process while in a working relationship (Adler 2007:106-107; Robert et al., 2009:242-244, Clark et al., 2010:177-193).

As fast paced and competitive the global market is, the foundation of successful businesses is good relationships, and at the centre of all relationships is the element of trust (Towers, 2017). Trust impacts performance, especially when there is a great dependency on each other to complete a task within a team, as trust fosters better collaboration and information sharing (Adler, 2007:108; Erez et al., 2013:337) within the team.

3.2.1 The dynamics of trust

Trust is thought of as "the glue of the global workspace", as it is associated with productive outcomes as a result of strong collaboration and also decreases emotive struggles within culturally diverse, virtual/geographically dispersed teams (Erez et al., 2013:337). Ultimately, having trust in a group will forge commitment and positive results, as one would feel safe enough to share information and deliver on commitments centred on achieving the team goal. However, first one needs to determine how to reach this point where one feels sufficiently safe to be vulnerable to share freely; and in the organisational setting how many individuals feel that this risk of vulnerability is worth the results?

3.2.2 Vulnerability and risk in trust

Trusting someone is making yourself vulnerable to another, as the possibility exists that they may not deliver on the agreed or expected deed. We have willingly to accept the possibility that others could wish us ill but have strong faith that they will not take advantage of our vulnerability or willingly hurt us. Reaching this level of trust is based on the individual's perception of the risk of vulnerability (Xu et al., 2007:96; Robert et al., 2009:248-249; PytlikZillig & Kimbrough, 2016:17). While the world is evolving with the advancement of technology, human characteristics such as the dynamics of trust remain the same, and thus twentieth-century authors' views continue to be valid. Some authors feel that because trusting a party means having faith in that party not to act harmfully towards oneself, that development of trust necessitates the condition of risk (Xu et al., 2007:97; Erez et al., 2013:337; PytlikZillig & Kimbrough, 2016:17). Trust increases in importance as soon as insecurity concerning the intentions and upcoming actions exists, especially when one cannot govern and oversee the other parties' actions (Jarvenpaa &

Leidner, 1999:791-792; Erez et al., 2013:337), thus making the risk to trust another higher. This means the higher the individual perceives the risk, the less likely the individual feels safe enough to be open to transparent communication and information sharing, resulting in poor collaboration and performance. This signifies the importance of perceived risk to the positive development of trust.

Perceived risk is different for every circumstance and includes the valuation of likely "losses and gains" rooted in the interaction of the situation (Robert et al., 2009:248-249). Should the level of perceived risk exceed the "level of trust", one is less likely to participate in the association and take the risks to said association (Mayer et al., 1995:726; Robert et al., 2009:248-249). Risk for teams include the valuation of likely team disappointment.

In other words, if a team member feels that the risk of trusting another member/group as a whole is too great, that member is less likely to communicate openly or participate freely and collaborate with the team, as he/she may fear judgement or malevolence, resulting in the team goal not reaching optimal outcomes. So, how does one determine the risk of an association when there are no prior judgements or preconceived notions to use as a basis, because of the ephemeral nature of a team? This is the case with most virtual teams, bearing in mind that the faster trust is established, the faster communication and collaboration happen, resulting in optimal team performance.

3.2.3 The concept of swift trust

When a team is constituted, its main purpose is to attain the team goal of the organisation. As previously mentioned, trust is a vital aspect of how teams perform and attain the team goal. In a virtual team, developing trust over distance is a great challenge as it lacks (as depicted in traditional studies), certain key elements that are said to enable the improvement of trust, for example, mutual customs, frequent face-to-face exchanges, common involvements and an emotionally safe communication environment (Mayer et al., 1995:709-734; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999:792; Erez et al., 2013:338). Rather than focusing on earlier research that questioned whether trust is conceivable and in what manner it can be established through communication in virtual teams, Meyerson et al. (1996:166-195) addressed where trust comes from and how is it upheld within a virtual team through electronic communication. This view is supported by authors like Curnin et al. (2015:30), Dubey et al. (2017:6), and Schilke and Huang (2018:1181). The manner in which Meyerson et al. (1996:166-195) addressed these questions was by developing the

theory of "swift trust" for teams whose lifespan is shaped around a shared goal with a limited time span, as is the case in the majority of virtual/geographically dispersed teams (Meyerson et al., 1996:166-195; Adler, 2007:107).

Swift trust progresses as a result of the variety of team individuals, their limited history in working as a team, and the complexity and interdependent nature of these teams (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999:791; Adler, 2007:108). In the notion of swift trust, clear role division between team members who have specific fields is assumed. The theory elaborates that owing to tight deadlines, there may not be sufficient time for building trust and relationships, and this hampers the capability of team members to cultivate expectations of their team members, usually built on direct information through numerous regular interactions (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999:791; Curnin et al., 2015:30-31; Schilke & Huang, 2018:1183). Different aspects of swift trust specifically applicable to virtual teams are discussed below, such as category-based trust and knowledge-based trust.

3.2.3.1 Category-based trust and its relation to swift trust

Similar to the manner in which team members in virtual teams build swift trust using category-driven information processing, category-based trust is founded on traditional or "identity-based" typecasts of team members, where the categories may be based on earlier long-term experiences with related groups, for example, race and gender categories or ad hoc categories like clothing type or random assignments to teams (Robert et al., 2009:247).

In "category processing", people are seen as affiliates of a "category" instead of individuals, allowing team members to behave in keeping with common values and practices related to said category, for example, if gender is used as a category and women are deemed responsible and sensible, team members will automatically associate these attributes with female team members, thus impacting the formation of "swift trust" (Jarvenpaa & Leidner 1999:791; Robert et al., 2009:247). Meyerson et al. (1996:166-195) further maintain that the absence of subjective information, together with the necessity to participate in trusting actions to achieve their tasks, directs individuals to practise "category-driven information processing" as a means to cope with matters of psychological and emotional well-being, namely, vulnerability, doubt, risk and expectations (Meyerson et al., 1996:166-195; Robert et al., 2009:246).

Studies by Robert et al. (2009:241-279) further elaborate that an individual's personal outlook towards trust and the overall trust linked with the category classification to which team members have been allocated are used to create the preliminary "swift trust" decision; however, as interactions increase, this swift trust transforms into a knowledge-based trust (Robert et al., 2009:241-279). Ultimately, the faster trust is established, the faster collaboration and communication can become effective and team members work together towards the team goal. Swift trust, therefore, is vital for virtual teams to communicate successfully.

3.2.3.2 The concept of knowledge-based trust

For initial trust to be established as quickly as possible and remain sustainable for as long as the team is required, it is important that the initial swift trust progresses into knowledge-based trust. "Knowledge-based trust" is founded on the valuation of actions and therefore it is measured after individuals have been subjected to historical actions of prospective team members, whereas "swift trust" is shaped aligned to preceding interactions based on previous general category experience (Robert et al., 2009:241-279).

Furthermore, Mayer et al. (1995:709-734) reason trust remains a person's opinions of another's trustworthiness, based on that person's perceived "ability, integrity and benevolence". Once adequate information is gathered of another's behaviour to evaluate his or her "trustworthiness", swift trust evolves into "knowledge-based trust", based on observed "ability, integrity, and benevolence", as these experiences are the most recent related to the relationship (Robert et al., 2009:269-270). Integrity is vital to knowledge-based trust as it advocates the span in which the "trustee's" behaviour is expected to match his or her advocated intents. Integrity is classified as the observance of expected, conventional values. Ability comprises the task-related skills that allow a person to be deemed capable in a particular area. Ability is vital to knowledge-based trust, as the "trustor" requires assurance that the "trustee" is adept at carrying out the job entrusted to him/her. Benevolence is the extent to which an individual is believed to feel interpersonal care and concern for others, and to be willing to do "good", aside from an egocentric profit motive. Compassion is vital to knowledge-based trust as it advocates that the "trustee" ensures a connection to the "trustor", besides the current circumstances during which trust is deliberated (Mayer et al. 1995:709-734; Piccoli & Ives, 2003:365-395; Thomas & Bostrom, 2008:2; Robert et al., 2009:247-248).

What this means is, when an individual experiences a colleague as having constructive "ability, integrity and benevolence", there is a rise in trust in the colleague, which increases the possibility of taking a risk with that colleague, leading to more efficient communication, closer collaboration and improved teamwork (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001:450- 467; Webster & Wong, 2008:46). This trust is especially crucial for virtual teams, who have limited spontaneous face-to-face interactions, to become cohesive and contribute to a shared identity resulting in a more effective and efficient team.

3.2.4   The link between trust and shared identity

Trust can similarly impact the progression of cultural acumen, as existence of trust within a team makes questioning other team members easier regarding their customs, ethnic beliefs, and standards. In contrast, in the absence of team trust, preconceived prejudices in interpreting members' behaviours can result in misinterpretations and an unwillingness to learn about other cultures and adjust behaviours to suit the whole team accordingly (Erez et al., 2013:337). These misinterpretations and an unwillingness to learn and adjust behaviours further impact the development of shared identity, as they separate individuals psychologically with an "out group" or divided mentality. Therefore, members of virtual teams who do not share a form of identity, in whatever category or based on previous knowledge, will not easily trust one another, and this impacts their willingness to share information and ideas freely, resulting in poor collaboration and overall ineffective team performance.

Earlier studies have revealed that people are more likely to trust other people that they view as similar to themselves or with whom they have a shared identity, that is, an "in group". Thus, when a person views a team member as similar, and with a lack of information regarding that team member's previous behaviour, this person may reveal a positive prejudice that may beneficially impact trust (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999:793; Webster & Wong, 2008:46; Robert et al., 2009:247), leading to optimal communication and collaboration in teams.

In the context of these organisations, where teams are geographically dispersed, the lack of face-to-face communication and the dependence on various communications technologies present a huge challenge to managers and team members alike. These challenges include looking for innovative ways to simplify communication with distant team members as well as building connections to reduce the "psychological distance" among

team members. Trust is thus critical to preventing "geographical distance" from migrating to "psychological distance" which could break down effective communication and collaboration. This is facilitated by the development of shared identity (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999:793-794; Webster & Wong, 2008:46).

3.3 Shared identity

"The challenge for corporations, if offices were to become obsolete, is twofold; how will they be able to retain their distinct cultures and how will they be able to ensure that all employees, wherever they work from, share a united identity and vision?"

Noreena Hertz (Hertz, 2017:1).

As noted above, trust is core for virtual team members to communicate and collaborate effectively, and the biggest facilitator of trust is a sense of shared identity – connecting with someone you feel is similar to you makes it easier to trust them.

3.3.1 The dynamics of shared identity

As previously established, in the ever-evolving technological world we live in, globalisation has become the norm, leading most organisations to implement virtual teams to remain competitive. This has also become a trend in South Africa (Nienaber & Barnard, 2015:445). Even though globalisation has become part of our everyday existence, whether it is buying, selling, or just communicating across the borders of our continent, it has an effect on identity. It may lead to psychological strain between local and global cultures in relation to how individuals see themselves relative to the extended social environment of the global community (Erez & Gati, 2004:593). This in turn impacts organisations as who individuals identify with, are the ones they are more likely to establish trust with, sharing and collaborating freely without fear of judgement.

Historically, forming mutual or shared identity, usually grows with "time and by means of face-to-face interaction". For this reason, virtual/geographically dispersed team members have a considerably tougher job when developing mutual or shared identity because of limited or no face-to-face access to one another and with only facilitated communication via technology (Bjørn & Ngwenyama, 2009:228). But what does shared identity mean and why it is important in virtual teams?

3.3.2 The concept of shared identity

To reiterate the concept of identity stated in Section1.6.4, it can be defined as the essence of one's individuality, self-recognition, and existence overall, as it can direct how an individual exists in this world. Therefore, critical in building and sustaining relationships in these organisations is determining where an individual's identity fits into the virtual team identity.

Shared Identity is a developing, vigorous component of a team. A robust shared identity among team members can be linked to a reduction in conflict, predominantly relational conflict (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005:292). Individuals who identify closely with their teams are inclined to better performance, higher trust, cooperation, confidence, and personal satisfaction (Webster & Wong, 2008:43-44). If the environment can facilitate regular spontaneous encounters for both societal and work-related events, this would favour the development of shared identity and decrease the threat of communication failures (Bjørn & Ngwenyama, 2009:228). When there is a significant shared identity, team members tend to be more loyal, trusting, and concerned regarding the promotion of the team's welfare; thus, it can be argued that a shared identity can form a "psychological tie" among geographically dispersed team members that assists in bridging "the physical and contextual distance" that divides them (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005:293).

3.3.3 Social identity and social categorisation

Tajfel and Turner (1986:7-24) created the "social identity and social categorization theories", which advise that people reduce uncertainty and promote self-enrichment by grouping their teammates based on comparative likeness to themselves. They form "in groups", comprising people similar to themselves, while "out groups" are those they perceive as dissimilar to, or different from, themselves (Lewis & Sherman, 2003:262-276; Hinds & Mortensen, 2005:292; Webster & Wong, 2008:43-44). According to social identity theory, individuals are motivated by "uncertainty reduction". Since individuals' self-worth increases as part of the group membership, they are motivated to give their "in group" members the benefit of the doubt and position them in a strong positive light to uphold their self-identity (Lewis & Sherman, 2003:262-276). Furthermore, team members of co-located teams are more inclined to identify with their team members than team members of virtual/geographically dispersed teams, because co-located team members can interact more easily and spontaneously, leading to an increase in awareness as a result of

observing "static cues" like dress code and "dynamic cues" like body language when they interact face-to-face, assisting in "uncertainty reduction". In comparison, virtual/geographically dispersed teams are dependent on computer-mediated technologies and have fewer cues about their team members (Webster & Wong, 2008:43-44).

Research also has shown that team members of virtual/geographically dispersed teams are more inclined towards tough personality designations about remote team members as a result of a lack of "situational information" or awareness to assist them to understand and interpret their remote team members' behaviours and activities (Cramton, 2002: 191–212). From this one can deduce that team members need to make a concerted effort to be more aware or mindful of their distant team members in order to give them the benefit of the doubt.

3.3.4 The link between shared identity and trust

When there is a strong shared identity present in teams, virtual/geographically dispersed team members may possess higher trust in their team members and be more inclined to discuss issues that arise (Hinds & Bailey, 2003:615-632). A strong shared identity among dispersed sites can decrease mistrust, with the potential to ease the course of information as team members are more concerned about sustaining their solid group ties and supporting the team's well-being (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005:293). Consequently, the research is inclined towards strong shared identity in teams, resulting in "perceived proximity" or a feeling of closeness, and this is achieved through the balance of the correct regularity, complexity and interactivity of communication (Wilson et al., 2008:983).

3.4 Conclusion

Taking the above into consideration, strategies pertaining to trust necessitate inclusion of these dynamic aspects of trust. At the preliminary phases of a work association, trust is based on swift trust, such as category-based information processing of another's features as there is inadequate information regarding the individual's behaviour. Further along in the work association, the information of a team member's earlier behaviour forms a vital aspect in shaping knowledge-based trust.

For this reason, the "integrity, ability and benevolence" of team members should be highlighted, and management should focus on providing opportunities for individuals to have personal dealings with other team members to permit healthier appreciation and understanding of one another. Individuals increase performance, teamwork, trust, confidence, and individual fulfilment once they identify better with their teams. Therefore, management should focus on endorsing team identification (Webster & Wong, 2008:41-62; Robert et al., 2009:268-269).

CHAPTER 4

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> Research is a discerning pursuit of the truth. Those who do research are looking for
> answers (Hair et al., 2011:3)

4.1   Introduction

Kothari (2004:1) defines research in general terms as a "search for knowledge", using "scientific and systematic" methods to search for relevant data on a specific subject. Hair et al. (2011:23) define general business research as a "truth-seeking" process responsible for "gathering, analysing, interpreting, and reporting" data in order for business decision makers to be able to make better informed and effective decisions. In pursuit of trustworthy knowledge, as indicated above, this chapter highlights the research design and methodology employed in this research study.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:12), research methodology is the universal method taken by the researcher in researching the occurrence. Research methodology can also be defined as a means to resolve the research problem methodically; in other words, a discipline of studying in what way research is completed scientifically, the many phases that are usually used by a researcher, as well as the reasons for them (Kothari, 2004:8).

The starting point for this research process was the review of existing research done in Company A as a foundation for the research problem and research question (see Section 1.2 and below in Sections 4.5.1.1.1 and 4.5.1.1.2). The research then progressed to the next phase of specific collection or sampling of data through a purposive sampling method (Crossman 2020: 1; Palinkas et al., 2015:2; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:166). The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative research methods to document and better understand the communication practices at these two organisations in South Africa. However, to support the quantitative questionnaire, a qualitative paradigm was used to construct a profile of the participants' expertise in business communication practices, and to generate insight into and in-depth knowledge of the participants' perceptions of business communication, trust and shared identity in geographically dispersed teams. Figure 4.1 presents the research process for this research study. The researcher used a case study approach and the outline of the research design and methodology for the case

study follows. Figure 4.1: Adapted from original diagram based on the discussion of case study designs in Yin and Robert (Goodrick, 2014:3).

PRIMARY PHASE

- Research in 2014: Climate online survey done with employees called the Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB) in Company A.
- Research in 2015: Story Collector online survey exercise done using the Influencer model in Company A.

SECONDARY PHASE

- Quantitative Questionnaires with:
  o Closed-ended yes/no questions and
  o rating questions.
- Qualitative Questionnaires with:
  o open-ended questions
- Analyse results:
  o a description of the similarities and differences found between cases to generate a holistic view of how virtual teams influence business communications
  o an interpretation of the implications of those similarities and differences across cases to guide further recommendations.

ONE
Clarify the key evaluation questions and the purpose of the evaluation

TWO
Identify initial communication challenges or successes in the organisation

THREE
Define the type of cases that will be included and how the case study process will be conducted

FOUR
Define how evidence will be collected, analysed and synthesized within and across organisations/cases and conduct the study

FIVE
Consider and test alternative explanations for outcomes.

SIX
Report findings

Figure 4.1: Research Design

4.2   Research design

Various researchers (Mouton, 2001:55-65; Kothari, 2004:31) define a research design as a design or blueprint for the manner the researcher plans to conduct the research. The researcher focuses on the end product, namely, the type of study planned, and type of results required. There are numerous methods of research and this study was conducted using a multifaceted approach (Kothari, 2004:2-4) as the most appropriate design to achieve the envisaged aim as follows:

4.2.1   Descriptive research

Descriptive research includes "surveys and fact-finding" (Kothari, 2004:2) investigations of various kinds. The core purpose of this research is to describe the situation as it is at present; looking for the "what is" situation, highlighting possible additional knowledge or a fresh approach to a subject (Hale, 2018). The key reason for using this method was that the researcher had no control over the variables and only reported what had happened and sought to measure facts.

4.2.2   Empirical research

Empirical research relies on involvement or observation alone; it is data based, where the researcher deduces conclusions which can be substantiated by observation or experiment (Flick, 2009:233-234; Emerald Publishing, 2019). The key reason for using this method was that the researcher has personal experience in working at both Company A and B over a long time. The researcher used the experience of working within these organisations and observing their communication channels to frame the questions in the survey.

4.2.3   Ethnographic research

As indicated briefly in the introductory chapter (see Section 1.5.1), an additional research approach incorporated in this study is a combination of traditional and virtual ethnographic research, which is the observation of a specific behaviour in a society (Mouton, 2001:279). In this case the researcher observed the behaviour patterns within virtual team communication in two organisations over a five-year period, with a focus on Company A to compare to Company B to establish consistencies or inconsistencies in results from a

South African context. This was due to the researcher's personal experience with the daily activities of the research matter, thus making the traditional ethnographical research approach appropriate (Sangasubana, 2011:567). The wide-ranging approach of traditional ethnography is where "observation and participation" are intertwined with additional procedures, leading to a more flexible approach (Flick, 2009:233-234). Additionally, virtual ethnography was incorporated to observe and participate in comparing the actual face-to-face communication with the virtual (online) communication to determine how people say they communicate virtually or face-to-face corresponds with how they actually communicate (Flick, 2009:272). This form of research was incorporated as a secondary approach to get a better understanding of the softer issues, namely, trust and shared identity, related to communication in virtual/geographically dispersed teams comparing the face-to-face and virtual interaction process (Spotless, 2013).

4.2.4   Quantitative and qualitative research

The research study included a quantitative research method to investigate communication practices at two organisations with a focus on Company A then compared to Company B in order to establish consistencies or inconsistencies in results from a South African context. A simplified definition of quantitative research is based on the "counts and measures" of things; it is most appropriately used in research that can be stated in terms of quantity/amount (Berg, 2001:3; Kothari, 2004:3). The quantitative approach was incorporated in the form of Likert scale questions that the researcher included in the questionnaire issued to the respondents and that could be measured in terms of responses. Qualitative research refers to research regarding a phenomenon, namely, the "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of activities or actions". Qualitative research is most appropriately used to determine the fundamental "motives and desires" in human behaviour (Berg, 2001:3; Kothari, 2004:3). The qualitative approach was used to draw up a profile of the participants' experience in business communication practices within a virtual/geographically dispersed environment in organisations in South Africa through observation of behaviours and open-ended questions that the researcher included in the questionnaire issued to the respondents.

4.2.5   Case study

Berg (2001:225; 2004:251) explains the use of the case study method as a systematic collection of sufficient data regarding a specific occurrence, for the simple purpose of

helping the researcher to comprehend how the phenomenon occurs. This study refers to the influence of virtual teams on business communication practices in two organisations in South Africa with a focus on Company A then compared to Company B in order to establish consistencies or inconsistencies in results from a South African context. To overcome some researchers' criticism of case studies, that, "one cannot generalize from a single case, therefore the single case study cannot contribute to scientific development" (Flyvbjerg, 2006:219), the researcher used a comparative case study method to determine if similar outcomes were achieved in a different company with a similar problem. "Comparative case studies involve the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal" (Goodrick, 2014:1).

In this study, the researcher used the case study to gather data primarily by means of quantitative closed-ended questions, assisted by a qualitative method (open-ended questions). Questionnaires were used to mobilise quantified information that served the purpose of an in-depth investigation into the current problem.

4.3   Demarcation/delimitation of study

In order to address the challenges in this research study, the aim of this study was to understand the influence of virtual teams on business communication practices and barriers or challenges with members based in multiple locations (Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal) within two organisations in South Africa with a focus on Company A then compared to Company B in order to establish consistencies or inconsistencies in results from a South African context. The study was done in a division of Company A, a financial organisation in South Africa (Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal) with a ±300 employee complement after a merger in 2010; the comparative component of the study was a two-year study (from 2016) of Company B, a non-profit organisation (Western Cape and Gauteng) with an overall ±7 employee complement at the time of the study.

4.4   Research methodologies/processes

In order to focus more on the research problem as stated in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.2) and further defined in the literature reviews in Chapter 2 and 3, the ensuing research process was followed.

4.4.1 Sampling

Strydom (2005:193) defines sampling as any portion of a population or universe as representative of that population or universe. The purposive method of sampling or judgement sampling was used in this case study as the researcher used their own judgement based on experience of working with and observing the population and purposely selected the divisions in these organisations. This was done with the rationale, to address the communication challenges identified within these organisations that emerged from the base research done in Company A (Crossman 2020: 1; Palinkas et al: 2015:2; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:166). The sampling of respondents for the research process consisted of staff members working at the organisations, either in the Western Cape, Gauteng or KwaZulu-Natal in both Company A and B in South Africa. The sample was purposely selected, based on the primary phase research available from Company A, the researcher took the IT and generic services divisions of a financial services organisation in Company A as the population. Consequently, based on the response in locations by Company A, the researcher included a company that had similar geographical dispersion in order to do a comparative analysis but contrasting structures in terms of size and operating methods. Therefore, Company B, a small non-profit organisation was selected, and the entire population was used due their small numbers of employees.

Table 4.1 explains the distribution of employees over the geographical dispersion in South Africa.

Table 4.1 Population

Population	
Company A	Company B
45% Western Cape 45% Gauteng 10% KwaZulu-Natal	43% Western Cape 57% Gauteng 0% KwaZulu-Natal

The aim was to sample at least 10% of the population.
- In Company A, at the time of survey, the population was 313, and 50 responses were received, making the response rate ±16%, achieving more than the minimum requirement.
- In Company B, at the time of survey, the population was 7, and 7 responses were received, making the response rate 100%.

The sampling of Company A and Company B represents an adequate portion of the population of both companies for the research study data to be reliable and valid.

4.4.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is a respectable tool that can be used for finding evidence and ascertaining opinions on a topic. It is used as a strong quantitative measure as it can create a universal meaning within structured questions; however, it has a number of advantages and disadvantages in comparison with other evaluation tools (Olsen, 2012: 9-10).

- Respondents: Respondents can take their time to contemplate their replies carefully without interference or coercion from, for example, an interviewer.
- Cost: Depending on the methods, the cost involved is relatively low as it allows for large numbers of people to be reached simultaneously.
- Uniformity: As each respondent receives the same questions, with closed-ended questions, responses are uniform, which helps in understanding large numbers of respondents.
- Missing personal touch: There is no one present to explain something should there be uncertainty about any of the questions.
- Questionnaires: Questionnaires designed so that answers to questions are scored lead to fruitful statistical reports as the scores can be calculated and give a general measure of the outlook and beliefs of the respondents.
- Anonymity: It is generally claimed that anonymity escalates response rates and can increase the possibility that responses revealed are honestly held opinions (Brace, 2008:29-33; Olsen, 2012:11).

Online surveys rather than paper-based ones reach a larger geographically dispersed audience in a shorter time, are more cost effective and more likely to get a higher response rate. They can, however, serve as a barrier to those not technologically knowledgeable. To accommodate this barrier in this research process, both online and paper-based questionnaires were available to participants. The survey was emailed via a tool called SurveyMonkey®, an online survey program, by means of a link that participants could access. The researcher also included a PDF version of the questionnaire for participants who could not access the online survey (see Appendix D). The questions were derived from the existing research from Company A as a guide to the research problem, using existing literature reviews as a guide to formulate the questions. The questionnaires were distributed to Company A after ethical clearance was received from the researcher's university on 27 February 2018, with a closing date of 30 March 2018, providing participants with approximately one month to respond. There were three follow-up reminder emails sent and responses were received from 28 February 2018, with the last response arriving on 29 March 2018. The questionnaire was distributed after the researcher received approval from the organisation's management as a comparative body

in the case study. In terms of Company B, the questionnaires were distributed on 24 September 2018 with a closing date of 5 October 2018, extended owing to poor response to the end of December 2018, providing participants with approximately three months to respond; responses were received from 28 September 2018, with the last response arriving on 27 December 2018. The questionnaires were distributed after the researcher received approval from both organisations' management for the case study.

4.4.2.1 Analysis of questionnaire

As stated above, many factors influenced the evaluation of questions incorporated in the questionnaire used in this comparative study in the secondary phase of this research process. The questionnaire itself was divided into three sections: Section A, B, and C (see Appendix D) and is discussed below.

4.4.2.1.1 Section A – Geographic location

This section consisted of one question and was not included in the reliability score of the survey. The reason for requesting the information was to determine if physical geographic dispersion is a barrier, as discussed in the literature in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.3), to effective communication (Uber Grosse, 2002:22-23; Daim et al., 2012:203; Hills, 2013:99-103).

4.4.2.1.2 Section B – Communication and Technology

This section consisted of 12 mixed, open-ended and Likert scale questions. Seven of the questions were included in the reliability score of the survey. Most of the qualitative data was derived from this section. The reason for requesting the information, as stated in the introductory chapter (see Section 1.2), was to determine business communication practices, identify corporate communication challenges, establish communications technologies within these organisations, how they are used, and how they affect business communication practices in virtual teams.

4.4.2.1.3 Section C – Trust and Shared Identity

This section consisted of five Likert scale questions. The reason for requesting the information, as stated in the introductory chapter (see Section 1.2), was to determine how

these organisations enhance trust among colleagues in virtual teams and how these organisations create a feeling of closeness, namely, a shared identity in virtual teams which feeds into a feeling of camaraderie as explained in the Chapter 3 (see Section 3.1).

4.4.3 Ethical considerations

As stated in the introductory chapter (see Section 1.7), researchers have an ethical obligation to their participants to safeguard their rights, confidentiality, and well-being (Berg, 2004:43; Gajjar, 2013:10; Roberts, 2015:314). The researcher's ethical considerations abided by standard norms of what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour within the research process (Center for innovation in Research and Teaching 2019).

For this reason, a permission agreement served as a cover letter to the questionnaire and included the following information (see Appendix D):
- The background to and objectives of the study.
- The objectives of the questionnaire and what would happen to the data.
- The questionnaire was voluntary with no coercion.
- Participants could extract themselves from the research at any time.
- Participants were not obliged to answer all the questions and could omit questions they were uncomfortable answering.
- Participants' personal data was confidential and if the responses were published, they would not be identifiable as theirs.

The researcher provided a research proposal with an overview of the research methodology and outcomes to the faculty research ethics committee at the researcher's registered university. The proposal also included approval (see Appendices A & B) from both organisations studied, the draft questionnaire to be used to collect data, as well as the consent form, as mentioned above, provided to respondents. These factors were reviewed, and approval was granted from the research ethics committee (see Appendix C).

4.5 Data collection

4.5.1 Primary phase

Existing research was used as the driving force behind the research problem in this research study of how virtual teams influence business communication in these organisations in South Africa.

4.5.1.1 Company A

4.5.1.1.1 Organisational Human Factor Benchmark

An online survey (April 2014) was sent to all employees in the IT and generic services division by an external facilitator to ensure anonymity. This was then analysed by the external facilitator using the Organisational Human Factor Benchmark (OHFB) diagnostic suite to generate personal reports sent to each individual, as well as an organisational report sent to management. The organisational report was then further analysed by an internal organisational development specialist, using Microsoft Excel. Microsoft PowerPoint was used to present the final findings. The purpose of the OHFB survey was to promote the work-related well-being of every employee in the organisation. It was also used to understand the current organisational climate and how the workplace was experienced by employees. As stated in the introductory chapter (see Section 1.2), one of the results that emerged from this survey showed that on average only 29% of employees (Ekkerd, 2014:8), across all ages, felt positive about communication in this financial organisation after the merger.

4.5.1.1.2 Story collector process

Later an online survey (May 2015) was sent to all employees in the IT and generic services division by an external facilitator to ensure anonymity. This was then reviewed to remove any references to names (to ensure anonymity) and sent to the management team of the IT division (± 300 questionnaires were collected). Each management member read through all 300 questionnaires. Then, collectively aided by an external facilitator, these were used to create themes that led to the creation of five vital behaviours to address the issues in the themes. The way the model works is to investigate and modify, where possible, one's "motivation and ability across personal, social, and structural aspects" (Meier, 2009) by identifying vital behaviours to adopt in crucial moments (Grenny et al., 2013:28-35). The biggest concerns emerging from this process were engagement, communication, and respect among employees in the organisation.

4.5.1.2 Company B

Company B is a new established national organisation struggling with business communication across multiple locations. The company does not have any existing

research available to contribute as a base to this case study and was used as a contrasting organisation to Company A in order to compare results from the questionnaires. The company is in the process of drafting and establishing policies and procedures to assist with this issue. The research findings and recommendations can assist greatly with this process where applicable in future.

4.5.2 Secondary phase

4.5.2.1 Questionnaires

The researcher analysed the questionnaires during phase two as follows:

- The quantitative raw data provided by the questionnaire was processed and analysed by the researcher using the Microsoft Excel computer program to provide a statistical analysis. It is a common tool used to analyse data and one the researcher is proficient in, ensuring easier analysis in minimal time.
- The qualitative raw data provided by the questionnaire was processed and analysed by the researcher using the Microsoft Excel computer program to determine themes.

4.6 Data analysis

4.6.1 Reliability of the data

Reliability can be described as the degree to which "measurement of a phenomenon" delivers "stable and consistent" outcomes and is juxtaposed with replication; in other words, a replication measurement made "under constant conditions" should provide the same outcome (Taherdoost, 2016:33-34). Reliability of a mixed-methods research approach can be established through triangulation; this is the "use of multiple theories, data sources, methods or investigators" in a research study to add to the quality and consistency of the data (Golafshani, 2003:603; Heale & Forbes, 2013:98). This therefore proves the data of this study reliable, owing to the mixed methods approach the researcher used for this study.

4.6.2 Validity of the data

Validity is an explanation of how soundly the "collected data" covers the actual scope of the study, namely, does it measure what was planned to be measured, did the researcher observe what was expected to be observed (Flick, 2009:387; Taherdoost, 2016:28). This study assumed content validity. Content validity can be defined as the extent to which

aspects of a tool reflect the "content universe" against which the tool will be "generalised", and it involves assessment of a survey tool to certify that it contains all the aspects that are vital, and removes unwanted aspects to a specific "construct domain" (Taherdoost, 2016:30). The accepted method to determine content validity comprises literature reviews, followed by assessment by expert adjudicators or panels (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:124-125; Taherdoost, 2016:30). In this study, the research proposal submitted by the researcher included a literature review as well as the draft questionnaire. This was reviewed and finally approved by the research supervisor and an ethics committee to establish content validity through an ethical clearance letter (see Appendix C). The construct validity of the data was further determined by comparing the two sample groups (Company A and B) with an expectation to distinguish from each other, then compared with and proven to support the existing literature.

4.7   Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the research methodology and procedures employed in this research study. The chapter covered contextual background, data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Additionally, it included the factors that influenced the development of the questionnaire.

In conducting the research, the researcher incorporated multiple approaches of research to deliver an all-inclusive understanding of the research question, including descriptive research, empirical research, traditional and virtual ethnographic research, and a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research. The core of the study, however, was a case study of a financial organisation in South Africa, then compared to a contrasting organisation; smaller in size and opposite in operating structure, observed over a five-year period from 2015–2019.

Although some critics contend mixed-methods research is not the best route as it is time consuming and lengthy, the researcher feels that the two methods supported each other instead of overshadowing and discounting each other, consequently producing quality and all-inclusive data which added significant value to this study.

The next two chapters, Chapter 5 and 6, provide a detailed breakdown, comparison and analysis of the survey conducted within these two organisations in South Africa with

conclusions and recommendations regarding the study covered in the final chapter, Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

"Data are just summaries of thousands of stories – tell a few of those stories to help make the data meaningful" (Heath 2014:1).

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presents the analysis of the data collected for this study by means of quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings were employed in an endeavour to respond to the main research question (see Section 1.2). The researcher offers a synopsis of communication practices in virtual teams at the two organisations studied in South Africa in order to provide context to the audience of the data analysis and the interpretation thereof, to give meaning to the data by telling the 'story'.

The foundation of any research story requires a good literature review, which was conducted on communication practices and the influence of trust and shared identity in virtual teams (see Chapter 2 and 3). Evident from the literature review was that there was limited research on virtual teams in the South African context. The respondents in two organisations provided reliable data by means of questionnaires of their understanding and views regarding practices and challenges their organisations face: providing valuable information within the South African context.

5.2   Data analysis and interpretation

The main purpose of this research and interpretation is to produce conclusions that are based on respondents' experiences of and opinions on the communication practices in their organisations within their virtual teams, taking trust and shared identity into consideration to provide supportive guidelines for strategic planning for the future.

As clarified in the previous chapter, the research methodology of this study consisted of a multifaceted approach that included both quantitative and qualitative methods. A questionnaire was distributed to employees of the studied organisations, generating quality and all-inclusive data which added significant value to the findings of the survey.

To best tell the 'story' with the factual data provided by the findings, the researcher used figures and tables as graphical representation.

5.2.1 Analysis of quantitative data

Each individual participant was sent a link to an online survey with an attached hard copy of the survey to complete. The request via email included a cover letter (Appendix D) that advised the participants that they would not be identified as individuals and that all data would be aggregated, for this reason.

5.2.1.1 Reliability and validity

Before analysing the data, the researcher established the reliability and validity of the data as discussed in Chapter 4 (see Section 4.6.1). Since the researcher used a multifaceted research approach, reliability and validity were established through triangulation, which is the "use of multiple theories, data sources, methods or investigators" in a research study to add to the quality and consistency of the data (Golafshani, 2003:603; Heale & Forbes, 2013:98). The reliability was established through triangulation and reflected consistent themes in the respondents' answers in both organisations; this added to the confirmation of the reliability of the data for the researcher. The construct validity of the data was further determined by comparing the two sample groups (Company A and B) with an expectation to distinguish from each other, then compared with and proven to support the existing literature and the content validity through literature reviews and an expert panel review in the form of the researcher's university research ethics committee, where ethics clearance was provided to establish content validity (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:124-125; Taherdoost, 2016:30).

5.2.1.2 Presentation of results

The results in the quantitative section of the questionnaire are presented in visual format via graphs, in percentages with two decimal points, with the reasoning that this will enable the reader to understand the respondents' opinions and justifications more easily. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to analyse the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire that provided descriptive statistics; therefore, the results are presented in an interpretative manner. Ultimately, the questionnaire aimed at gathering data to

determine the existing communication practices in virtual teams within these organisations.

5.2.2 Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data

The researcher focused on the data collected through qualitative means, that is, through open-ended questions and comments offered by the respondents, and clustered them into themes to determine the existing communication practices in virtual teams within these organisations and offer recommendations based on the opinions and experiences of the respondents, in addition to existing literature.

5.3 Geographic dispersion

Section A, the geographic location was used to determine if geographic dispersion was a barrier in communication practices within virtual teams in these South African organisations.
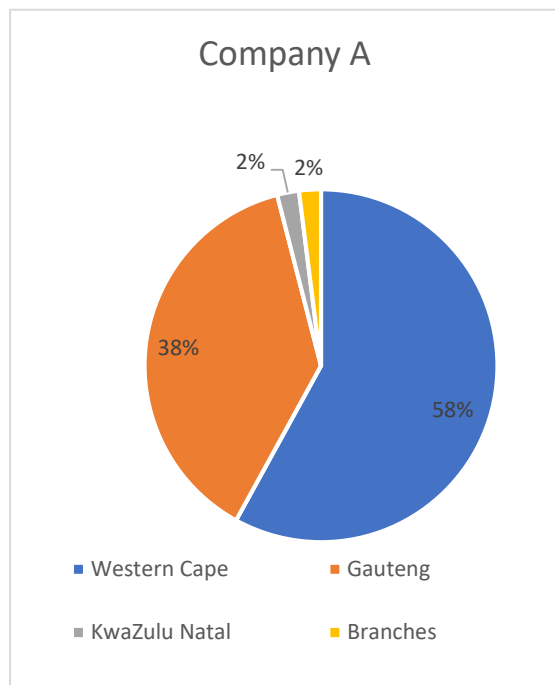
5.3.1 Geographical location

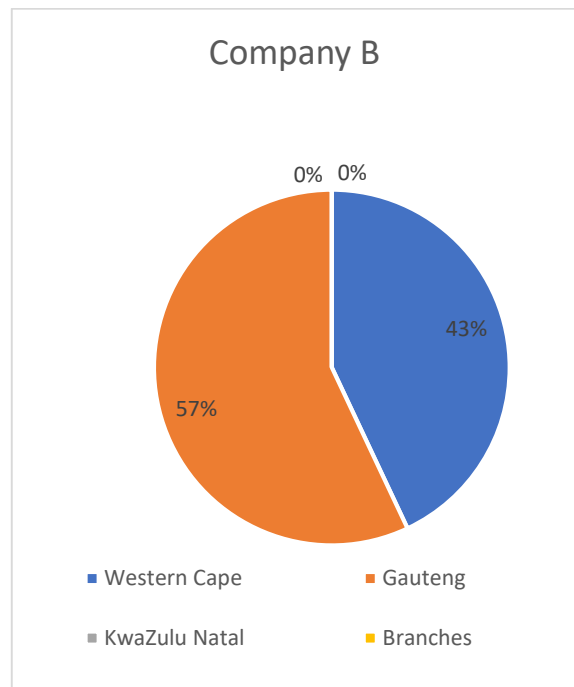| Figure 5.1: Company A – Geographical Location	Figure 5.2: Company B – Geographical Location

The researcher categorised location according to the organisations' employee distribution to display the core characteristic of virtual teams, that is, geographical dispersion, and the results were as follows. Both Company A and B were largely situated in the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces with a distribution as follows: respondents in the Western Cape for Company A constituted 58% and 43% for Company B. The distribution for Gauteng was 38% in Company A; this was lower than the Western Cape respondents of 57% for Company B. Company A had 2% of respondents in KwaZulu-Natal and 2% of respondents in branches. Company B had no respondents currently in KwaZulu-Natal. The biggest contention, as observed by the researcher over the five-year period of research within these provinces for these organisations, has been financial discrepancies, which is supported by surveys done within South Africa as noted in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4), where KwaZulu-Natal, followed by Western Cape employees, were paid less for the same jobs than Gauteng employees in 2018 and 2019; this affects the communication between the provinces owing to these discrepancies, causing trust issues and individuals not being open with sharing information or collaborating with someone who is doing the same job as they are and earning more money.

5.4 Communication and technology

Communication and Technology, in Section B of the questionnaire, consisted of questions to identify the business communication practices, corporate communication challenges and communications technologies employed within these South African organisations.

5.4.1 Audience of communication

When determining the core audience for the various communication channels used in the organisations, the data reflected that both organisations have similar practices.

5.4.1.1   With whom do you mostly communicate face-to-face?
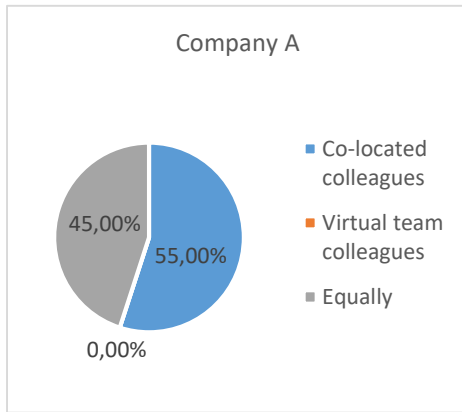
Figure 5.3: Company A – Face-to-face
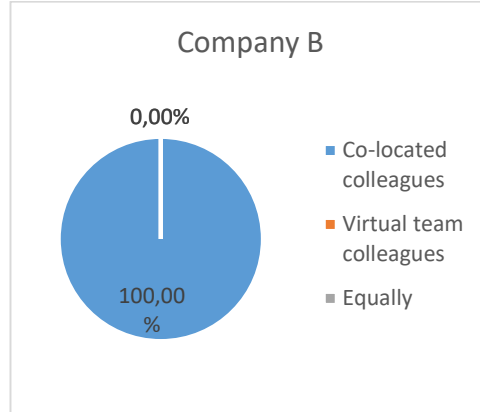
Figure 5.4: Company B – Face-to-face

As reflected above in Figures 5.3 and 5.4, face-to-face communication is predominantly used with co-located team members in both organisations; this is due to ease of access to one another and no or little cost; they can see one another through close proximity. In Company B, respondents unanimously use face-to-face communication with co-located team members, while Company A had a more mixed view; this is because Company A is a larger organisation with more funding to allow for more face-to-face meetings with virtual team members through flights between locations than Company B, a non-profit organisation. Face-to-face communication will always be the most efficient form of communication, as parties have direct links to more sources of communication: body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, and immediate feedback, as detailed in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2.1).

5.4.1.2   With whom do you mostly communicate via telephone (including landlines, mobile and teleconferencing)?
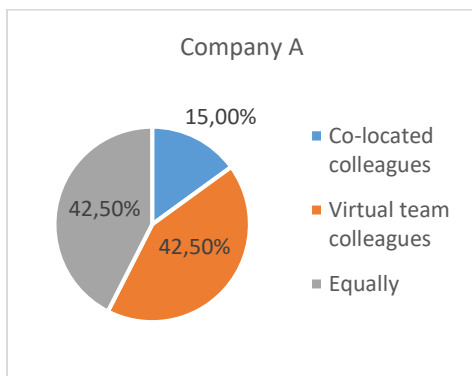
Figure 5.5: Company A – Telephone
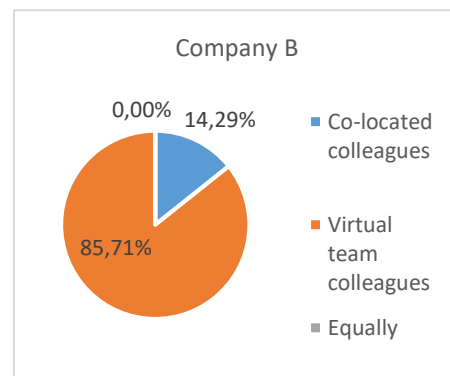
Figure 5.6: Company B – Telephone

Telephones and teleconferences are used primarily with virtual team members, as Figures 5.5 and 5.6 confirm, as this is cheaper than flying to see one another and members can still hear one another, as the literature confirms (see Section 2.3.2.1 and 2.4.2.3). The researcher believes that the financial state of the organisations also affects the results; the larger Company A has a more mixed result due to more funding for travel to initiate face-to-face communication than Company B, a non-profit organisation.

5.4.1.3 With whom do you mostly communicate via video conferencing (including Lync calling and Skype)?
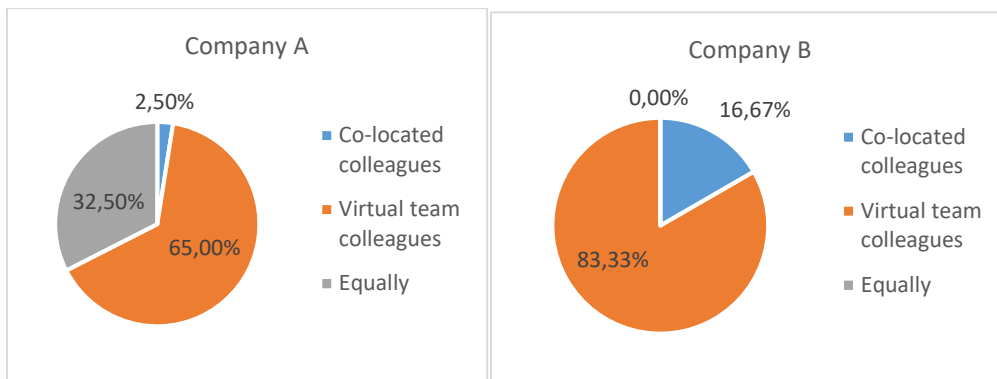
Figure 5.7: Company A – Video Conferencing

Figure 5.8: Company B – Video Conferencing

Figures 5.7 and 5.8 clearly demonstrate that video conferencing is used predominantly with virtual teams with an overall average for both companies of 74% (average of Company A: 65% and Company B: 83.33%) of respondents replying with 'virtual team colleagues'; this is because video conferencing most closely mimics face-to-face communication (see Section 2.4.2.3) and individuals who are co-located need not copy face-to-face communication when they can travel a short distance (walk or short drive) to have actual face-to-face communication.

5.4.1.4 With whom do you mostly communicate via email?
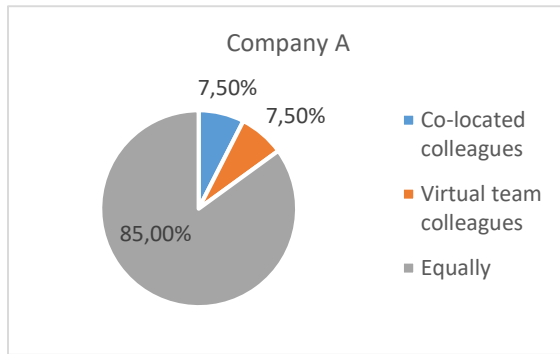
Figure 5.9: Company A – Email
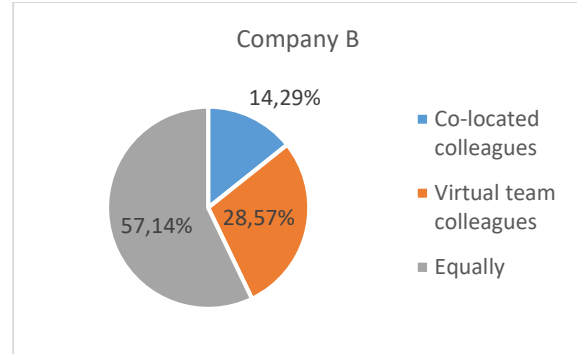
Figure 5.10: Company B – Email

Email seems to be favoured equally with co-located and virtual team members as 71% (average of Company A: 85% and Company B: 57.14%) of respondents within both organisations noted, because email offers a better option for team members who have different first languages to plan their communication. Email also serves as a record keeping mechanism for key communication decisions (see Section 2.3.2.2 and 2.4.2.2).

5.4.1.5 With whom do you mostly communicate via instant messaging (e.g. WhatsApp, Lync, etc.)?
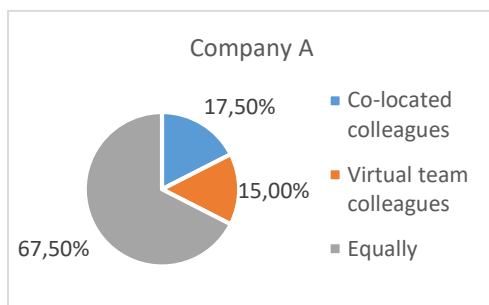
Figure 5.11: Company A – Instant messaging
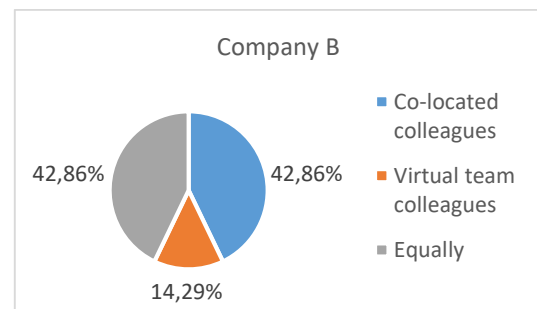
Figure 5.12: Company B – Instant messaging

Instant messaging (IM) seem to be favoured equally with co-located and virtual team members in Company A as it offers a quick or live response time (see Section 2.3.2.3 and 2.4.2.4). Additionally, Company B respondents used IMs with co-located team members more than in Company A; this can be attributed to the smaller teams that use IM for casual check ins more regularly in Company B than in Company A. Employees in Company B communicate daily on the status of all employees in the office, as when someone is late, as the impact of being short staffed is greater on a smaller team than a bigger team.

5.4.2 Frequency of communication

How often does your business unit or team communicate via the following channels?

Company A

	Face to face	Telephone	Video Conferencing	Email	Instant Messaging
■ Often	62,50%	62,50%	52,50%	85,00%	70,00%
■ Sometimes	22,50%	30,00%	35,00%	15,00%	27,50%
■ Seldom	15,00%	7,50%	5,00%	0,00%	2,50%
■ Never	0,00%	0,00%	7,50%	0,00%	0,00%
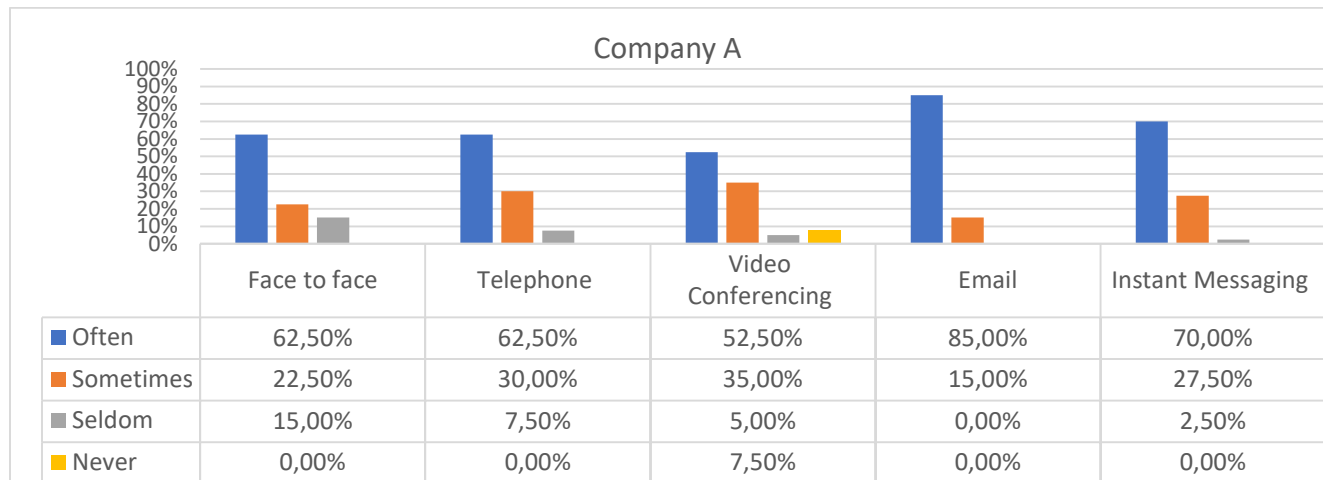
Figure 5.13: Frequency of communication – Company A

Company B

	Face to face	Telephone	Video Conferencing	Email	Instant Messaging
■ Often	85,71%	71,43%	14,29%	100,00%	85,71%
■ Sometimes	14,29%	28,57%	42,86%	0,00%	0,00%
■ Seldom	0,00%	0,00%	42,86%	0,00%	14,29%
■ Never	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%
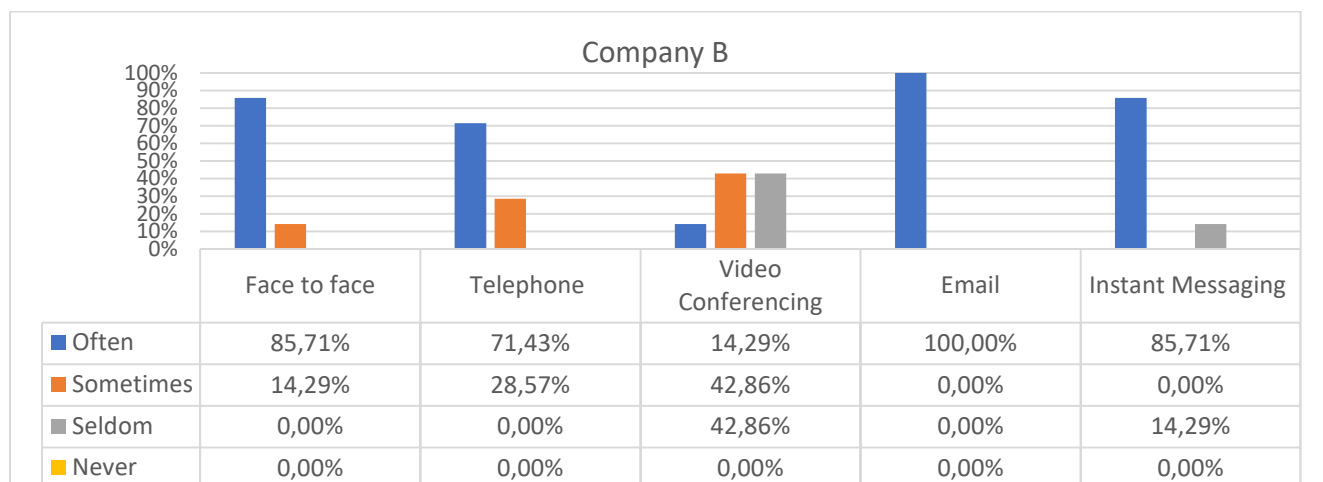
Figure 5.14: Frequency of communication – Company B

As portrayed in Figures 5.13 and 5.14 above, both companies overwhelmingly display that email is the favoured channel of communication in virtual teams, with an overall 93% (average of Company A: 85% and Company B: 100%) response for using it 'often' in both companies. Instant messaging is second at 78% (average of Company A: 70% and Company B: 85.71%) overall average response for using it 'often'. This supports the literature, which emphasises that email is the channel of choice when language barriers come into play, as in virtual teams. Individuals are provided with time to plan and strategize their communication, and at the same time use it for record purposes. Instant messaging is also the most cost-effective way to keep in constant and quick contact with almost instantaneous response, thus becoming the virtual "watercooler" discussion

platform. Key indicators of virtual communication also add to the richness of the communication, like delivery and read receipts noted in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.3.2.2 and 2.3.2.3), which can put the sender's mind at ease that the message has been received and read. The communication channel that is used the least, with an average response of 4% (average of Company A: 7.5% and Company B: 0%) 'never' using the channel, is video conferencing in both organisations; this is the only channel selected that respondents replied with 'never' used. This could be attributed to the cost and time it takes to set up a video conference, specifically, in the South African context with high data costs (see Section 2.4.2.3). Interestingly enough, the third most used medium of communication in these organisations is face-to-face communication, with a 74% (average of Company A: 62.50% and Company B: 85.71%) average response for being used 'often'. The researcher believes that this is an excellent result to balance the other channels, as intermittent face-to-face communication is a strong foundation for trust in communications technologies, enhancing overall communication within the virtual team.

5.4.3 Quality of communication channels

How well does your business unit/team communicate?

Company A

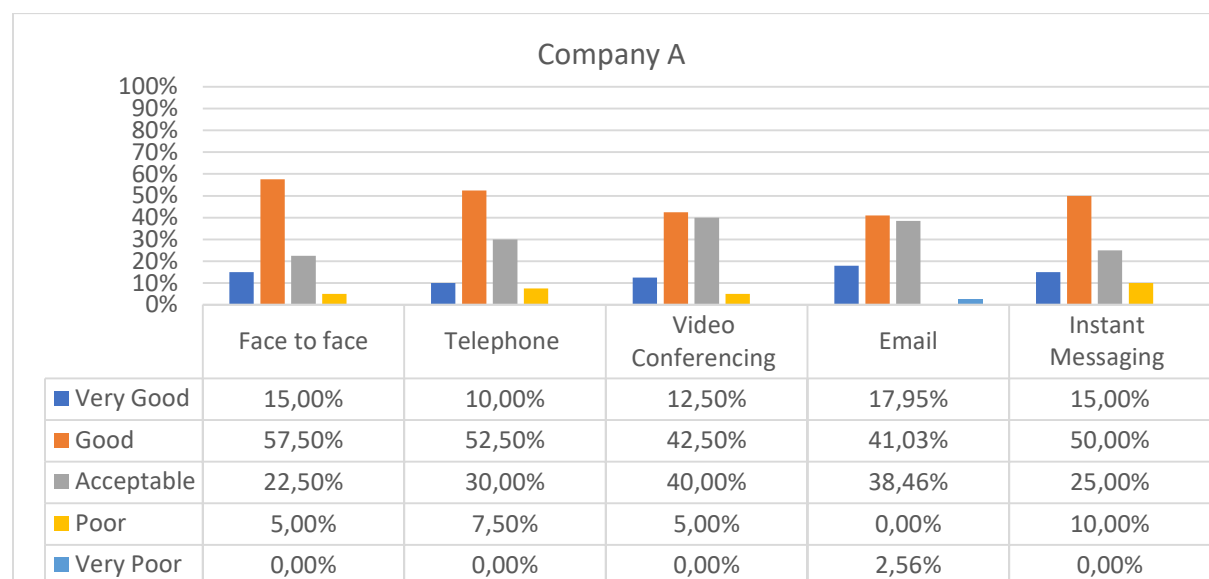|	Face to face	Telephone	Video Conferencing	Email	Instant Messaging
■ Very Good	15,00%	10,00%	12,50%	17,95%	15,00%
■ Good	57,50%	52,50%	42,50%	41,03%	50,00%
■ Acceptable	22,50%	30,00%	40,00%	38,46%	25,00%
■ Poor	5,00%	7,50%	5,00%	0,00%	10,00%
■ Very Poor	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	2,56%	0,00%

Figure 5.15: Quality of communication – Company A
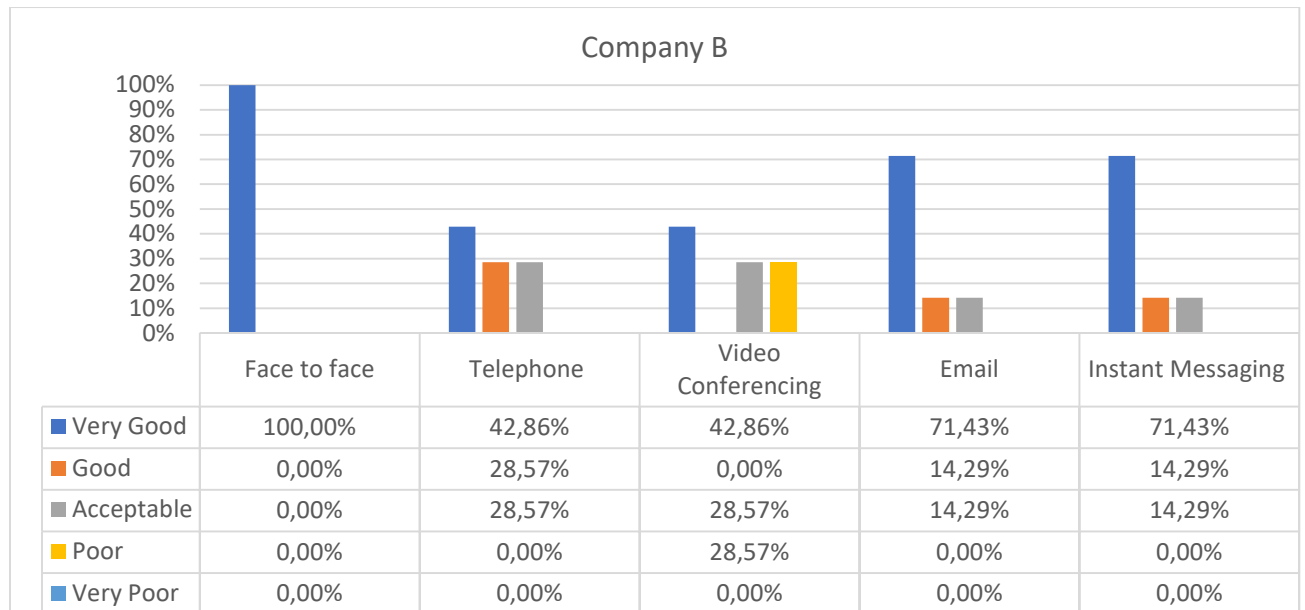
Figure 5.16: Quality of communication – Company B

The above results in Figures 5.15 and 5.16 show that the respondents indicated that the face-to-face communication channel was used the best within these organisations, with an overall average of 'very good' and 'good' responses of 86% (average of 'very good' - Company A: 15% and Company B: 100%, + average of 'good' - Company A: 57.50% and Company B: 0%). The communication channel used the least productively was video conferencing, with an overall average response of 'very poor' and 'poor' of 17% (average of 'poor' - Company A: 5% and Company B: 28.57%, + average of 'very poor' - Company A: 0% and Company B: 0%). The researcher is of the view that this could be a result of poor connectivity and training in the case of video conferencing, compared with face-to-face communication where any issues can be resolved almost instantly and are not generally of a technical nature. When it came to the respondents' intermediate ratings of communication channels, overall they felt that telephonic, email and IM were used well in terms of the quality of the channel, with an overall average of 'very good' and 'good' of 71.56%; calculated as follows:

- telephone average of 'very good' - Company A: 10% and Company B: 42.86%, + average of 'good' - Company A: 52.50% and Company B: 28.57%) = 66.96%
- email average of 'very good' - Company A: 17.95% and Company B: 71.43%, + average of 'good' - Company A: 41.03% and Company B: 14.29%) = 72.34%
- IM average of 'very good' - Company A: 15% and Company B: 71.43%, + average of 'good' - Company A: 50% and Company B: 14.29%) = 75.36 %
- Average over all for above (average of 66.96%, 72.34% and 75.36%)

The researcher believes that this is a direct link to the frequency of the use, that is, because they use the channels most of the time, either by choice or force, they adapt to

ensure that their communication becomes more effective as time goes on. The winning ingredient is to learn from one's previous mistakes.

5.4.4 Understanding of communication using various channels

How often is there a misunderstanding of communication delivered by your business unit/team via the following channels?

Company A

	Face to face	Telephone	Video Conferencing	Email	Instant Messaging
Most of the time	2,50%	0,00%	0,00%	7,50%	2,50%
Some of the time	32,50%	50,00%	37,50%	60,00%	37,50%
Seldom	60,00%	50,00%	55,00%	30,00%	52,50%
Never	5,00%	0,00%	7,50%	2,50%	7,50%
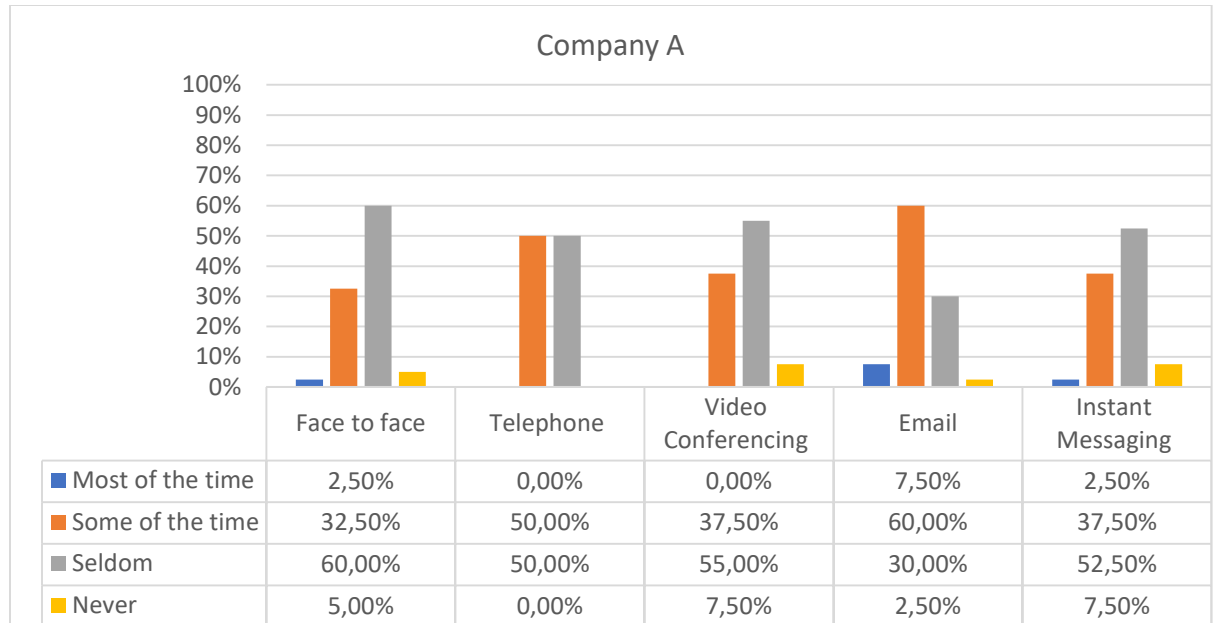
Figure 5.17: Understanding of communication – Company A

Company B

	Face to face	Telephone	Video Conferencing	Email	Instant Messaging
Most of the time	0,00%	14,29%	14,29%	0,00%	0,00%
Some of the time	14,29%	71,43%	28,57%	0,00%	0,00%
Seldom	14,29%	0,00%	14,29%	57,14%	57,14%
Never	71,43%	14,29%	42,86%	42,86%	42,86%
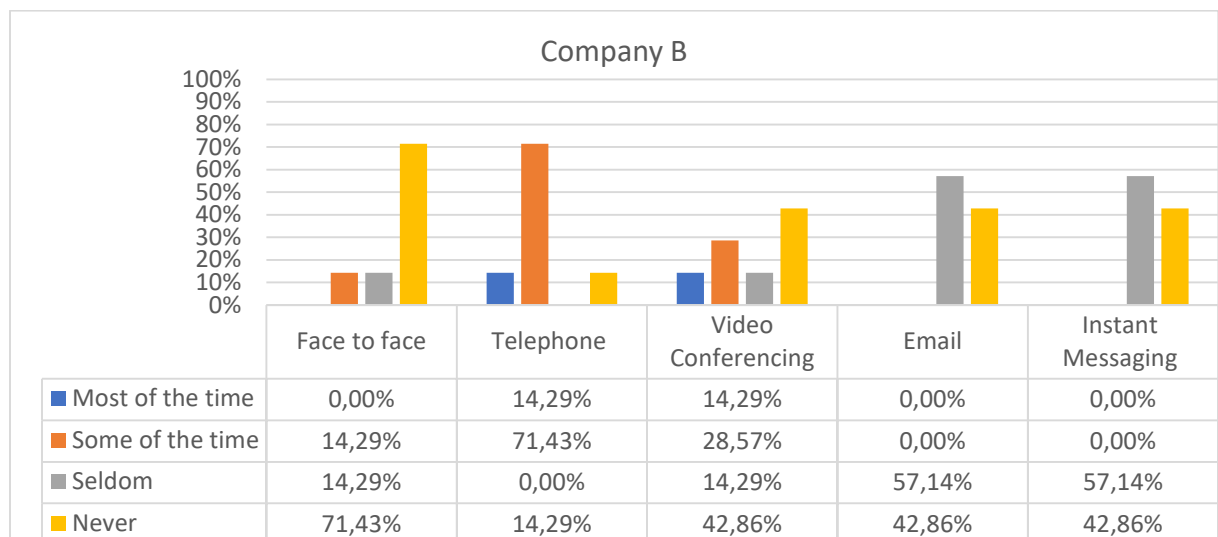
Figure 5.18: Understanding of communication – Company B

When analysing which communication channels result in misunderstandings during communication, the data reflects that face-to-face communication is the most effective in these organisations and results in the least misunderstandings, with 65% respondents in Company A ('seldom' 60% + 'never' 5%) and 85.72% of respondents in Company B ('seldom' 14.29% + 'never' 71.43%) replying that there are seldom or never misunderstandings. When using telephonic communication channels, respondents felt that misunderstandings occurred 'some of the time', with a response of 50% in Company A and 71.43% in Company B. In Company A, 55% of respondents felt that video conferencing seldom results in misunderstandings and 42.86% of respondents in Company B felt that video conferencing never results in misunderstandings. Sixty percent of respondents felt that email results in misunderstandings occasionally in Company A, compared with 57.14% of respondents who noted that emails seldom result in misunderstandings. The majority of both organisations' respondents felt that IM seldom results in misunderstandings, with Company A at 52.50% and Company B at 57.14%.

In summary, the results display that misunderstandings occur predominantly when using the telephone, with 68% (average of 'most of the time' - Company A: 0% and Company B: 14.29%, + average of 'some of the time' - Company A: 50% and Company B: 71.43%) of respondents replying that when using this channel there are misunderstandings of communication most and some of the time. The channel with the least misunderstandings when used, is face-to-face communication, with 75% (average of 'seldom' and 'never' - Company A: 65% and Company B: 85.72%) of respondents stating that they seldom or never have misunderstandings during face-to-face communication. The overarching themes from the respondent's' comments confirm the results: face-to-face communication is the most effective, as one can address issues and clarify any misunderstandings immediately. The few times that misunderstandings do occur usually relate to more technical data which may take a lot of time to explain or forgetting of information like dates that may require a follow-up to finalise a decision. In telephonic communication there are no visual cues to enhance communication like body language or ability to demonstrate graphics while on the call.

The following comments from respondents' questionnaires confirm the above:

Table 5.1: Comments by respondents on understanding and/or misunderstanding of using face-to-face communication

Comments from respondents confirming that face-to-face is the best communication channel to use to avoid misunderstanding were:
• "Face-to-face communication is always the best for everybody to be on the same page. Eye contact and explaining using drawing works well."   • "When we communicate face-to-face, people have the opportunity to immediately clarify matters."   • "Engage immediately with person, eye contact, can observe the body language, make physical contact – handshakes, build relationships and trust."
Comments from respondents confirming what type of misunderstandings occur occasionally in face-to-face communication:
• "Mostly due to technical detail missed during initial discussion."   • "Sometimes when info is shared numbers get mixed up."   • "We sometime forget deadlines."

The predominant themes from the respondents' comments from their questionnaires confirm the results: telephone conferencing is the least effective communications channel and usually results in some form of misunderstanding owing to lack of nonverbal cues and connection problems. These forms of communication should be followed up with an email to confirm that all parties comprehend the status before decisions can be made. The few times that misunderstandings do occur in face-to-face communication usually relate to more technical data, which may take a lot of time to explain, or forgetting information like dates that may require a follow-up to finalise a decision.

Some comments from respondents' questionnaires confirming that telephone conferencing is the least appropriate communication channel to use to avoid misunderstanding were:

Table 5.2: Comments by respondents on understanding and/or misunderstanding of using telephone communication

Telephone
• "Phone quality and personal touch not there. Cannot read body language."   • "There are no visual communication mechanisms on the telephone."   • "Without physical presence and ability to draw designs, build activities sometimes can miss critical components since correct questions have not been asked."   • "The misunderstanding is often caused by network problems and not being able to read the other person's body language."   • "We tend not to take notes when we are speaking via telephone."

According to the results from respondents in these organisations, email and IM are in the middle, with misunderstandings occurring occasionally, usually from a context and

information overload perspective. The main misunderstandings when using email and IM by respondents in these organisations as well as the core reasons they use these communication channels confirm the literature as is reflected in the following comments, from respondents' questionnaires.

Table 5.3: Comments by respondents on understanding and/or misunderstanding of using email communication

Email
🔊 "Due to working shifts, we sometimes have to go through too much mail that it sometimes gets overlooked."
🔊 "Email communications are open to interpretation if not articulated correctly, and don't always allow for discussion or the receiver does not feel comfortable to ask questions."
🔊 "Urgency get missed during email comms."
🔊 "There's hardly miscommunication on email. The only misunderstanding would be from a context point of view."
🔊 "We [can] go back and read our emails."

Table 5.4: Comments by respondents on understanding and/or misunderstanding of using IM communication

Instant Messaging
🔊 "Instant messages are closer to a conversation so easier to correct any miscommunications, but still written and not verbal, so harder to convey tone."
🔊 "Posting to the wrong group."
🔊 "When the writer makes grammar mistakes."
🔊 "We can go back and read our messages."
🔊 "This works well, but following the expectations needs to be very clear and following up via telephone is sometime required. WhatsApp alone is not always sufficient."

5.4.5   Quality of team communication

Our virtual team really listens to one another and tries to understand the feelings and points of view of one another.
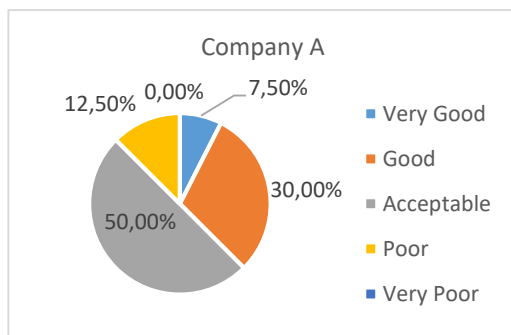
Figure 5.19: Company A – Virtual team communication
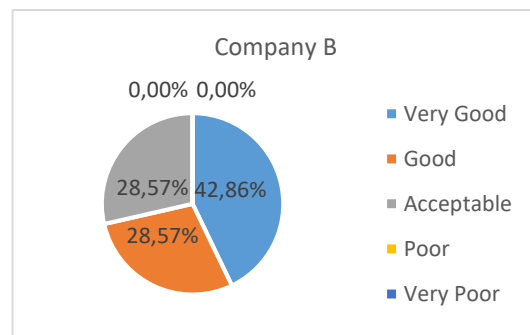
Figure 5.20: Company B – Virtual team communication

In terms of the quality of the actual communication between virtual team members, the data shows that the majority of the respondents in these organisations felt that their virtual team members try to listen and understand one another on average, with 50% in Company A replying 'acceptable' and less than half responding 'very good' and 'good' ('very good' 7.5% + 'good' 30% = 37.50%), and 71.43% ('very good' 7.5% + 'good' 30% = 37.50%) of the respondents replying 'very good' and 'good' in Company B. The researcher is of the view that owing to the average response rate in Company A regarding the quality of communication within virtual team members, they do not attribute great importance to building relationships with virtual team members. For short-term goals, this may not affect productivity, as these individuals could apply swift trust (see Section 3.2.3.1) to their teams to complete immediate goals.

Our co-located team really listens to one another and tries to understand the feelings and points of view of one another.
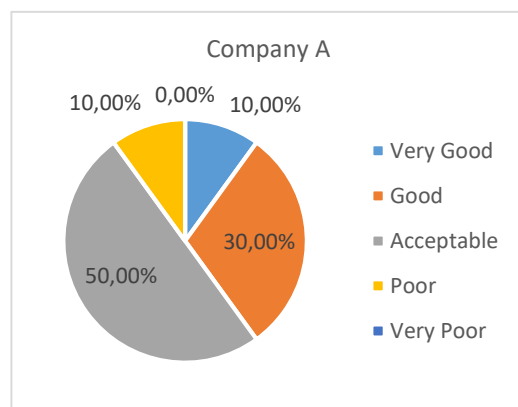
Figure 5.21: Company A – Co-located team communication
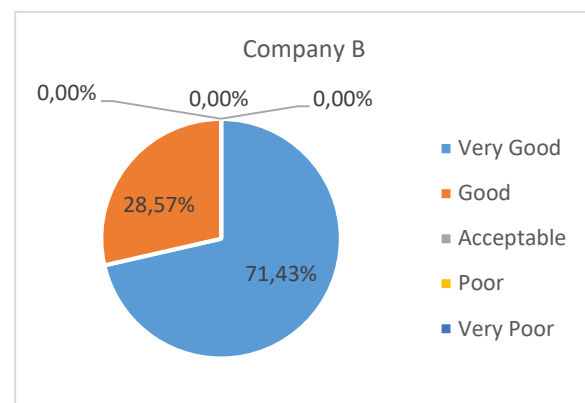
Figure 5.22: Company B – Co-located team communication

In terms of the quality of the actual communication between co-located team members, the data shows that a fraction of 50% of the respondents in Company A felt that their co-located team members try to listen and understand one another on average, in addition to 40% ("very good'; 10% + 'good'; 30%) of respondents feeling very positive compared with a large majority of 71.43% of the respondents in Company B responding 'very good'. The results overall reflect that co-located teams have better quality of communication in both organisations, compared with their virtual teams' counterparts.

To summarise, the results reveal that Company A respondents felt that their co-located and virtual team members both have average quality of communication at 50%, compared with Company B respondents who predominantly felt that they have better quality of communication with their co-located team members, with 100% ('very good"; 71.43 +

'good'; 28.57%) of respondents feeling their co-located team members' communication is either 'very good' or 'good'. The researcher believes a large contributing factor to be the resources available to the larger Company A, compared with Company B, to use the best technology to interact with virtual team members, supported by regular face-to-face meetings through air travel. The researcher also feels that the data demonstrates that overall in Company A there is a breach in the connection that team members make with one another during their communication, owing to the average response within both virtual and co-located communication, and that Company B runs the risk of having two very different organisational cultures in the organisation if the geographically dispersed teams operate separately, as they communicate much more effectively with their co-located counterparts.

In our virtual team we have the freedom to express ourselves on any issue at any time.
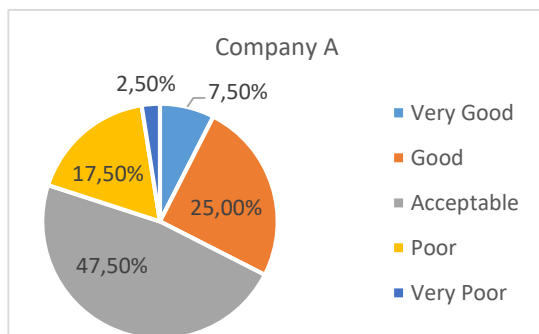
Figure 5.23: Company A – Virtual team   **Figure 5.24: Company B – Virtual team**

This question is an indicator of the level of trust within teams, and in virtual team communication, trust seems to be a mixed sentiment, leaning to a positive view for both organisations based on the data from the respondents. In Company A, 32.50% of respondents replied positively, 'very good and good' (7.5% + 25%) and 47.50% respondents responded 'acceptable', compared with 57.15% of respondents in Company B responding positively, 'very good and good' (14.29% + 42.86%) and 42.86% responding 'acceptable'. In Company A, a small minority of 17.50% felt that they did not have the freedom to express themselves in their virtual teams; this is a barrier to trust, as such individuals would most likely interact and share less information with their virtual team members, which impacts productivity negatively.

In our co-located team, we have the freedom to express ourselves on any issue at any time.

Company A

7,50% 0,00% 10,00%

42,50%

40,00%

- Very Good
- Good
- Acceptable
- Poor
- Very Poor

Company B

0,00% 0,00% 0,00%

42,86%

57,14%

- Very Good
- Good
- Acceptable
- Poor
- Very Poor

Figure 5.25: Company A – Co-located team

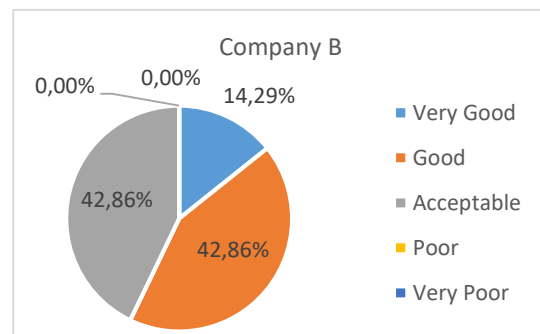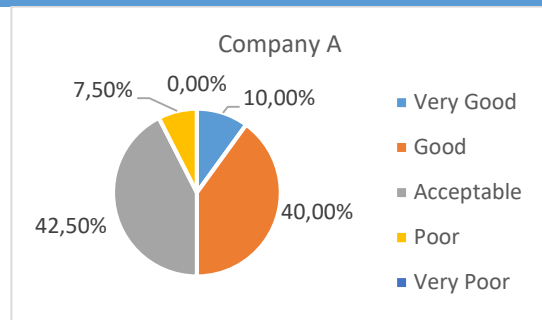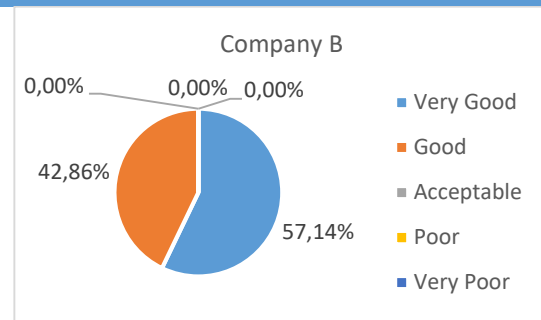**Figure 5.26: Company B – Co-located team**

In comparison with the above, the results displayed a majority of respondents replied positively overall in both organisations, with a 'very good' and 'good' response of 50% (10% + 40%) in Company A and 100% (57.14% + 42.86%) in Company B. In addition, 42.50% of Company A respondents responded 'acceptable'. Once again in Company A, a small minority of 7.50% felt that they did not have the freedom to express themselves in their co-located teams. This is potentially a barrier to trust as well because these individuals would most likely cooperate less within their teams, thus impacting productivity.

Some of the results show that respondents felt more at ease to express themselves within their co-located teams, with an overall 75% (average of Company A; 50% and Company B; 100%) of respondents replying in 'very good' and 'good' within both organisations, compared with the virtual team response of 45% (average of Company A; 32.50% and Company B; 57.15%). Trusting one's team members plays a major role in the performance of the team as reflected in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2). The researcher is of the opinion that no matter what technology or practice is in place, if there are underlying trust issues that are not addressed, they will affect the communication negatively within these teams, as reflected in the 7% and 17.50% 'poor' response in co-located and virtual team communication respectively in Company A. The lack of trust is damaging to the growth of team morale.

5.4.6 Flow of communication

How has the flow of information and communication changed owing to the increased use of Information Technology at your workplace?
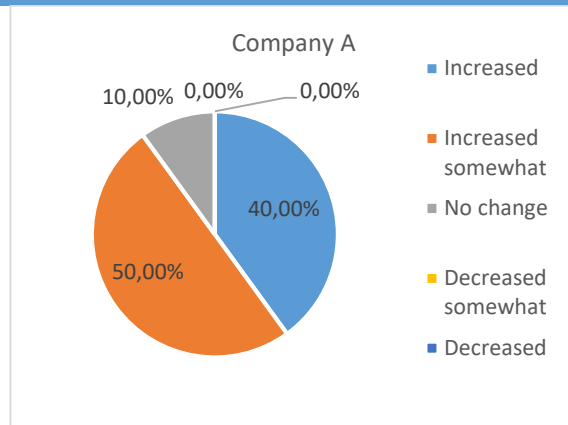
Figure 5.27: Company A – From employees to managers
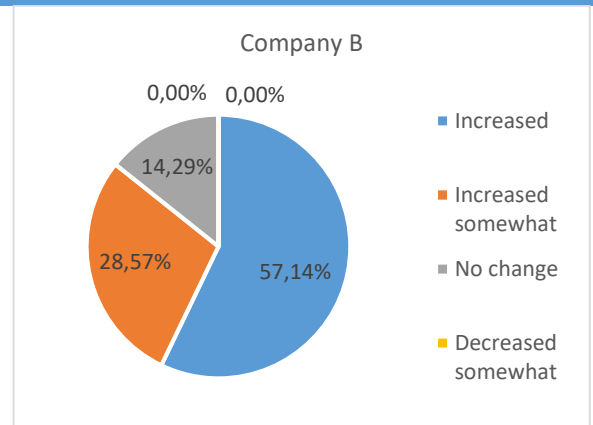
Figure 5.28: Company B – From employees to managers

When it comes to the flow of communication, the data reflects that respondents felt that the increased use of technology has facilitated the flow information to some extent from employees to managers in both organisations, with 90% (40% + 50%) of respondents in Company A and 85.71% (57.14% + 28.57%) of respondents in Company B responding 'increased' and 'increased somewhat'. A small minority at 10% in Company A and 14.29% in Company B felt there was no change. None of the respondents in either organisation felt the flow of information had decreased. The data supports the literature that technology enhances communication practices if used effectively and supported by softer influences like trust and shared identity (see Section 2.3.2).

Some of the comments captured from the respondent's questionnaires are:

Table.5.5: Comments by respondents on quality of communication from employees to managers

From employees to managers
🔊 "Because you feel you can be more open than face-to-face."
🔊 "Employees and managers are more informed because of the available technologies."
🔊 "Employees cautious not to upset management and also there will be proof of the communication trail."
🔊 "Everybody is filled in when there are issues; managers will get more details."
🔊 "Where there would normally be no communication, some contact is now made."
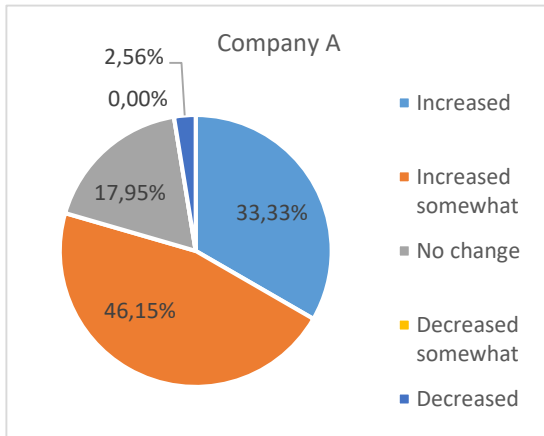
Figure 5.29: Company A – From managers to employees
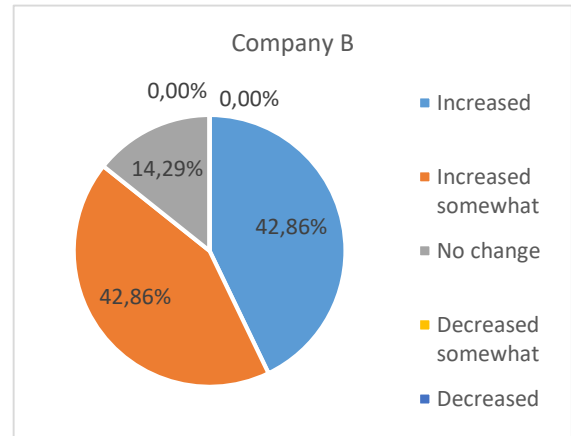
Figure 5.30: Company B – From managers to employees

In communication from managers to employees, the data reflects that respondents felt that the increased use of technology has increased the flow information to some extent in both organisations, with 79.48% (33.33% + 46.15%) of respondents in Company A and 85.72% (42.86% + 42.86%) of respondents in Company B responding, 'increased' and 'increased somewhat'. A minority of 17.95% in Company A and 14.29% in Company B felt there was no change. In Company A, 2.56% of the respondents felt the flow of information had decreased, whereas none of the respondents in Company B felt the flow of information had decreased.

Some of the comments captured from the respondents' questionnaires are:

Table 5.6: Comments by respondents on quality of communication from managers to employees

From managers to employees
◄» "By introducing new technologies, the flow of information has improved as tasks are assigned to the relevant persons."
◄» "Enables more frequent communication."
◄» "Managers do updates more often than face-to-face."
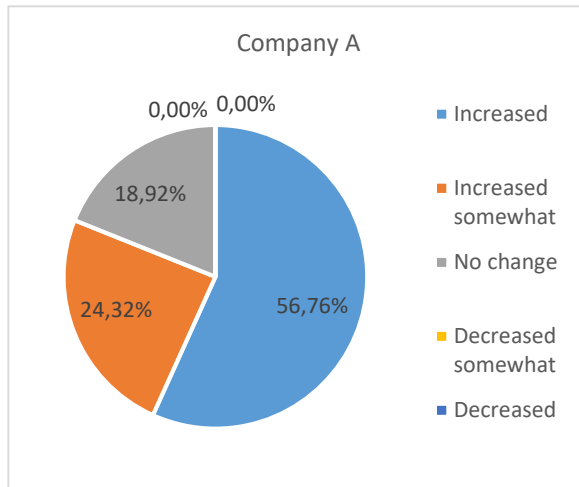
Figure 5.31: Company A – From employees to employees
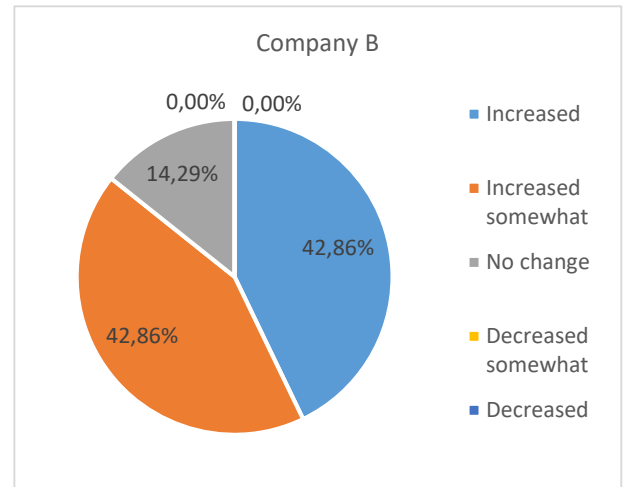
Figure 5.32: Company B – From employees to employees

In terms of information flow among employees, the majority view seems to be that information flow has increased because of the additional use of technology. In Company A, 81.08% (56.76% + 24.32%) of respondents believe that information flow has 'increased' and 'increased somewhat' and 85.72% (42.86% + 42.86%) of respondents in Company B have the same view. A small minority of 18.92% in Company A and 14.29% in Company B feel that there was no change in information flow with additional use of technology in the workplace. None of the respondents felt that there was a decrease in information flow in either of the organisations.

Some of the comments captured from the respondents' questionnaires are:

Table 5.7: Comments by respondents on quality of communication between employees

Between employees
🔊 "It is better to put things in writing, especially when there is more than one person involved."
🔊 "Team morale with all the changes has taken a dip."
🔊 "Employees to employees prefer face-to-face communication."
🔊 "With team WhatsApp messaging, all team members are reachable and informed of everything important happening in our space."

In conclusion, in the communication process, the results show that communication has increased in all aspects within both organisations among employees and managers, and among employees. The overall increase in communication flow was among employees, with an average of 49% (average of Company A; 40% and Company B; 57.14%) of respondents replying positively. The themes for the respondents' opinions of increase in communication flow due to technology are that within employee to manager

communication, employees felt more informed, as technology has enabled more opportunities to share information, resulting in quicker turnaround solutions. Within manager to employee communication, respondents felt that they had a better understanding of what is expected of them and that managers kept them apprised of changes; however, among employees there was a decline in morale, as although they may have greater access to more information, this has led to less personal contact, resulting in less of the preferred channel of communication among colleagues, which is face-to-face communication.

5.4.7   Speed of communication

How has the speed of information and communication transfer been affected by the increased use of Information Technology at your workplace?

From employees to managers
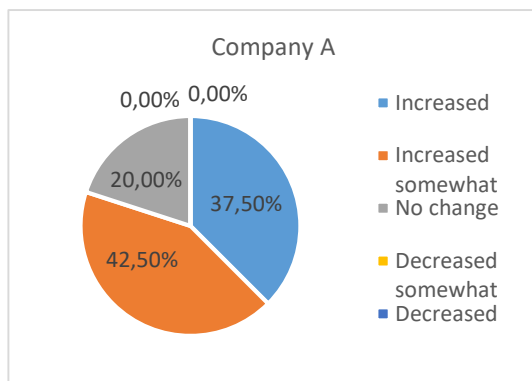
Figure 5.33: Company A – From employees to managers
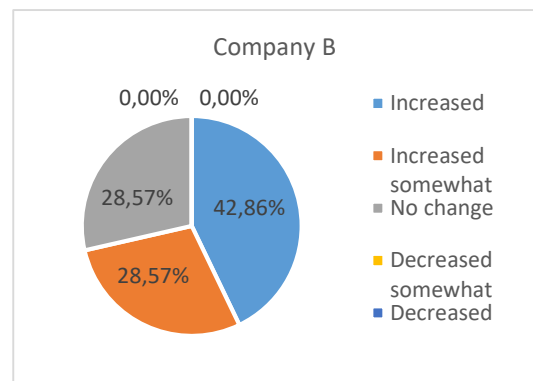
Figure 5.34: Company B – From employees to managers

Most of the respondents are of the opinion, based on the data analysed from the questionnaires, that the speed of information has increased to some extent from employees to managers in both organisations, with a response of 80% (37.50% + 42.50%) in Company A and 71.43% (42.86% + 28.57%) in Company B. A small percentage of 20% in Company A and 28.57% of respondents in Company B feel that there has been no change in the speed of information and communication from employees to managers. None of the respondents felt that the speed of information and communication has decreased owing to an increase in technology use.

Some of the respondents' opinions from their questionnaires are expressed as follows:

Table 5.8: Comments by respondents on speed of communication from employees to managers

From employees to managers
🔊 "Faster responses across the country."   🔊 "Jobs get done quicker."   🔊 "WhatsApp/Instant Messaging ensures immediate delivery of information whereby emails could take longer to be read."   🔊 "Must think twice before hitting the enter button."

From managers to employees
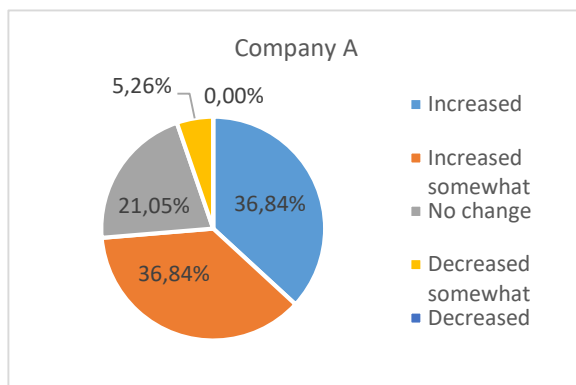
Figure 5.35: Company A – From managers to employees
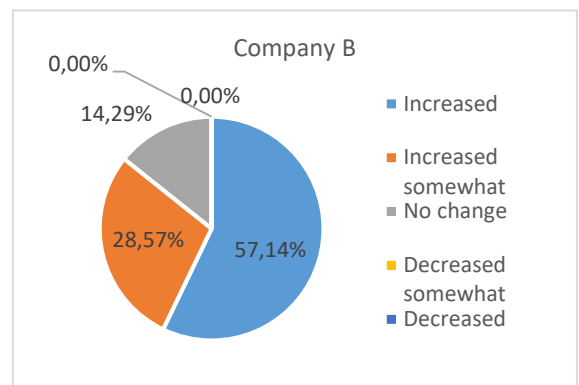
Figure 5.36: Company B – From managers to employees

In terms of the speed of information from managers to employees, a majority felt that the speed of information sharing, and communication has increased to some extent in both organisations, at 73.68% (36.84% + 36.84%) in Company A and 85.71% (57.14% + 28.57%) in Company B. In Company A, 21.05% felt that there was no change in the speed of information and communication sharing between managers and employees, and 5.26% of respondents in Company A felt it had decreased somewhat with the use of technology. The researcher feels that this could be as a result of information overload and the extra time it takes for managers to analyse information before being able to share it with employees. In Company B, 14.29% of the respondents felt that there was no change, while none of the respondents felt that there was a decrease in speed of information and communication transfer from managers to employees.

Some of the respondents' opinions from their questionnaires are expressed as follows:

Table 5.9: Comments by respondents on speed of communication from managers to employees

From managers to employees
🔊 "Quick updates and changes communicated."
🔊 "We are getting an information overload. Cannot keep up with emails in inbox."

From employees to employees
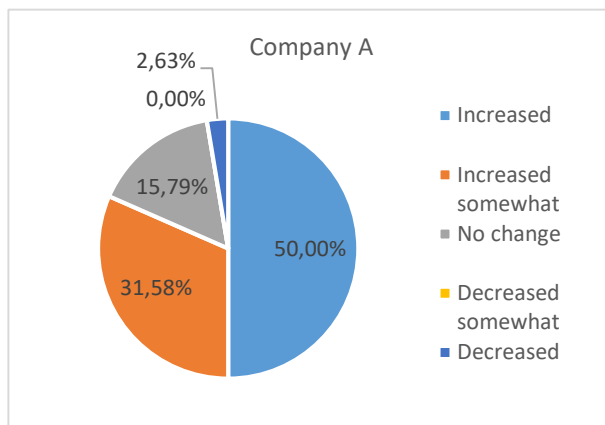
Figure 5.37: Company A – From employees to employees
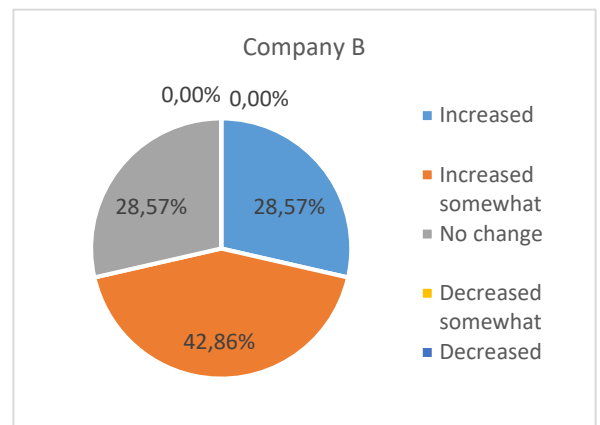
Figure 5.38: Company B – From employees to employees

Regarding the speed of information and communication transfer among employees, most respondents felt that there was an increase: 81.58% (50% + 31.58%) in Company A and 71.43% (28.57% + 42.86%) in Company B. A slight percentage of the respondents felt that there was no change in both organisations at 15.79% in Company A and 28.57% in Company B. Similarly, with regard to the speed of information and communication flow from managers to employees, in Company A some respondents felt that there was a decrease in the speed of information and communication among employees. The researcher is of the opinion that this can be attributed to the abundance of information available and required to be perused before communication and actions can be taken by employees. Additionally, the researcher feels this is a result of some technologies (email and IM) allowing individuals to share 24/7. Employees may find it difficult to prioritise and action messages during required working hours because of the surfeit of information.

Some of the respondents' opinions from their questionnaires are expressed as follows:

Table 5.10: Comments from respondents on speed of communication between employees

Between employees
🔊 "Opportunity to check in and clarify – immediate." 🔊 "Sharing relevant info." 🔊 "Time is relevant since reading a message on a comms medium will depend on time when the receiver has time to read it."

A general summary of the results reflects an overall increase in speed of communication in all aspects within both organisations among employees and managers, and among employees. The biggest impact is increase in speed of communication between managers and employees, with 47% (average Company A: 38.84% and Company B: 57.14%) of respondents replying 'increased'. The increase in speed of sharing information had great benefits but also some negatives. The themes from the respondents are that the benefits are faster response times, which enable quicker solutions as well as being informed more regularly, resulting in more informed decisions. However, the disadvantage of faster communication is that one needs to be careful about sharing information too quickly without context, and that there is information overload which could actually slow the progress of output and decision making. Our brains are constructed to manage and preserve data in a specific way and do not automatically adjust or accelerate because of changing technology (Weobong, 2016; Bouweraerts, 2018). In reality, technology could hamper our brain processes, making them 'lazy', as in the instances where we depend on our cell phones rather than remembering a telephone number or relying on our calendars to remind us of appointments (Bouweraerts, 2018).

5.4.8 Appropriate communications technology and training in place

Do you feel the appropriate communications technology is in place to ensure trust, shared identity and location are not barriers to creating one way of work?
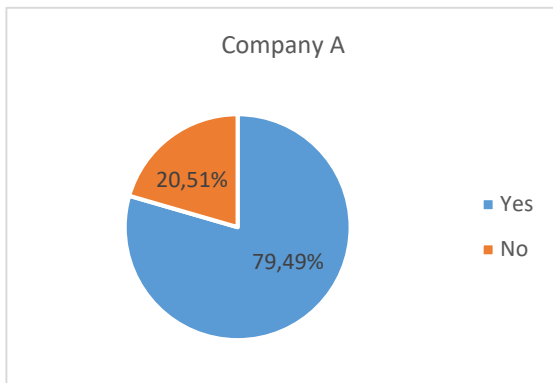
Figure 5.39: Company A – Technology
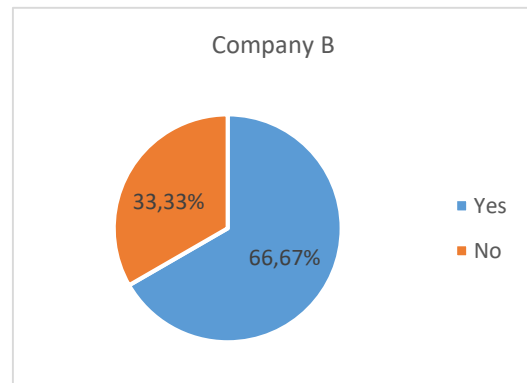
Figure 5.40: Company B – Technology

Figures 5.39 and 5.40 clearly display that respondents felt that the correct technologies are in place as explained in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.2); however, even with the correct technologies in place, they are only as successful as the users' capability (see Section 2.5) to apply them optimally.

The above is reinforced in these organisations with some of the respondents' comments from their questionnaires.

Table 5.11: Comments by respondents on appropriate communications technology

Do you feel the appropriate communications technology is in place to ensure trust, shared identity and location are not barriers to creating one way of work?
◀ "If communication is good, then geographical location is not a problem." ◀ "Once a team has been established, the members will contribute based on trust, honesty and being open." ◀ "We work with a team in India and have daily teleconferences/VC with them on projects we're working on. Everyone is well informed with what they need to deliver." ◀ "We are able to maintain communication with each other." ◀ "Yes, we do have a tool that made our communication and logging of tasks very simple." ◀ "Currently the communication with the other team in the different location is not as effective as the communication within the same region."

Do you feel the appropriate training is in place to ensure trust, shared identity and location are not barriers to creating one way of work?
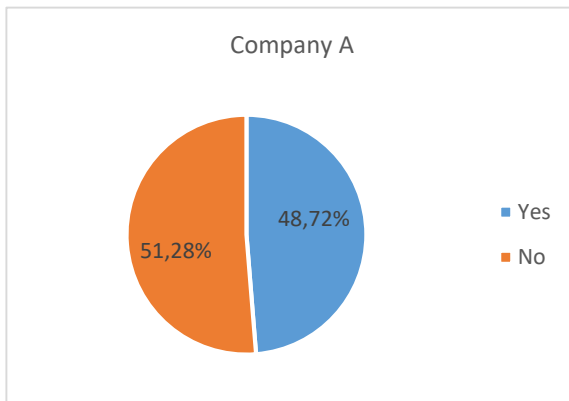
Figure 5.41: Company A – Training
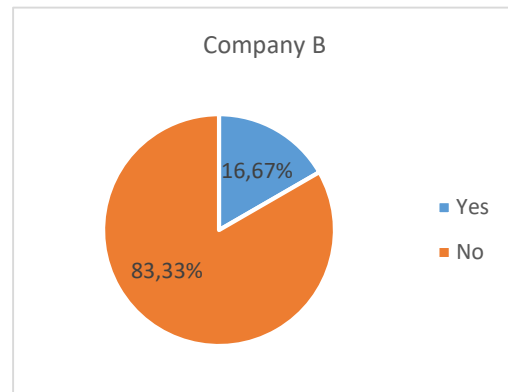
Figure 5.42: Company B – Training

Figures 5.41 and 5.42 clearly display that even though the respondents felt that the correct technologies are in place, the fact that that they also felt there was not enough training on the 'how' and 'when' to use these technologies, as explained in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.2), could be a barrier to the technology itself. As explained above, the correct technologies enable teams to interact and produce from almost anywhere, if the users (see Section 2.5) are able to apply them appropriately.

The above is reinforced in these organisations with some of the respondents' comments from their questionnaires.

Table 5.12: Comments by respondents on appropriate training

| Do you feel the appropriate training is in place to ensure trust, shared identity and location are not barriers to creating one way of work? |
| --- |
| 🔊 "Having to figure things out for yourself."
🔊 "No communications technology policy in place."
🔊 "No training has been offered for the current communication channels."
🔊 "Although some of the tools are simple to use, I think a little more training would be beneficial to some users, to make users more aware of the feature sets available."
🔊 "More and more training and awareness of the technology is needed." |

5.4.9 Main purpose of communication channels

The main purpose of communication channels in the organisations was asked in an open-ended manner, enabling respondents to share their opinions with context and explanations. The core themes that emanated from the respondents in both organisations were aligned with one another, as well as with the literature review in Chapter 2.

5.4.9.1 Face-to-face

In both organisations, the core reason for using face-to-face communication is relationship building or to establish an initial connection with clients. These organisations use face-to-face communication for meetings, to clarify any misunderstandings, to have in-depth discussions like project scoping, brainstorming and goal planning, and once again for the personal touch in performance discussions and in initial client meetings, to create context and for decision making.

Table 5.13: Comments by respondents on the main purpose for using face-to-face communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *main purpose* for using *face-to-face* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Build a connection, get better understanding and more authentic conversation." 🔊 "Collaboration and troubleshooting."
Company B
🔊 "In office communication." 🔊 "Introductions, build relationships and trust."

5.4.9.2 Telephone

The data from respondents reflects that once again both organisations' opinions are aligned with each other as well as with the literature. These organisations engage in telephonic communication mainly to provide updates, for feedback, to provide clarification of misunderstandings of emails, for quick confirmation of issues, to share information, to resolve easy queries, and as a follow-up to emails. It is generally a cheaper way to communicate with people in another location than travelling for face-to-face communication.

Table 5.14: Comments by respondents on the main purpose for using telephone communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *main purpose* for using *telephone* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Updates/Feedback."
🔊 "Confirmation, setting up appointments, log calls."
Company B
🔊 "It's cost effective and directive can be driven from the conversation without having to waste fuel cost."
🔊 "Follow-up emails, stay in contact, long-distance contact."

5.4.9.3 Email

Both organisations have similar views on emails. The primary use is a form of record keeping for legal and compliance reasons and confirmation of oral discussions like decisions and agreements. These organisations predominately use email to provide updates, for feedback, general communication and easy instructions or reference.

Table 5.15: Comments by respondents on the main purpose for using email communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *main purpose* for using *email* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Put requirements/notes/minutes in writing; for reference purposes."
🔊 "Formal channel of communication with business partners."
Company B
🔊 "Information sharing, contacting external people."
🔊 "It is flexible and can be used for serving as documentation."

5.4.9.4 Video conferencing

Company A and B use video conferencing for communication, when travel in not possible owing to time and cost, to share information for quick updates and check ins, as well as for initial discussions for decision making or emergency decision making with groups of people based in different locations.

Table 5.16: Comments by respondents on the main purpose for using video conferencing communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *main purpose* for using *video conferencing* communication are:
Company A
◀◦ "When travelling is not possible, and a few people are needed in the meeting."
◀◦ "Meeting with colleagues in different geographical locations."
Company B
◀◦ "Enables face-to-face communication between people in different locations."
◀◦ "If you want to see the expression of the people you're talking to while you discuss serious issues."

5.4.9.5 Instant messaging

In these organisations, Instant Messaging (IM) is used for the same reasons, as aligned with the literature in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.3.2.3). These reasons are quick informal check-ins, to convey urgent messages, to provide quick updates for operational groups, for easy collaboration and troubleshooting, information sharing and feedback, and easy assistance.

Table 5.17: Comments by respondents on the main purpose for using instant messaging communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *main purpose* for using *instant messaging* communication are:
Company A
◀◦ "Quick check-in or to get hold people to get quick answers at short notice."
◀◦ "Informal communication between colleagues"
Company B
◀◦ "Queries, information sharing."
◀◦ "Instant contact and or reply needed, for emergencies."

5.4.9.6 Other

Both organisations use additional communication media like social media, for example, Twitter, to inform, share and update clients, and project management systems Jira and Asana® to allocate and track work. Asana® centres on team communication more appropriately matched to smaller, non-software teams, as it offers 'an easy-to-use tool' with a straightforward design that's suited to teams whose projects are not too intricate, whereas Jira assists software development teams strategize and monitor new software and product releases for larger projects, as Jira was designed especially for software teams (Betterbuys.com, 2018).

Table 5.18: Comments by respondents on the main purpose for using other communication media

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *main purpose* for using *other* communication media are:
Company A
◁» "Social media, i.e. Twitter, should be used more effectively to communicate with external parties/clients."
◁» "Jira – The teams use the tool to track work that is being done by local and virtual teams."

5.4.10 Barriers to communication channels

5.4.10.1 Face-to-face

The barriers or challenges that respondents within these organisations face are similar to those when engaging in face-to-face communication. These include: a lack of interest or short attention span in lengthy communication, language barriers when English is not the first language of participants in a discussion, confrontation can arise when emotions are high and individuals are in the same room, disruptions like noise or other people walking past and greeting, misinterpreting body language, there is no record of the interaction unless notes are taken in the discussion, and finally, availability, cost and scheduling of meeting rooms and people are some barriers in face-to-face communication.

Table 5.19: Comments by respondents on the barriers to using face-to-face communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *barriers* to using *face-to-face* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Availability of meeting rooms and people." Face-to-face communication can only take place if the relevant people are available and they have a venue (for example, a meeting room) to have discussions.
🔊 "Unplanned can lead to heated conversations."
Company B
🔊 "Disagreement can lead to physical fights."
🔊 "Timing/disruption, break in concentration, misinterpreting body language."

5.4.10.2 Telephone

In these organisations, the most significant challenges and barriers to telephone communication are language barriers, where individuals may not understand another's colloquial speech or accent. Additional challenges are distractions in the form of background noise or technical issues like bad signals and unclear lines. Further challenges are that one can neither see the nonverbal cues of body language, nor perceive the feelings or emotions of the person adequately. Individuals also cannot see visual material to explain or create context for on-the-spot questions, like drawing a diagram or process flow. There is no record of interaction, unless notes are taken or calls are recorded as per RICA, as noted in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.4.2.1). Availability, cost, and scheduling of infrastructure for teleconferences and people are further issues.

Table 5.20: Comments by respondents on the barriers to using telephone communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *barriers* to using *telephone* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Lack of personal contact (eye and body language)."
🔊 "Ability to provide graphical detail."
Company B
🔊 "Technical issues and network issues."
🔊 "May not understand the client's speech."

5.4.10.3 Email

When using email, the barriers that respondents in these organisations face are misunderstandings due to language barriers like incorrect grammar, use of colloquial or technical terms, and muddled paragraphs. Further challenges are too many emails, leading to the possibility of missing important emails and emails with content that takes too long to read, wasting production time. Emails not reaching the (intended) receiver because their email box is full, and technical problems like internet and network availability, also are barriers to the use of email. Additionally, recipients not responding to emails, requiring extra follow-up, and most importantly the lack of physical cues like body language, emotional state, and instant conversational feedback, are also barriers to the use of email communication. These barriers are confirmation of the literature in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.3.2.3).

Table 5.21: Comments by respondents on the barriers to using email communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *barriers* to using *email* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Time stolen from productive work to read often irrelevant email. Flooded by email reduces productivity. Lack of physiological response often leads to unintentional tension."
🔊 "Ability to Q&A while reading/discussing."
Company B
🔊 "Missing the email or email not reaching the (intended) receiver."
🔊 "Confusing paragraphs/misinterpretation."

5.4.10.4 Video conferencing

The results reflect that the barriers that these organisations face in video conferencing are aligned with the literature (see Section 2.4.2.3) as well as with each other. These barriers include: technical issues due to signals or networks influencing the quality of the video conference, causing misunderstanding due to delays in video; not being able to see nonverbal cues clearly or hear individuals clearly; one-sided sub-conversations can occur, disrupting the meeting, and resulting in individuals in other locations feeling left out; and availability, cost and scheduling of infrastructure.

Table 5.22: Comments by respondents on the barriers to using video conferencing communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *barriers* to using *video conferencing* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Can create misunderstandings and technology can be a challenge connecting, especially when there is a time delay when people speak."
🔊 "Lack of facilities (difficult to book VC rooms) and sometimes impersonal."
Company B
🔊 "Speech difficulties or hearing problems."
🔊 "Poor reception, bad quality of the video call, time difference."

5.4.10.5 Instant messaging

The data for IM for both organisations is aligned in terms of barriers that these organisations face and includes personal infringement, where individuals feel they are expected to be available to read work information at all times and use their personal data to keep up to date with work issues. Other barriers identified are a lack of nonverbal cues that can lead to misunderstanding of messages, the quick and instant response does not always provide context to messages, while typing errors on mobile devices can lead to misunderstanding. The constant messages and simultaneous responses from groups can be distracting and confusing, leading to over communication, and resulting in people ignoring the messages which defeats the purpose of the communication.

Table 5.23: Comments by respondents on the barriers to using instant messaging communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *barriers* to using *instant messaging* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Plenty of room for error with finger problems."
🔊 "Not enough context shared as it is a short message."
Company B
🔊 "For WhatsApp; no data/airtime."
🔊 "Easy to argue."

5.4.11 BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The media under discussion are the current communication channels in use at these two South African organisations and therefore have to offer some form of benefit, resulting in their continued use. The benefits as per the respondents are discussed below.

5.4.11.1 Face-to-face

The core benefits of face-to-face communication in these organisations are similar and aligned with the literature. They are clear real-time communication with visible nonverbal cues that add to the richness of the communication. The personal touch and relationship building that result in clearer understanding and trust between parties that communicate face-to-face are huge benefits, as they lay the foundation for future virtual and face-to-face communication and offer opportunities for open discussions and strategizing to make quicker decisions.

Table 5.24: Comments by respondents on the *benefits* of using *face-to-face* communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *benefits* of using *face-to-face* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "Pick up important information based on body language; immediate feedback given."
🔊 "Trusted and open discussions."
Company B
🔊 "Put the name to the face and see colleague's expression while communication or getting a point across."
🔊 "Visible body language, tacit learning and non-verbal communication."

5.4.11.2 Telephone

In telephonic communication, Company A's and Company B's respondents' opinions were aligned with each other and with the literature. This form of communication offered convenience at a low cost for direct one-on-one calls as well as a quick way to elaborate and give clarity on previous information sent via email to someone in a different location.

Respondents also felt some form of personal connection, as they could hear the other person's voice/s. It further saved time in going back and forth via written communication, with instant feedback. Telephonic communication works well in sharing information and provides great opportunities for clarifying any misunderstandings.

Table 5.25: Comments by respondents on the *benefits* of using *telephonic* communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *benefits* of using *telephonic* communication are:
Company A
◀)) "Can connect and hear voice and understand response when listening intently."
◀)) "Immediate feedback given and information sharing."
Company B
◀)) "Convenient."
◀)) "The message is delivered fast."

5.4.11.3 Email

Email in these organisations has the benefits of record keeping, reliable information sharing, low cost, and confirmation of decisions, discussions, and agreements. It also offers individuals the time to plan and strategize their communication, as well as share information with a wide audience.

Table 5.26: Comments by respondents on the benefits of using email communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *benefits* of using *email* communication are:
Company A
◀)) "To confirm something in writing – main form used.'
◀)) "Drafting mail and sending later, proof."
Company B
◀)) "Able to keep record of communication."
◀)) "Low cost, no print or postage cost."

5.4.11.4 Video conferencing

The data reflects that video conferencing has the following benefits for the organisations in this case study. Even with high data costs, it saves money in the form of reduced travel costs and provides a virtual alternative to face-to-face communication where individuals are able to experience, to some degree, nonverbal cues to enrich the communication. It also offers opportunities for rich discussions for large groups in diverse locations when emergency decisions are required and is therefore key in these organisations as they have vital decision makers in various geographical locations.

Table 5.27: Comments by respondents on the benefits of using video conferencing communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *benefits* of using *video conferencing* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "For emergency meetings."
🔊 "Can read physiological responses to [a] degree."
Company B
🔊 "Reduces travel time and costs."
🔊 "Eye to eye with someone in a different location."

5.4.11.5 Instant messaging

Instant Messaging (IM) offers these respondents the "virtual cooler" they require to build their relationships, with instant, informal communication. It also offers a platform to share information and concerns when emergencies arise, to assist team members in real- time situations.

Table 5.28: Comments by respondents on the benefits of using instant messaging communication

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *benefits* of using *instant messaging* communication are:
Company A
🔊 "To receive a quick response to a question or to check something."
🔊 "Able to track if messages were read and see feedback in an instant."
Company B
🔊 "It allows group communication and saves costs."
🔊 "Quick and is easily accessible."

5.4.11.6 Other

The other internal communication channels that these organisations use are project management systems called Jira and Asana®, which allow for allocation and tracking of work, enabling owners to take accountability.

Table 5.29: Comments by respondents on the benefits of using other communication channels

A few of the comments provided by respondents in their questionnaire on the *benefits* of using *other* communication channels are:
Company A
🔊 "Jira allows tracking of work and ensuring accountability."

5.5 Trust and shared identity

The core reason for requesting the information in Section C, as stated in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.2), was to determine how these organisations enhance trust among colleagues in virtual teams and how these organisations create a feeling of closeness, namely, a shared identity in virtual teams which feeds into enhancing trust as described in the literature (see Section 3.1).

5.5.1 Transparency and alignment

How well do leaders set a clear direction and help create a sense of a shared purpose?
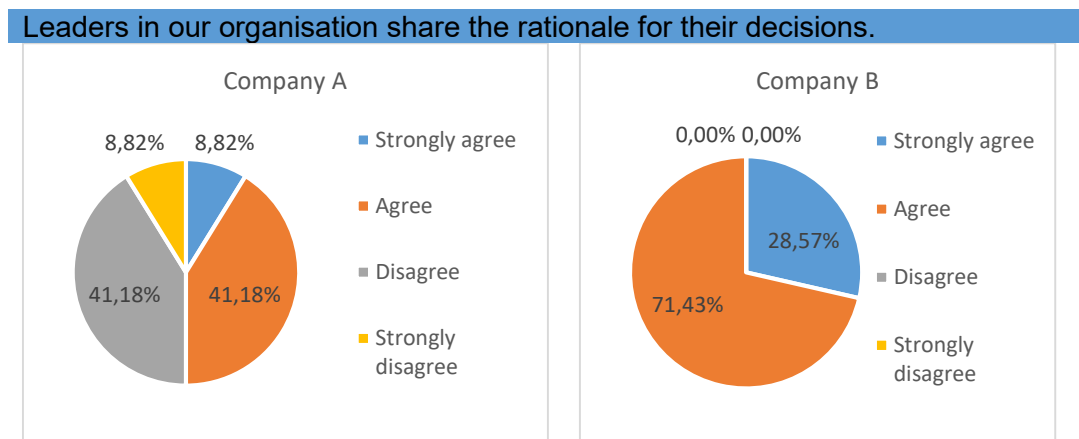

Leaders in our organisation share the rationale for their decisions.

Company A

8,82% 8,82%
41,18% 41,18%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Company B

0,00% 0,00%
28,57%
71,43%

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Figure 5.43: Company A – Share rationale   **Figure 5.44: Company B – Share rationale**

With regard to transparency and alignment, Company A respondents have mixed views, with only 50% (41.18 % + 8.82%) responding 'strongly agree' and 'agree' with their leaders sharing the rationale for their decisions, compared with Company B respondents who overwhelmingly feel positive about their management's style of sharing, with 100% (71.43% + 28.57%) responding, 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. The researcher feels this is critical for leaders to ensure buy-in and a sense of inclusion from their employees to affect trust positively, resulting in individuals focusing on the problem or goals to improve the quality of joint results, as team members see themselves as jointly accountable for the results they produce, as explained in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.1).
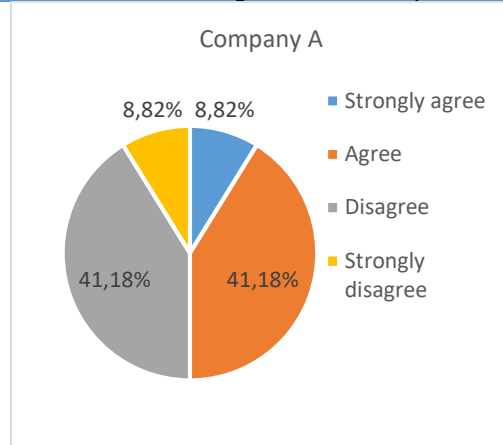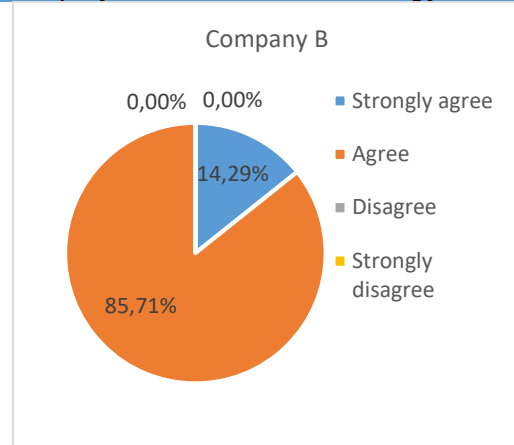
Figure 5.45: Company A – Connect

Figure 5.46: Company B – Connect

In relation to leaders in their organisations assisting employees with connecting their actions to the organisational strategy, Company A respondents have mixed views, with only 50% (41.18% + 8.82%) responding 'strongly agree' and 'agree', compared with Company B respondents who overwhelmingly feel positive about their management's style of sharing, with 100% (85.71 + 14.29%) of respondents responding, 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. The researcher believes that this result could indicate a breakdown in productivity and a sense of shared identity in Company A, as some individuals may not truly understand in what way their work or output fits into the strategy of the organisation, making them feel left out (see Section 3.1). In Company A, where the result is mixed, employees can use their performance review process in which they have to align their key performance areas with the larger organisational goals. The key driver is to have authentic conversations to ensure individuals actually understand the connection between what they do and the organisational strategy, and not just go through the process as a 'tick-box' exercise.
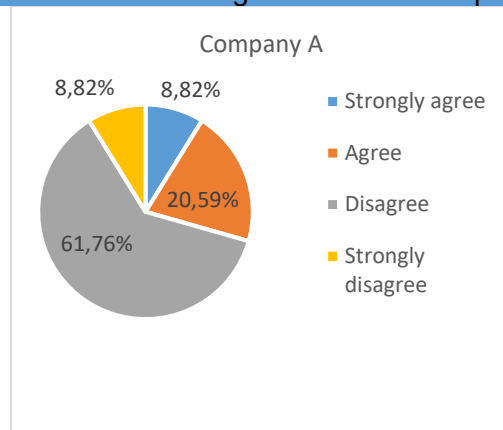
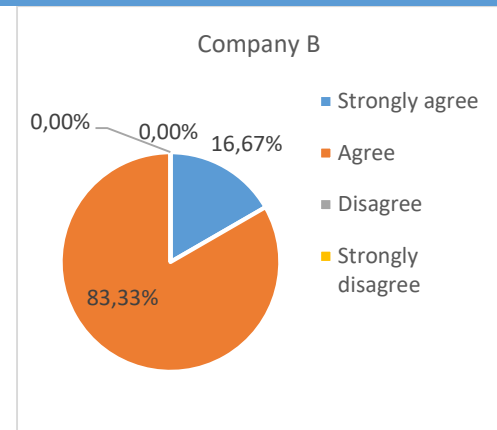**Figure 5.47: Company A – Involve**

Figure 5.48: Company B – Involve

With regard to leaders in their organisations involving employees in decisions that affect them, the majority of respondents in Company A had a negative view, with 70.58% (61.76% + 8.82%) responding 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree', compared with Company B respondents who feel positive about their management's style of involvement, with 100% (83.33% + 16.67%) responding 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. The researcher is of the opinion that this has a considerable effect on trust, especially in Company A, where the above results could lead to diminished teamwork, a decrease in productivity and an increase in emotional problems within the virtual teams (see Section 3.2.1), as individuals may not feel that their leaders have their best interests at heart.

Figure 5.49: Company A – Win-win solutions

Figure 5.50: Company B – Win-win solutions
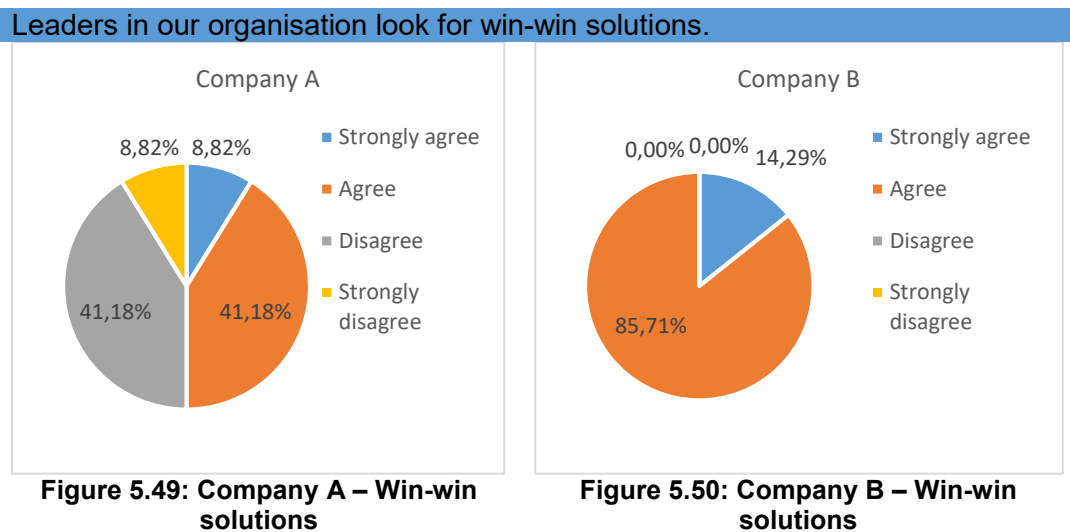
Concerning leaders in their organisations looking for win-win solutions, Company A respondents once again have mixed views, with only 50% (41.18% + 8.82%) responding 'strongly agree' and 'agree', compared with Company B respondents who predominantly feel positive about their management's style of cooperation, with 100% (85.71% + 14.29%) of respondents responding, 'strongly agree' and 'agree'.

The results reflect that Company B employees unanimously felt, with 100% 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses, that their management is open and shares the strategy with them by involving them as much as possible, with none of the respondents disagreeing with the above transparency and alignment statements. The researcher is of the opinion that this provides a great foundation for employees to understand how their work fits into the bigger picture and into the strategy of the organisation. It also builds trust in their leaders and teams. Company A, in comparison, provided a mixed response, where the respondents are split exactly in the middle, with 50% 'strongly agreeing' and 'agreeing' with how their leadership shares the rationale and connects what the employees are doing

to the strategy, as well as searching for win-win solutions for individuals and the company. However, a majority of respondents felt that they are not involved in the decision-making process. The researcher's view is that most employees in Company A understand 'where' the organisation is going and 'how' their work fits into the strategy, but they don't understand or agree with the 'why' of the decisions. This could put the company at risk of low performance and trust if their own employees do not 'buy into' their strategy because employees may feel disempowered by not being involved in the decision-making process.

5.5.2   Accountability, consistency, and predictability

Do leaders hold themselves and others accountable for being consistent in their actions and words?

Leaders in our organisation are consistent and predictable.
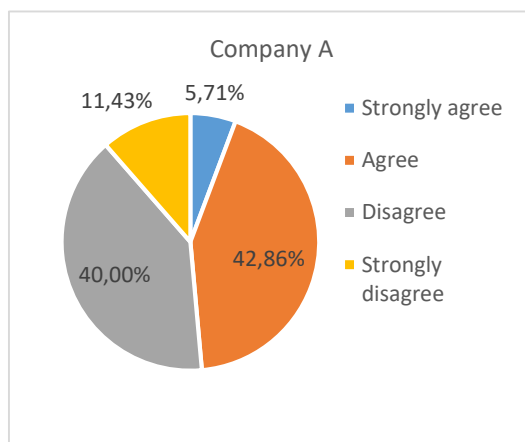
Figure 5.51: Company A – Consistent and predictable
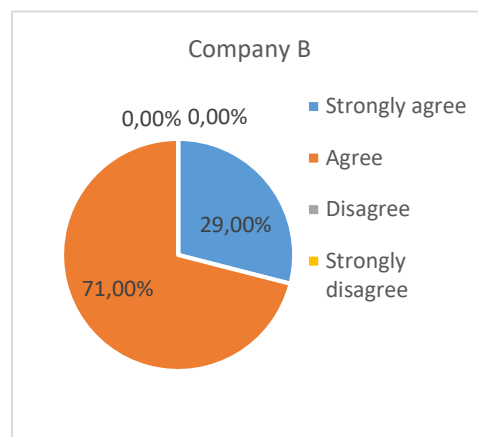
Figure 5.52: Company B – Consistent and predictable

In terms of consistency and predictability, respondents in Company A feel that leaders largely are not consistent and predictable in their communication, with 51.43% (40% + 11.43%) responding 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree', compared with Company B respondents who mostly feel optimistic about their management's reliability, with 100% (71% + 29%) responding, 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. The perception of reliability plays a big role in building trust among individuals as it affects the perception of risk in the relationship and in virtual teams is critical, as spontaneous opportunities to build trust are limited (see Section 3.2.2).
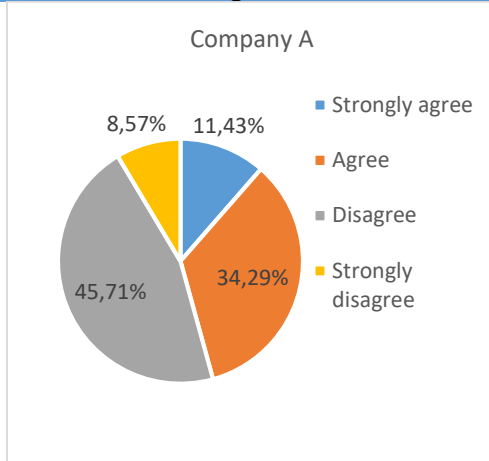
Figure 5.53: Company A – Accountability
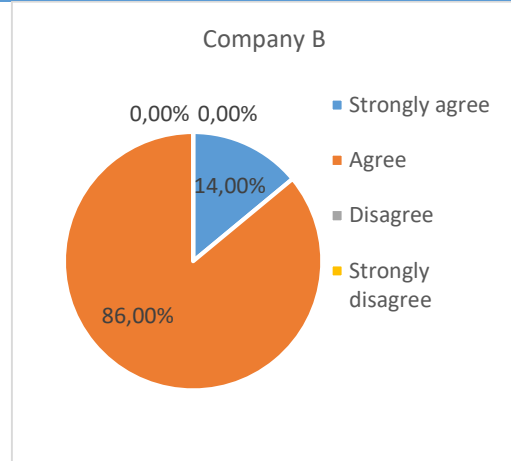
Figure 5.54: Company B – Accountability

The results for leaders holding themselves and others accountable reflect that respondents in Company A had mixed views, inclining to a negative, with only 45.72% (34.29% + 11.43%) responding 'strongly agree' and 'agree' and 54.28% (45.71% + 8.57%) responding 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree', compared with Company B respondents who largely feel positive about their management's sense of accountability, with 100% (86% + 14%) of respondents noting, 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. The view of accountability is important in trust as it affects the perception of integrity if employees are willing to be accountable for what they are responsible as stipulated (see Section 3.2.3.2).
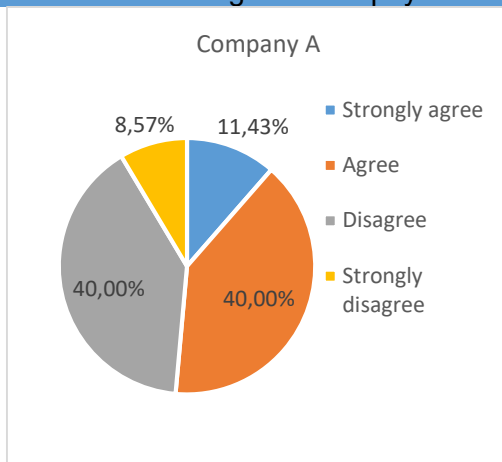
Figure 5.55: Company A – Results
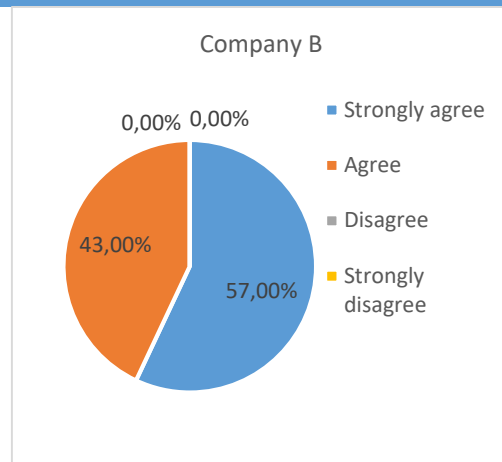
Figure 5.56: Company B – Results

When it comes to leaders in their organisations paying attention to how results are achieved, the data shows that respondents in Company A have mixed opinions, with only 51.43% (11.43% + 40%) responding 'strongly agree' and 'agree' compared with Company

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B respondents who principally feel confident about their management's approach to results, with 100% (57% + 43%) responding, 'strongly agree' and 'agree'. The perception of how management considers output is linked to the perception of benevolence, as individuals may feel that they are more than just a number to the manager as the manager considers the effort as well as the outcome, and this is vital in embedding trust (see Section 3.2.3.2).

In summary, the results reflect that Company B employees unanimously felt, with 100% 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses, that their management's style is predictably consistent, they take accountability and pay attention to how results are achieved, and they look at the innovation and initiative that went into achieving results. The higher the sense of predictability, consistency and accountability, in terms of delivery, the higher the sense of trust, as is aligned with the perceived "integrity, ability and benevolence" of an individual as explained in the literature review in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.2.3.2). The researcher agrees with the literature that high trust is linked to high performance (see Section 3.2.3.2) and has observed in both organisations during the case study that individuals that have higher trust in their management and colleagues have higher team output and performance, as they are willing to do whatever they can to achieve the team goals if they trust and feel affiliated with one another. In comparison, Company A respondents have a mixed response, with just over half 'strongly disagreeing' and 'disagreeing' with regard to their management's consistency, predictability, and accountability for their actions. The researcher's opinion is that the respondents' perceptions of predictability, consistency and accountability in their leadership will affect their trust in their leadership and ultimately their performance, as they will be more likely to be concerned with their own interests. This affects teamwork and collaboration negatively and could lead to low individual morale and employee engagement, prompting high employee turnover if employees are not happy.

5.5.3   Capability

How well do leaders' efforts improve the organisation's capacity to execute, so that people see their goals as challenging, but realistic?

Leaders in our organisation ensure people have the skills to succeed.
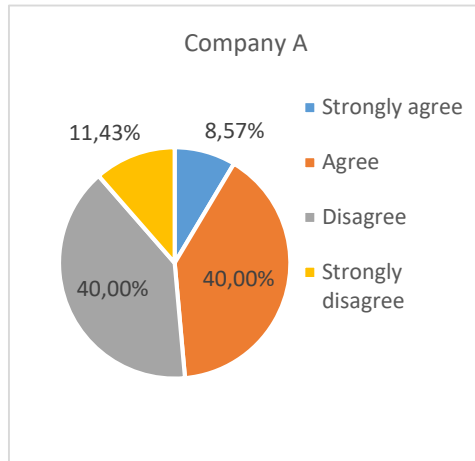
Figure 5.57: Company A – Skills
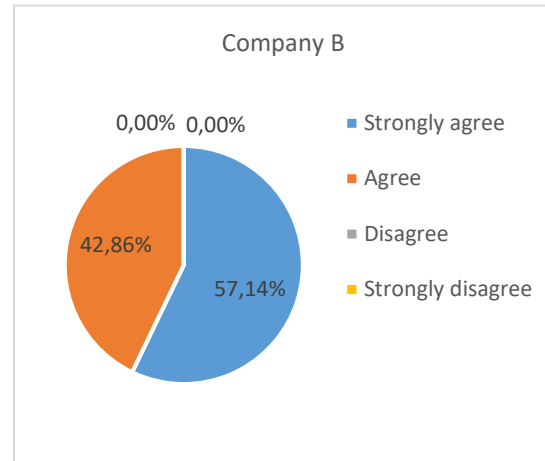
Figure 5.58: Company B – Skills

In Company A, 51.43% (8.57% + 40%) of respondents felt that their leaders do not ensure they have the skills required to succeed in their roles, in comparison with 100% (57.14% + 42.86%) of respondents in Company B that feel that their leaders guarantee they have the skills required to succeed in their jobs. This is linked to the ability of individuals to perform at their best, which affects trust among team members (see Section 3.2.3.2).

Leaders in our organisation provide opportunities to learn from experience.
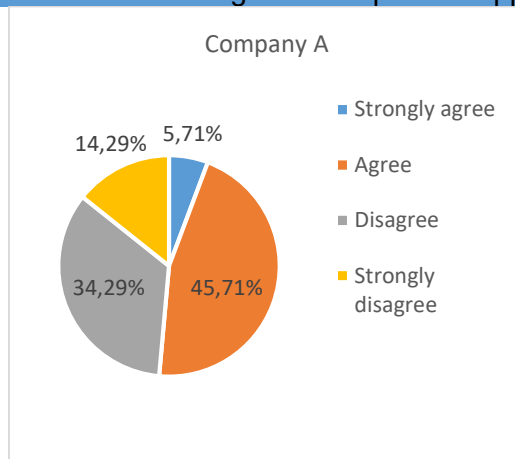
Figure 5.59: Company A – Opportunities
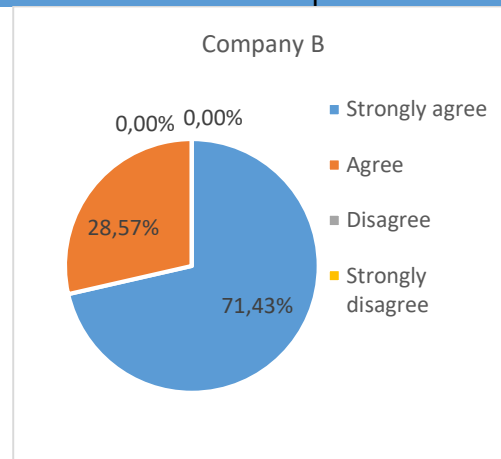
Figure 5.60: Company B – Opportunities

The results of leaders providing opportunities to learn from show that respondents in Company A were once again divided in their opinions, with a mere 51.42% (45.17% + 5.71%) responding 'agree' and 'strongly agree', compared with Company B respondents who yet again unanimously felt positive, with 100% (28.57% + 71 43%) responding 'agree' and 'strongly agree'. The researcher believes this perception is also linked to the ability of individuals to perform at their best, which undoubtedly affects trust through their view of management's 'benevolence'; in other words, their perception of management's setting them up for success and acting in their best interests (see Section 3.2.3.2).

Leaders in our organisation provide resources needed to complete tasks.
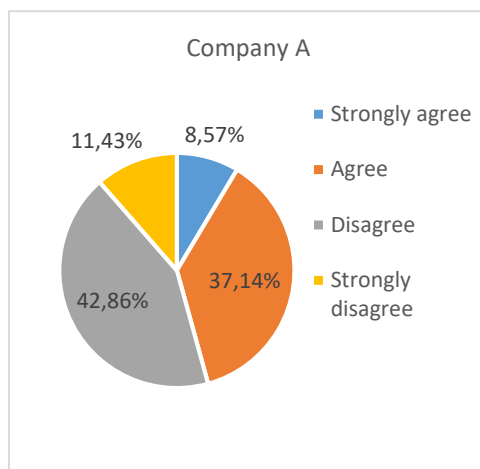
Figure 5.61: Company A – Resources   **Figure 5.62: Company B – Resources**
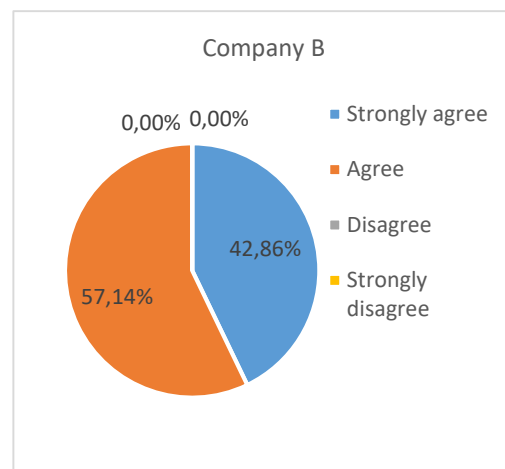
In terms of leaders providing resources needed to complete tasks, respondents in Company A were less positive in their opinions, with 54.29% (42.86% + 11.43%) responding 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree' compared with Company B respondents, who predominantly felt positive, with 100% (57.14% + 42.86%) responding 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

Company B's respondents once again unanimously felt, with 100% 'agree' and 'strongly agree' responses, that their management ensures they have the correct skills, resources and opportunities within their organisation to deliver on their goals; this is also aligned with trust in terms of enabling "ability" (see Section 3.2.3.2.) to consistently be able to provide optimal performance. The perception that management enables capability provides a strong link with higher trust, as respondents will feel that they are being set up for success by being provided with all they require to perform at their best. In contrast, Company A respondents once again had a mixed response, with just over half 'strongly disagreeing' and 'disagreeing' that their management enables 'ability' by providing sufficient skills,

resources, and opportunities to deliver their best. The researcher's opinion is that the respondents' perception of their leadership's enabling their capability will affect trust in their leadership, as they may feel they are being set up for failure through insufficient skills, resources, and opportunities.

5.5.4   Trust

The results were divided into the current state vs the desired state to determine the gaps between what the respondents felt they require compared with what they felt they actually have in terms of trust.

The first three questions were used as a basis to compare the current life outlook against trust in general. The positive responses in terms of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were captured in a graphical representation in Figure 5.63 below. The questions were:
1.   I believe most people are basically good and kind.
2.   I believe most people can be trusted.
3.   I believe most people trust others.
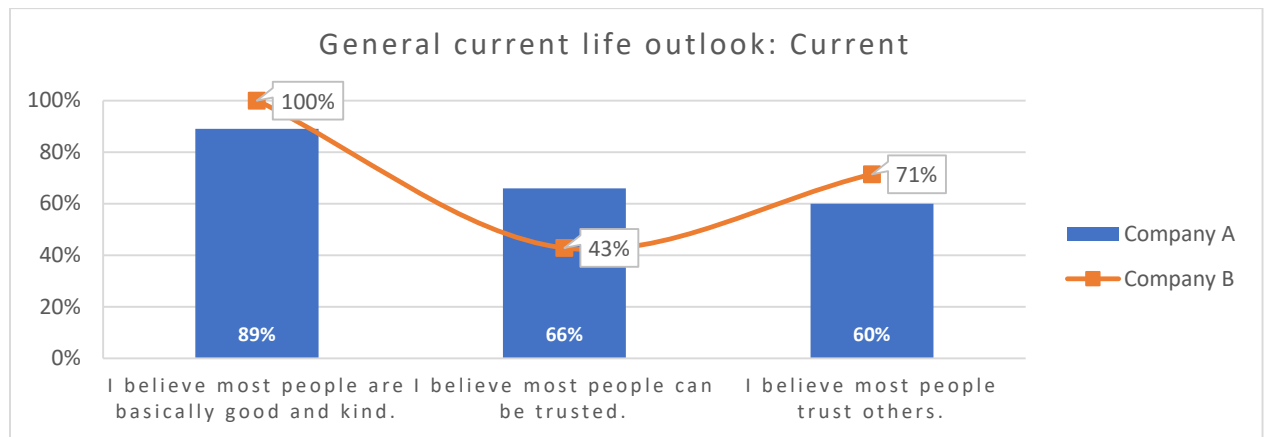
Figure 5.63: General trust outlook on life

Overall, Company A had an 89% (9% 'strongly agree' + 80% 'agree') and Company B a 100% (29% 'strongly agree' + 71% 'agree') positive outlook on trust in people; that people are good and kind, with Company B exhibiting an exception, where a minority of 43%(14% 'strongly agree' + 29% 'agree') felt that most people can be trusted and Company A had a more positive view at 66% (9% 'strongly agree' + 57% 'agree'). Respondents' views on believing most people trust others reflect that Company B has a 71% (29% 'strongly agree' + 43% 'agree') higher belief in people than respondents in Company A, with only 60% (6% 'strongly agree' + 54% 'agree').

In terms of the organisational outlook, the next four questions sought to elicit the current state of trust of respondents as depicted below in Figure 5.64.

1. That they trusted their direct manager.
2. That they trusted their virtual team.
3. That they trusted their co-located team.
4. That they trusted their organisational values.
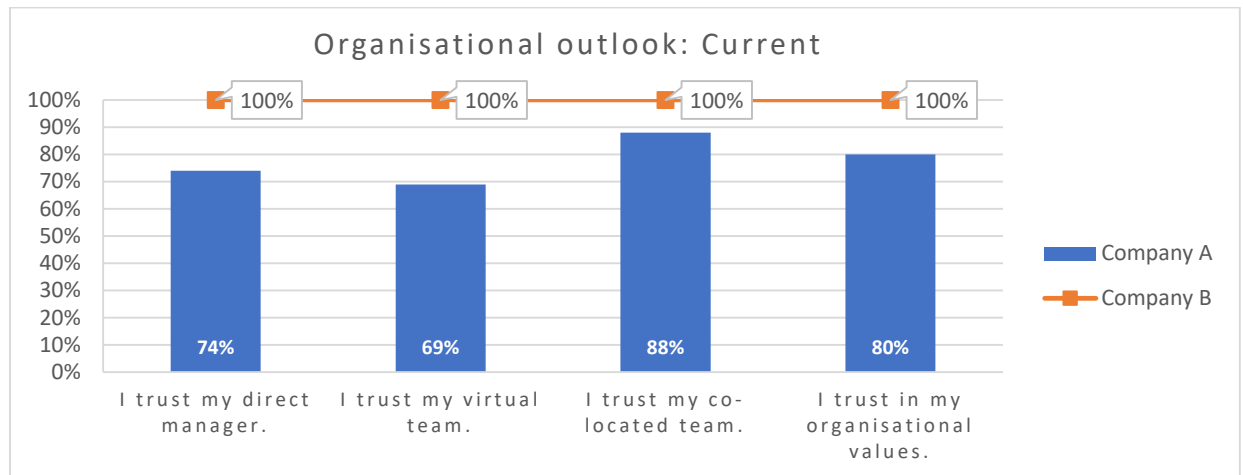
Figure 5.64: Current organisational trust

From an organisational outlook, overall Company A and Company B have a very positive outlook on trust; with Company A respondents exhibiting the highest trust in their co-located team members at 88% (9% 'strongly agree' + 79% 'agree') and lowest in their virtual team members at 69% (6% 'strongly agree' + 63% 'agree'). Additionally, the respondents only have a 74% (23% 'strongly agree' + 51% 'agree') trust in their direct managers, with a higher trust in the organisational values, namely 79% (18% 'strongly agree' + 62% 'agree') compared with Company B respondents' views on trust, which were more consistent at a 100% positive response as follows:

- they trusted their direct manager - (29% 'strongly agree' + 71% 'agree');
- they trusted their virtual team - (14% 'strongly agree' + 86% 'agree');
- they trusted their co-located team - (14% 'strongly agree' + 86% 'agree');
- they trusted their organisational values - (14% 'strongly agree' + 86% 'agree').

The last set of questions in the trust section was aimed at extracting the desired state of trust as a requirement for respondents to be able to perform their jobs effectively, as depicted below in Figure 5.65.

1. I feel trust in my direct manager is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job.
2. I feel trust in my virtual team is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job.
3. I feel trust in co-located team is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job.

4. I feel trust in my organisational values is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job.
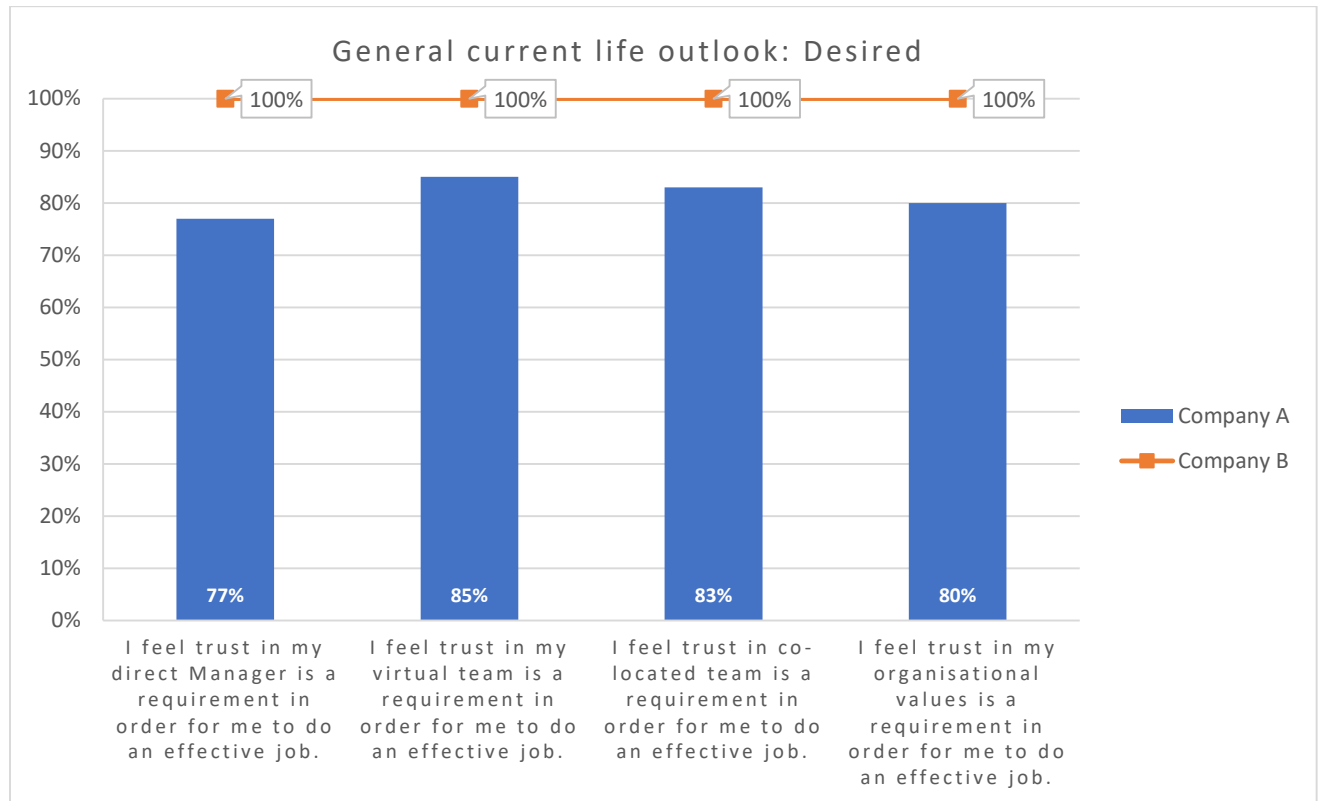
Figure 5.65: Desired organisational trust

In terms of the desired outlook of trust in the organisation, overall Company A and Company B had high trust expectations. Company A respondents exhibited the highest trust expectation in their virtual team members at 85% (29% 'strongly agree' + 56% 'agree'), compared with the actual trust in their virtual teams as displayed in Figure 5.64 above of 69%, which means more effort needs to be expended into creating that trusting environment within the virtual teams through more open sharing and involvement in virtual team goals by all virtual team members. The complete overall positive response is as follows for Company A:

- I feel trust in my direct manager is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job – 77% (46% 'strongly agree' + 31% 'agree');
- I feel trust in my virtual team is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job 85% - (29% 'strongly agree' + 56% 'agree');
- I feel trust in co-located team is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job 83% - (34% 'strongly agree' + 49% 'agree');
- I feel trust in my organisational values is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job 80% - (31% 'strongly agree' + 49% 'agree').

In Company B, respondents' expectations of trust throughout were constant at a 100% response as follows:

- I feel trust in my direct manager is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job - (57% 'strongly agree' + 43% 'agree');
- I feel trust in my virtual team is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job - (43% 'strongly agree' + 57% 'agree');
- I feel trust in co-located team is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job - (43% 'strongly agree' + 57% 'agree');
- I feel trust in my organisational values is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job - (43% 'strongly agree' + 57% 'agree').

In summary, the data reflects that there is a partial gap between the actual trust the respondents experience compared with the desired trust they expect or require to perform optimally in their roles. The researcher is of the opinion that this is linked to the views of Company A respondents, where they express a low sense of involvement, opportunities to learn, and capability, as discussed above in Section 5.5.1 and 5.5.3.

5.5.5   Identity

To demonstrate the link between trust and shared identify, the researcher categorised the three trust categories with three shared identity categories as follows:

1. Co-located team with direct team identification as a primary contact.
2. Virtual team with divisional team identification as a secondary contact.
3. Organisational values with organisational identity as a direct organisational link.

In the above context, in terms of identification, the results show that respondents primarily identity with their co-located team members within both organisations and have a strong sense of overall organisational identity. In Company A, 85.71% (14.29% 'strongly agree' + 71.43% 'agree') responded 'strongly agree' and 'agree' with identifying with their direct team (co-located), 71.43% (14.29% 'strongly agree' + 57.14% 'agree') responded 'strongly agree' and 'agree' with identifying with their divisional identity (virtual team) and 71.43% with their organisational identity (11.43% 'strongly agree' + 60% 'agree'). In Company B, 100% (57% 'strongly agree' + 43% 'agree') responded 'strongly agree' and 'agree' with identifying with their direct team (co-located), 57.14% (29% 'strongly agree' + 29% 'agree') responded 'strongly agree' and 'agree' with identifying with their divisional identity (virtual team) and 85.71% (28.57% 'strongly agree' + 57.14% 'agree') with their organisational identity.

To measure the link between trust and shared identity, the researcher compared three trust questions with three shared identity questions as follows:

1. Comparing trust in co-located team vs identification with direct team as a primary contact basis who would be most likely to have the most frequent and spontaneous interactions.
2. Comparing trust in virtual team vs identification with divisional team as a secondary contact basis who would be most likely to have the least frequent and spontaneous interactions.
3. Comparing trust in organisational values vs identification with organisational identity as a direct organisational link.

The positive responses in terms of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were captured in a graphical representation in Figure 5.66 below.
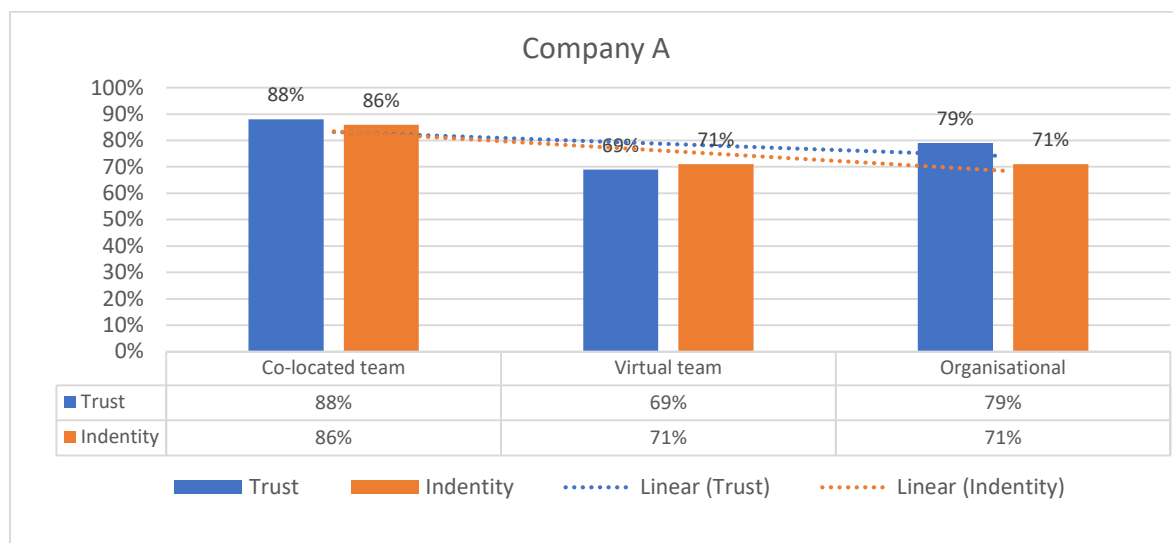
Figure: 5.66 Trust vs Identity – Company A

When analysing the data for Company A, there is a very strong link between the level of trust and the level of identity in the related categories, with a deviation of 2% in co-located teams, 2% in virtual teams and 8% in organisational trust and identity. The researcher is of the opinion that the above data confirms the literature that a strong sense of shared identity has a positive influence on trust (see Section 3.2.4 and 3.3.4).
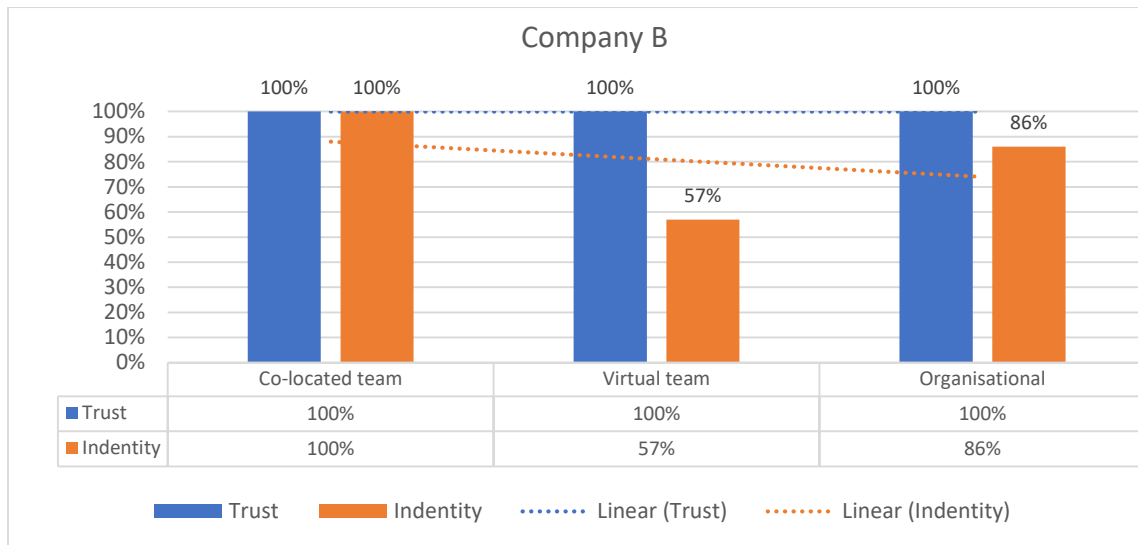
Figure: 5.67 Trust vs Identity – Company B

When analysing the data for Company B, there is a link between the level of trust and the level of identity in relation to co-located and organisational categories with a deviation of 0% in co-located teams and 14% in organisational trust and identity. The anomaly seems to be the link between trust and identity of virtual teams, where the deviation is 43%. The researcher is of the opinion that this could be as a result of the small size of the sample and that overall the data confirms the literature that a strong sense of shared identity has a positive influence on trust (see Section 3.2.4 and 3.3.4).

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter began with the main purpose of the research, which was to derive conclusions and recommendations based on the case study of these two organisations in South Africa with a focus on Company A then compared to Company B in order to establish consistencies or inconsistencies in results from a South African context through the respondents' experiences of and opinions on their communication practices in their organisations within their virtual teams. The chapter provided explanations and discussions of the findings from questionnaires. The discussions commenced with a quantitative analysis of the questionnaire, followed by a discussion of the views extrapolated from the qualitative research. Even though the study is limited to two organisations in South Africa, the researcher is of the opinion that the questionnaire still provided valuable data for the main purpose of this study, ultimately adding to useful local South African data in respect of virtual team communication.

The next chapter outlines the researcher's insights into and interpretation of the findings with regard to geographic dispersion influencing virtual team communication.

CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS: GEOGRAPHIC DISPERSION

"I think the success around any product is really about subtle insights. You need a great product and a bigger vision to execute against, but it's really those small things that make the big difference" (American businessman – Chad Hurley, 2019:1).

6.1   Introduction

In this chapter the researcher presents the findings of and insights into geographic dispersion as an influencing factor identified during the study on virtual team communication with specific focus on the South African context.

6.2   Geographic location

The researcher categorised locations according to the organisations' employee distribution to display the core characteristic of virtual teams, that is, geographical dispersion. The categories were Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, and branches. In Company A, respondents fell into each of the geographical categories as mentioned above, whereas in Company B, the respondents were only in the Gauteng and Western Cape groups.

6.2.1   Audience of communication

When evaluating the responses based on geographic location, respondents in Company A based at branches communicated equally with their co-located and virtual teams on all communication channels as they are based in proximity to their clients and are 100% virtual with no co-located team members. The respondents based in KwaZulu-Natal mainly communicated via face-to-face communication with their co-located team members; telephone and video conferencing were mainly used with virtual teams, while email and IM were predominately used equally with co-located and virtual team members. Their Gauteng counterparts largely communicated via all channels, that is, face-to-face, telephone conferencing, virtual conferencing, email, and IM communication with virtual and co-located teams alike. The respondents based in the Western Cape mainly used face-to-face communication with their co-located teams and video conferencing with their

virtual teams; they communicated equally with virtual and co-located teams via email and IM. They had mixed views on the main audience for telephonic communication.

In Company B, all respondents in all locations mainly communicated via face-to-face communication with their co-located team, telephone and video conferencing with their virtual team and email equally with their co-located and virtual teams. In terms of IM, the Gauteng respondents communicated mainly with their co-located team and the Western Cape respondents communicated equally with their co-located and virtual teams.

In both organisations, the main audiences per location group are graphically presented in Figure 6.1.
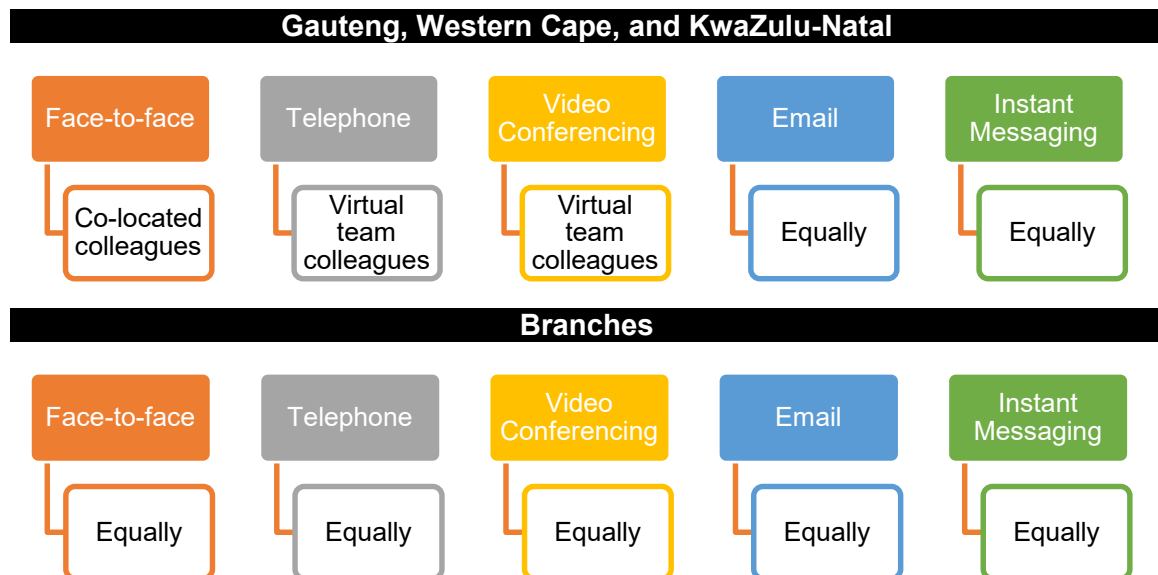
Figure 6.1: Audience per location category

6.2.2   Frequency of communication

The respondents based at the branches of Company A, equally used all the communication channels owing to their being 100% virtual. The respondents based in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng mostly used face-to face-communication, email, and IM, while their Western Cape colleagues communicated through email most frequently and video conferencing the least often.

In Company B, all respondents in all locations most often communicated through emails, with the Gauteng respondents equally using IM, and the Western Cape respondents communicating most frequently through face-to-face communication.

6.2.3   Quality of communication channels

In Company A, the respondents based at the branches were of the opinion that telephonic communication was practised the best, the KwaZulu-Natal respondents felt that face-to-face communication, email and IM were equally used most effectively, and the Gauteng and Western Cape respondents felt that face-to-face communication was incorporated most effectively.

In Company B, all respondents in all locations were of the opinion that face-to-face communication was used most effectively, with Gauteng respondents of the opinion that IM was used equally effectively.

6.2.4   Understanding/misunderstanding of communication using various channels

In Company A, the branch respondents felt that all communication channels resulted in some form of misunderstanding, whereas the KwaZulu-Natal respondents felt that telephonic communication, video conferencing and email communication resulted in the most misunderstandings. The Gauteng and Western Cape respondents felt that mainly emails resulted in misunderstandings.

In Company B, both groups felt that telephonic communication resulted in the most misunderstandings.

6.2.5   Quality of team communication

The respondents of Company A based at the branches and in the Western Cape felt that their virtual teams and co-located teams' quality of communication was equally mediocre to acceptable. A minority of the Western Cape respondents also felt that the freedom to express themselves with their virtual teams was on a very poor level. The Gauteng respondents, similarly, felt the quality of communication with their virtual teams was average, but felt that their co-located team members listened to them more and that they had more freedom to express themselves with their co-located team members. The KwaZulu-Natal respondents overall were positive about their virtual teams listening to them but felt negative regarding their co-located teams listening to them and having the freedom to express themselves in both virtual and co-located teams.

In Company B, the Gauteng respondents felt that their virtual and co-located teams listened to them more, but they had more freedom to express themselves with their co-located teams, whereas the Western Cape respondents felt that their co-located teams listened to them more and gave them more freedom to express themselves.

6.2.6 Flow of communication

In Company A, the Gauteng and Western Cape respondents largely felt that communication flow on all levels increased to some extent with a minority of 6% of Gauteng respondents feeling that communication flow from managers to employees decreased. The respondents based at the branches felt that the communication from employees to managers and between employees increased; however, they were also of the view that the communication flow from managers to employees did not change with the added use of technology. The KwaZulu-Natal respondents felt that communication flow from employees to managers and from managers to employees increased to a certain degree but felt that the communication flow between employees remained the same, regardless of the additional use of technology.

In Company B, the Gauteng opinion was largely positive, feeling that communication flow on all levels increased to some degree; however, a quarter of the respondents felt that communication flow on all levels did not change. The Western Cape respondents felt that all communication flows on all levels increased to some extent owing to the increased use of technology.

6.2.7 Speed of communication

In Company A, the Gauteng and Western Cape respondents largely felt that speed of communication on all levels increased to some extent. The respondents based at the branches felt that the speed of communication from employees to managers and between employees increased; however they were also of the view that the speed of communication from managers to employees did not change with the added use of technology. The KwaZulu-Natal respondents felt that the speed of communication from employees to managers and from managers to employees increased to a certain degree but felt that the speed of communication flow between employees decreased, even with the additional used of technology.

In Company B, the Gauteng opinion was more positive, that is, the speed of communication on all levels increased to some degree; however, on average 42% of the respondents felt that communication flow on all levels did not change compared with the Western Cape respondents, who felt that the speed of communication on all levels increased to some extent owing to the increased use of technology.

6.2.8 Appropriate communications technology and training in place

In Company A, most of the respondents in all locations felt that the organisation had the correct technologies in place; however, the KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape respondents felt more training was required compared with the branch and Gauteng respondents, who largely felt that the training was sufficient.

In Company B, the Gauteng respondents felt that the correct technologies were in place; however, the majority felt more training was required on these technologies, whereas the Western Cape respondents felt that the correct technologies were not in place and there was not sufficient training on the technologies used in the organisation.

6.2.9 Main purpose of communication channels

In both Company A and Company B, respondents on all levels identified similar core purposes for using the various communication channels as summarised in Table 6.1, with no predominant theme for any location.

Table 6.1: Summary of main purpose of communication channels

	Face-to-face:	
☝ Relationship building or to establish an initial connection with clients. ☝ Meetings to clarify any misunderstandings.		☝ To have in-depth discussions like project scoping, brainstorming and goal planning. ☝ Performance discussions, initial client meetings to create context and for decision making.
☝ Provide updates, for feedback. ☝ Provide clarification of misunderstandings of email.	Telephone:	☝ To share information and/or to resolve easy queries, as a follow-up to emails. ☝ A cheaper way to communicate with people in another location than

For quick confirmation of issues.		travelling for face-to-face communication.
A form of record keeping for legal and compliance reasons. Confirmation of oral discussions like decisions and agreements.	Email: 	Provide updates, for feedback, general communication and easy instructions or reference.
Communication to share information when travel in not possible owing to time and cost.	Video Conferencing: 	Quick updates and check-ins. Initial discussions for decision making or emergency decision making with groups of people based in different locations.
Quick informal check-ins to convey urgent messages.	Instant Messaging: 	Information sharing and feedback and easy assistance. To provide quick updates for operational groups for easy collaboration and troubleshooting.

6.2.10 Barriers of communication channels

In both Company A and Company B, respondents on all levels identified similar barriers when using the various communication channels as summarised in Table 6.2, with no predominant theme for any location.

Table 6.2: Summary of barriers of communication channels

	Face-to-face:	
☹ Lack of interest. ☹ Short attention span. ☹ Language barriers (English not first language). ☹ Confrontation owing to emotions. ☹ Disruptions (noise or people walking past).	Face-to-face:	☹ Misinterpreting body language. ☹ No automatic record of interaction (no automatic notes taken). ☹ Availability of people and rooms.
☹ Language barriers where individual may not understand the other's colloquial speech or accent. ☹ Distractions in the form of background noise, technical issues like bad signals and unclear lines. ☹ No nonverbal cues of body language.	Telephone:	☹ No visual material to explain or create context for on-the-spot questions, like drawing a diagram. ☹ No automatic record of interaction unless notes are taken, or calls are recorded, aligned with legislation. ☹ Availability, cost and scheduling of infrastructure and people for teleconferences.
☹ Misunderstanding due to language barriers like incorrect grammar, using colloquial or technical terms and confusing paragraphs. ☹ Too many emails leading to a possibility of missing important emails and emails not reaching the (intended) receiver because their email box is full.	Email:	☹ Email with content that takes too long to read, wasting production time. ☹ Technical problems like internet and network down. ☹ Recipients not responding to emails, requiring extra follow-up. ☹ Lack of physical cues like body language, emotional state and instant conversational feedback.
☹ Technical issues due to signal or network influencing the quality of the video conference causing misunderstanding due to delays in video. ☹ Not being able to see nonverbal cues clearly or hear individuals clearly.	Video Conferencing:	☹ One-sided sub-conversations can occur, disrupting the meeting, resulting in individuals in other locations feeling left out. ☹ Availability, cost and scheduling of infrastructure.

	Instant Messaging:	
☹ Personal infringement where individuals feel they are expected to be available to read work information at all times and/or use their personal data to keep up to date with work issues. ☹ A lack of nonverbal cues that can lead to misunderstandings in messages. ☹ The quick and instant response does not always provide context to the messages.		☹ Typing errors due to most people using mobile devices. ☹ The constant messages in groups can be distracting. ☹ Simultaneous responses in groups can be confusing, leading to over-communication resulting in people ignoring the messages.

6.2.11 Benefits of communication channels

In both Company A and Company B, respondents on all levels identified similar benefits when using the various communication channels as summarised in Table 6.3, with no predominant theme for any location.

Table 6.3: Summary of benefits of communication channels

	Face-to-face:	
☺ Clear real-time communication with visible nonverbal cues that add to the richness of the communication. ☺ Opportunities for open discussions and strategizing points to make quicker decisions.		☺ The personal touch and relationship building that results in clearer understanding and trust between parties that communicate face-to-face.
	Telephone:	
☺ Convenience at a low cost for direct one-on-one calls. ☺ A quick manner to elaborate and give clarity to previous information sent via email to someone in a different location. ☺ There is some form of personal connection as you can hear the other person's voice.		☺ Saves time from going back and forth in written communication with instant feedback where possible. ☺ Great to share information and provides opportunities to clarify any misunderstandings.

☺ Record keeping. ☺ Reliable, low-cost information sharing. Confirmation of decisions, discussions and agreements at a low cost.	Email:	☺ Offers individuals the time to plan and strategize their communication. ☺ Possible to share information with a wide audience.
☺ Even with high data costs, it saves money in the form of reduced travel costs. Offers opportunities for rich discussions for large groups in different locations when emergency decisions are required.	Video Conferencing:	☺ Provides a virtual alternative to face-to-face communication where individuals are able to experience, to some degree, nonverbal cues to enrich the communication.
☺ Offers the "virtual cooler" to build on relationships with instant information communication.	Instant Messaging:	☺ Offers a platform to share information and concerns when emergencies arise to assist team members in real-time situations.

6.2.12 Transparency and alignment

In Company A, the branch respondents were very positive in their view of their management's transparency and alignment in all aspects as described in the questionnaire, compared with the KwaZulu-Natal respondents, who were very negative in their views. The Gauteng respondents were more positive in their views of management's sharing the rationale for their decisions and looking for a win-win solution, but were negative in their views of management's assisting in connecting employee actions to the strategy and involving people in decisions that affect them. The Western Cape respondents were mainly negative in their views of management's transparency and alignment, but slightly more positive in their opinion of management's assisting in connecting employee actions to the strategy. The researcher feels that the performance review process that Company A uses is a great tool to enhance the employees' views of management's transparency and alignment, as it is based on open and authentic conversations and connects the organisational strategy to the individual's outcomes.

In Company B, both groups were unanimously positive regarding the transparency and alignment of their management.

6.2.13 Accountability, consistency and predictability

In Company A, the branch and KwaZulu-Natal respondents were very positive in their view of management's accountability, consistency and predictability in all aspects as described in the questionnaire, except for the KwaZulu-Natal respondents who were very negative in their views of management's consistency and predictability of their actions and communication. The Gauteng and Western Cape respondents were mostly negative in their opinion of management's accountability. Gauteng respondents were relatively more positive regarding management's consistency and predictability of their actions and communication, and the Western Cape respondents were more positive about management, noting how results are achieved compared with Company B, where both groups were equally positive regarding management's accountability, consistency and predictability.

6.2.14 Capability

In Company A, the branch respondents were very positive in their view of management's enabling capability in all aspects as described in the questionnaire, compared with the KwaZulu-Natal respondents, who were very negative in their views. The Gauteng and Western Cape respondents were mostly negative in their opinions of management's enabling capability, with the exception of management's providing opportunities to learn from experience, which showed a more positive view.

In Company B, both groups were equally positive regarding management's enabling capability.

6.2.15 Trust

In Company A, the respondents based at the branches and in Gauteng and the Western Cape, were predominantly positive regarding trust in all aspects as described in the questionnaire, apart from the branch respondents who felt that trust in their direct managers was not a requirement for them to perform their job. The respondents based in KwaZulu-Natal were largely negative in their views of current trust in their organisation

and life in general, but very clear that they required a high degree of trust to perform their jobs effectively.

In Company B, all respondents had a very positive view of the trust in life outlook, organisational current trust perception and what trust they desire in the organisational context, apart from both groups' views on whether most people can be trusted. Gauteng respondents had mixed responses and Western Cape respondents had a mainly negative view.

6.2.16 Identity

In Company A, the branch and KwaZulu-Natal respondents were equally very positive in their identification with virtual teams, co-located teams, and organisational values. The Gauteng and Western Cape respondents were mostly positive as well, with Gauteng equally mainly identifying with co-located teams and organisational values, and the Western Cape respondents mainly identifying with their co-located teams.

In Company B, both groups identified with their co-located teams primarily. The Gauteng respondents equally identified with their organisational values and were positive regarding their virtual team identification compared with the Western Cape respondents who were slightly less positive about identifying with their organisational values and virtual teams.

6.2.17 Overall summary

Regarding a high-level overview within both organisations, the researcher highlighted only differences within the locational groups. Overall, within both organisations, organisational communication based on location displayed the following:

Table 6.4 Geographic location: Overall summary

1. Audience of communication	The *branches* are 100% virtual and communicate with co-located branches in the same provinces that can be driven to and with virtual teams' branches across the country; therefore they equally communicated with their virtual and co-located teams across all communication channels.

2.	Quality of communication channels	• The *branch* groups felt that the quality telephone communication was good.
3.	Understanding/misunderstanding of communication using various channels	• Because the *branch* groups used the telephone the most, it seems understandable that they also feel that it results in the most misunderstandings.
4.	Quality of team communication	• The *branches* were neutral and felt both virtual and co-located teams were acceptable only. • The *KwaZulu-Natal* group felt their virtual team listened more but that they didn't feel they had the freedom to communicate freely in both virtual and co-located teams.
5.	Flow of communication	• A small minority of the *Gauteng* group felt that the flow of communication from managers to employees decreased. • The *KwaZulu-Natal* group felt that there was no change to the flow of communication between employees. • The *branches* felt that there was no change to the flow of communication from managers to employees.
6.	Speed of communication	• The *KwaZulu-Natal* group felt that the speed of communication between employees decreased. • The *branches* felt that there was no change to the speed of communication from managers to employees.
7.	Appropriate communications technology and training in place	• The *branches* group felt that was sufficient training in place compared with the other groups.
8.	Transparency and alignment	• In the *KwaZulu-Natal groups*, none of the respondents felt positive overall regarding management's transparency and alignment of communication to the strategy and operational output.
9.	Accountability, consistency and predictability	• In the *KwaZulu-Natal* respondents, none of the respondents felt positive about the predictability and consistency of management's actions.

10. Capability	• In the *KwaZulu-Natal* group, none of the respondents felt positive about management's enabling capability in all aspects.
11. Trust	• In the *Western Cape* group, only 47% had a positive outlook on whether most people can be trusted. • In the *branches* group, none of the respondents trusted in their organisational values or felt that trust in their direct managers was required for them to perform their jobs efficiently.

The KwaZulu-Natal and branch groups differed the most from the rest of the groups, overall, as displayed in the above table. A small minority of the *Gauteng* group felt that the flow of communication from managers to employees decreased and in the *Western Cape* group only 47% had a positive outlook on whether most people can be trusted.

6.3   Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher provided findings of and insights into geographic dispersion as an influencing factor identified during the study on virtual team communication with specific focus on the South African context. The aim of this chapter was to analyse if geographic dispersion influenced communication in virtual teams. The interpretations were required for the researcher to answer all the research questions and provide recommendations, discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Introduction

In this chapter the researcher presents the concluding findings for each research question as well as limitations from the research study.

The outcomes of the research study have resulted in the identification of challenges and success stories about communication practices in virtual teams in two organisations in South Africa with a focus on Company A then compared to Company B to establish consistencies or inconsistencies of results in the South African context. This study has attempted to provide a background to the current communication practices and complexities within virtual teams in the South African context.

This study aimed to analyse business communication practices among virtual teams and recommend effective and efficient guidelines to improve the use of communications technology practices to enhance trust and to build one shared identity within organisations in South Africa.

This chapter concludes with the link to the research questions and recommendations made relating to business communication in virtual teams in organisations in South Africa.

7.2   Research Questions: Conclusions and recommendations

In Chapter 1, four subsidiary research questions were formulated to focus on the research problem (see Section 1.4). The subsidiary research questions directed the research and supplied vital data that influenced the final outcome of the study, namely, the recommendations relating to business communication in virtual teams in the organisations studied in South Africa. In the subsequent sections, the subsidiary research questions are re-evaluated in conjunction with the key conclusions resulting from each research question.

7.2.1   Research question one

How do the organisations apply business communication practices in virtual teams?

To identify corporate communication practices and challenges in the organisations, the researcher commenced with a wide-ranging literature study in Chapter 2 on global communication practices within virtual teams. The literature covered the core channels in virtual teams, namely, face-to-face and virtual communication (see Section 2.2), how these channels and technology influence these communication practices (see Section 2.3) and barriers or challenges that affect communication practices in organisations (see Section 2.4). The literature advises that face-to-face communication will always be the preferred communication, as it offers the best stimuli to all senses, thus resulting in a stronger human connection and thereby enriching the overall communication.

However, as the literature further clarifies in this ever-evolving global village that business has become, integrating virtual teams into organisations is inevitable to remain competitive. The key factor is how to adjust the standard way of work in the virtual context without affecting team trust and productivity negatively. This is done through the use of communications technologies such as email, telephone, video conferencing and IM. However, simply making use of these communications technologies does not necessarily lead to effective communication within virtual teams; therefore, guidelines and clear practices are essential for organisations in the use of communications technologies in their virtual teams in order for the communications technologies not to become a barrier to general communication within organisations.

When examining the barriers and challenges in virtual team communication, the literature advises that there are many factors that could influence the quality of communication, such as gender variances, generational differences, ethnic diversity, language variances, lack or absence of trust, noise, and information overload. In this study, the factors focused on were communications technologies and geographic dispersion.

The study revealed that the organisations in this study incorporated adequate communications technologies but did not incorporate sufficient training on the technical aspect of utilising these technologies or take into consideration how the softer issues like trust and shared identity influenced the manner in which these technologies are used in their communication practices.

The researcher's recommendation is summarised in Figure 7.1 below.
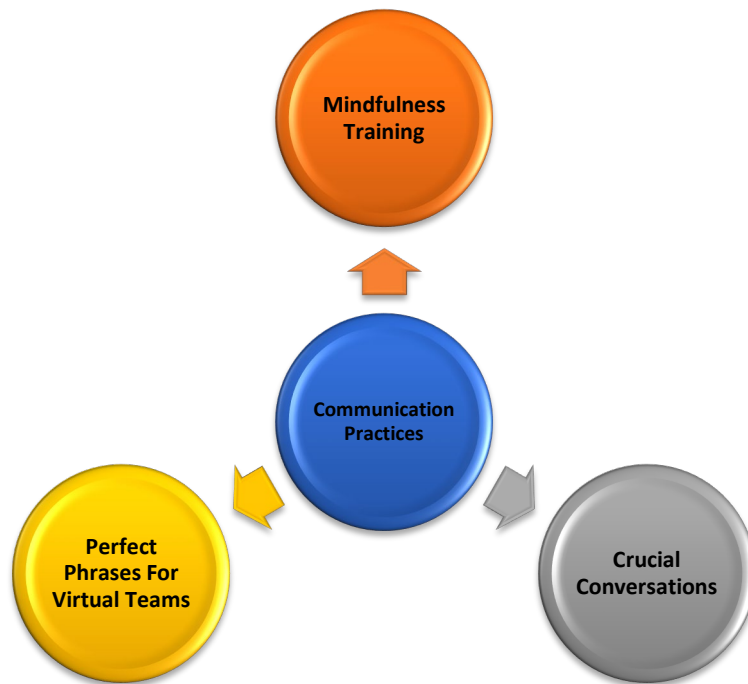
Figure 7.1: Communication Practices

The researcher recommends that management address the softer issues and not only the technical requirements to sustain virtual teams, as the organisations have the technical expertise to sustain virtual teams. The biggest challenge, however, is that virtual teams are treated as entities that individuals do not have control over rather than as opportunities they need to embrace. The most impactful transformation would be to shift the mind-set, and this can only be done through providing individuals with the tools, both technical and psychological, to equip them for change.

The literature as well as the findings indicate the best solutions create a sense of belonging or connection, using clear words to avoid misunderstandings, not using slang in mixed language groups, learning methods to manage emotions, and building trust to enable highly stressful situations to be dealt with effectively.

The researcher recommends the following practical tools based on experience and observance in the organisations studied, training or workshops, such as the following:

1. *Crucial Conversations* by Patterson et al. (2012), where individuals are provided with tools to have authentic conversations when they have different opinions, emotions are high and the "stakes are high" through:
   - starting with a mutually beneficial stance,
   - sticking to the facts and not letting your opinions influence the situation, and
   - creating a safe space to have these conversations.

This enables trust as the core of this training is creating a "safe" trusting environment to have authentic communication. It also assists with managing emotions during communications as one has to stick to actual observed actions rather than perception of a situation.

2. *Perfect Phrases for Virtual Teams* (Runion & McDermott, 2012:10,21,22), where phrases or conversational wording are provided for various scenarios to enable individuals to embrace being part of a virtual team rather than reject it, for example:
   - Phrases to introduce collaborative potential in a notice/email to employees: "How are you using our online network? Post to this discussion and share your wins and best practices." (Runion & McDermott, 2012:10).
   - Phrases to determine team goals to ensure all team members feel included: "Based on the discussion, we formulated recommended preliminary goals …". "Let's each describe the preliminary goals to the best of our understanding to make sure we're on the same page" (Runion & McDermott, 2012:21, 22).

These methodologies can foster a sense of shared identity, making the employee feel part of the decision-making process to emplace virtual teams better. This training is an example of methodologies to be used and updated versions should be explored.

3. *10-Minute Mindfulness: 71 Habits for Living in the Present Moment* (Scott & Davenport, 2017): training to provide individuals with tools to overcome negativity, stress and anxiety by living in the present moment, thereby enabling them to plan for the future. For example:
   - Morning Mindfulness habits – Wake up early to plan for reflection and the day ahead or practise breathing exercises to connect the body to the mind (Scott & Davenport, 2017:36).
   - Afternoon Mindfulness habits – Practise "slow work" – focus on quality, not speed and give yourself the opportunity to acknowledge the sense of accomplishment for completing the work (Scott & Davenport, 2017:122).
   - Evening Mindfulness habits – "Mindfully end your workday" to open your mind to shift to your evening routine, for example, just before you leave the office, sit at your desk and "close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and think about all you accomplished during the day". Acknowledge and be grateful for what you produced that day (Scott & Davenport, 2017:168).

This tool will enable the individual to be more aware of themselves and others in terms of actions, words, etc. and can assist when dealing with virtual team members more efficiently through concise meaningful communication and not waste time and productivity.

7.2.2   Research question two

What communications technology practices are used in business communication in virtual teams to determine current technology practices and challenges in the organisations?

The researcher's recommendation is summarised in Figure 7.2 below.
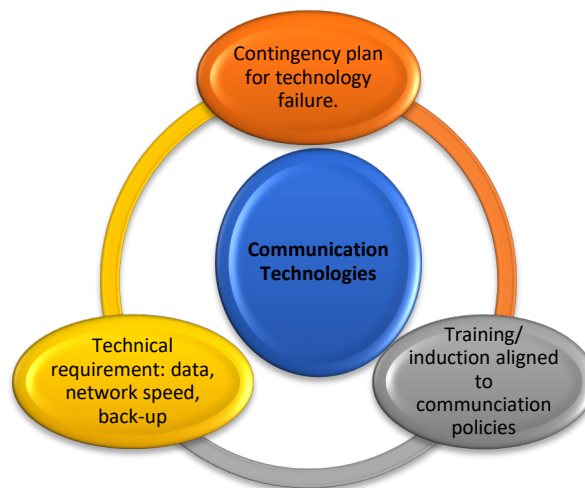
Figure 7.2: Communications Technologies

As part of the literature review in Chapter 2, the researcher established what the most common communications technologies used in virtual teams are (see Section 2.3.2), and what their benefits (see Section 2.3.2) and challenges are (see Section 2.4.2). Aligned with the existing research, the results showed that the organisations in this study incorporated most of the common technologies for virtual teams, namely, email, telephone communications, video conferencing and IM (see Section 5.4.2).

The main benefits and challenges indicated through the data are also aligned with the literature and are summarised as follows:

Table 7.1: The main benefits and challenges aligned with the literature

Telephone	☹ Language barriers ☹ Distractions ☹ Technical problems ☹ Lack of nonverbal cues ☹ Availability, cost and scheduling of infrastructure and people	☺ Convenience ☺ Low cost ☺ Quick manner to elaborate and give clarity on previous information ☺ A form of personal connection through the voice ☺ Saving time from going back and forth in written communication – instant feedback ☺ Opportunities to clarify any misunderstandings
Email	☹ Language barriers ☹ Too many emails ☹ Technical problems ☹ Not responding to emails ☹ Lack of nonverbal cues	☺ Record keeping ☺ Time to plan and strategize their communication ☺ Share information with a wide audience
Video Conferencing	☹ Technical problems ☹ Lack of nonverbal cues ☹ One-sided sub-conversation ☹ Availability, cost and scheduling of infrastructure and people	☺ Cheaper than travel ☺ Virtual alternative to face-to-face communication ☺ Opportunities for rich discussions for large groups in different locations
Instant Messaging	☹ Personal infringement ☹ Lack of nonverbal cues ☹ No/little context ☹ Typing errors ☹ Simultaneous responses	☺ The "virtual cooler" – build relationships ☺ Instant informal communication

The researcher recommends that management focus on technical training/induction on how to use the relevant technologies aligned with company communication policies or methods of work. All features of a given technology may not be applicable in every situation, for example, unless it is an emergency, no instant messages after work hours, no chain messages or large social files on work chats, as they may take up space on individuals' devices and use up their personal data. The importance of the context and in what situations the technologies should be used is sometimes overlooked by management; therefore, training should include the "when" to use the technologies as well.

As mentioned above, training should also cover when to communicate using the various channels; formally communicating or sharing the main purpose for each platform aligned with organisational policies is vital and should not be underestimated. This is confirmed by the respondents' suggestions (see Section 5.4.9). For example:

- Email is used as the main form of communication to initiate a request, also serving as a platform for proof of documentation.
- Telephone is used mainly for follow-up or as an initial introduction to determine if an in-depth engagement is required.
- Video conferencing is used as a once-off visual engagement, or only after an initial face-to face engagement has been established.

Management should also ensure sufficient technical requirements are met for the relevant technologies in place in order to benefit the virtual team, for example, if you are using voice-over internet protocol (VoIP) or video conferencing, ensure the network speed is sufficient to enable clear and uninterrupted communication, as highlighted in the respondents' challenges with technology (see Section 5.4.10).

It is also vital to ensure there are contingency plans in place if the technology fails, so that business can continue; for example, if the video call fails, or is of poor quality, switch to teleconferencing or a live chat group to continue, or at the very least conclude the engagement with actionable next steps. Transmission of work also needs to be backed up in case of technology failure, for business to restore at a later stage for business continuity.

7.2.3   Research question three

How do the organisations enhance trust between colleagues in virtual teams?

The researcher's recommendation is summarised in Figure 7.3 below.
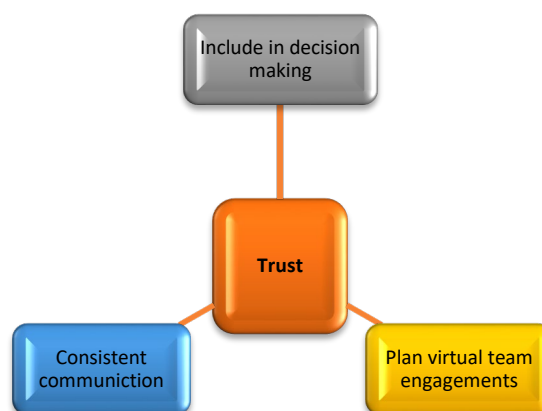
Figure 7.3: Trust

The research has widely established that trust is essential for ideal cooperation in teams, particularly virtual teams, and shared identity fosters trust in teams (see Section 3.1). The research further advises that in a virtual team, developing trust over distance is a great challenge as it lacks some main elements that are said to enable the improvement of trust, like frequent face-to-face exchanges, common involvement, and an emotionally safe communication environment (see Section 3. 2.3).

In virtual teams, most members will not have prior history together and thus establishing trust can be problematic. In swift trust (see Section 3.2.3), people tend to trust those similar to themselves or those that have been proved through experience to be trustworthy. There is a strong link in virtual teams to trust and shared identity, as people with no or little history together depend on a sense of similarity (category-based swift trust – see Section 3.2.3.1) and those similarities form a sense of shared identity, even on a temporary level, for example, wearing the same colour for the day can bring a sense of shared identity for that purpose.

The results reflect that the trust levels in these organisations are acceptable; however, more work can be done to improve this, as recommended below.

The researcher recommends that management focus on practices that include employees in decision making as far as possible; where not be possible, ensure mechanisms are in place for extensive and consistent communication to clarify how the decision came about to get buy-in and support upfront. Not providing a channel to gain buy-in from employees could lead to efforts spent on the wrong aspects of engagement, and by the time the efforts is required elsewhere, both parties are exhausted, and the results are mediocre.

Management should incorporate more structured plans for communication platforms for various reasons, as the predictability of the communication leads to trust, if authentic conversations are taking place. These could include engagements planned according to time frames; and weekly social check-ins before an operational meeting – a "how are you doing" not work-related conversation via video conferencing makes employees feel like a holistic person in the work context and not as another tool in the business. Consistent engagements will build trust to the extent that people can feel comfortable to say, "I am not OK and am not ready to talk about it." A safe space is provided with added trust. Another example of time-based engagements are annual face-to-face engagements – team building, awards dinners, and strategy planning with a social event.

Engagements can also be planned aligned with situations, for instance, when stress is high:

- Plan a quick break to reset the team with a simple team game of 30 seconds.
- An hour's lunch as a team with no work talk via video conferencing.
- Additionally, situational engagements can be rewards aligned with a predetermined milestone where the team gets a half day off, or meal vouchers for the family sponsored by the company, or a desk drop with a thank-you chocolate as a morale booster.

These examples address the needs of the employee as an individual as well as a team member.

7.2.4 Research question four

How do the organisations create a feeling of closeness, namely, a shared identity in virtual teams?

The researcher's recommendation is summarised in Figure 7.4 below.

Figure 7.4: Shared Identity

Established in the literature review in Chapter 3, is the role of shared identity in virtual teams (see Sections 3.2.4 and 3.3.4). Generally, establishing shared identity grows over time and usually with regular face-to-face interaction. Therefore, in virtual teams it is more difficult to develop shared identity because of the limited or no face-to-face engagement and predominant communication via technology.

Furthermore, shared identity is an evolving, dynamic element of a team (see Section 3.3.2). A healthy shared identity between team members can be linked to a reduction in conflict – predominantly relational conflict. Moreover, individuals who identify more with their teams are inclined to better performance, higher trust, cooperation, confidence, and personal satisfaction.

The results show a high level of shared identity in co-located teams compared with their virtual team members, and the researcher believes this is a direct link to the mediocre trust levels in these organisations. Employees view their virtual team members as an inevitability that they do not have control over. The organisations and co-located identities balance out and feed into the virtual team identity; however, the researcher feels that virtual team identity will not be authentic without trust, and engagement among team members will feel like an effort rather than a natural occurrence. For this reason, the researcher recommends, based on their experience of the organisational culture in both organisations studied, that management focus on building trust, which will result in stronger virtual team identity, in addition to the following suggestions:

- Include employees in decision making as far as possible to create buy-in to the final decision and for employees to feel part of the process.
- Actively search for similarities in virtual teams and use these as a bonding mechanism. Where there are no similarities, create a new team-bonding activity to establish a team identity, for example, create an informal team blog for fun that each team member contributes to, providing a platform for them to share their experiences.
- Focus more on rewarding the whole team for collaboration over individual performance to foster a sense of togetherness.

7.3 Geographic dispersion as an Influencing factor

The study also investigated whether geographic dispersion influenced communication practices in virtual teams. The results show that it does in fact influence virtual team communication as the differences impact the preference and frequency of use of a communications technology, summarised as follows:

- The location results showed that the KwaZulu-Natal branch groups differed the most from the rest of the groups, with KwaZulu-Natal being considerably more pessimistic in their views and the branch respondents more optimistic in their views. The overall mind-set affects how these individuals approach the use of technology, for example, overuse of emails and IMs to avoid actual face-to-face or virtual face-to-face in the form of video conferencing communications because of underlying trust issues.

7.4 Importance of the research

The significance of the study is to provide information to management about their current business communication practices and guidelines to improve them. It further offers

insights into the opportunities to enhance trust and shared identity among virtual team members, as well as adding much-needed research data on virtual teams in the South African context. The researcher has incorporated features regarded as best practice from two organisations in South Africa, but also the recommendations and suggestions of respondents. The communication practices are not only based on sound theoretical perspectives and principles (as discussed in the literature review), but also provide a more practical approach to communication practices in the business environment that could be useful to South African organisations with virtual teams.

The study focused on communication practices in virtual teams in organisations in South Africa, which is a unique aspect, owing to limited research done in the South African context. Therefore, this study is not only applicable to the two organisations studied, but also to other organisations in the South African environment.

The principles of virtual communication practices may be applicable to other organisations in South Africa with similar challenges in their communication practices. First, management need to understand the existing communication practices in their virtual teams, then align with best practices in the South African context as the data reflects (see Sections 5.4.9, 5.4.10 and 5.4.11):

- Establish and communicate the organisation's main purpose for using a specified communication channel, for example:
  - Face-to-face: Relationship building or to establish an initial connection with clients. The results show that majority of respondents prefer the face-to-face interaction and thus this should be used as far as possible in communications, with the rationale that each interaction contributes to the building and sustaining of team relationships and trust that directly influences team productivity.
  - Telephone: To share information and/or to resolve easy queries, as a follow-up to emails. In the South African context this is immediately used as a secondary method of communication when face-to-face communication is not possible for quick discussions and urgent matters. The quality of the communication increases in smaller groups that have some form of previous communication established.
  - Video Conference: Communication when travelling is not possible owing to time and cost to share information. This means of communication is used mainly for formal meetings where face-to-face communications are not possible. The results also show that the quality of the communication increases in smaller groups with a good quality connection for the physical cues, like body language, tone of voice, etc. to benefit the communication.
  - Email: A form of record keeping for legal and compliance reasons. From the study it shows that this is the most frequently used form of communication on a daily basis and that specific focus should be placed in

ensuring proper context is created with clear expectations and deadlines in emails to avoid misunderstandings.

- o <u>Instant Messaging</u>: Quick informal check-ins to convey urgent messages. The study also reveals that this is mainly used between individuals who are comfortable with each other and have communication by other means previously, due to the informal nature of IMs.

- ▪ Identify technology barriers/challenges and put plans in place to overcome them, for example:

  - o <u>Face-to-face</u>: Disruptions (noise or people walking past) – put in place soundproof meeting rooms for important face-to-face discussions. The results and literature show that people should be mindful and considerate when approaching people in face-to-face communications if they are not planned, in order for the communication not be a disruption and therefore not beneficial to both parties.
  - o <u>Telephone</u>: No visual material to explain or create context for on-the-spot questions like drawing a diagram – support telephonic communication with other technology like IM, where diagrams can be sent to other parties immediately for clarification. Similar to face-to-face communication individuals need to be mindful of the other party for specifically unplanned telephone calls, as you cannot see their body language or see their environment. Additionally, most of the challenges can be overcome with good relationships or positive trust as individuals feel comfortable enough to ask for clarity, context or more information. Mixing telephonic communication with IMs can also assist with the instant sharing of visual materials like drawings, diagrams, etc.
  - o <u>Video Conference</u>: One-sided sub-conversations can occur, disrupting the meeting, resulting in individuals in other locations feeling left out – appoint an informal chairperson in each location that can bring the locational conversations to order to ensure all attendees are included in all discussions. For interactive and fruitful discussions when using video conferencing, start off with smaller groups who are familiar with each other and build from there.
  - o <u>Email</u>: Too many emails leading to a possibility of missing important emails and emails not reaching the (intended) receivers because their email boxes are full – plan emails better and clarify in the first two sentences what actions, if any, are required from the recipients and by when. The data also show that specific focus and even training should be given to emails as these are mostly uses on a day to day basis.
  - o <u>Instant Messaging</u>: Personal infringement where individuals feel they are expected to be available to read work information at all times and/or use their personal data to keep up to date with work issues – put rules of engagement in place for IM specifically after hours, and take data into consideration where the technology becomes a required form of communication through data allowances or use only in organisational WiFi equipped venues. Even though this is a quick form of check-in and updates IMs are seen as an informal form of communication and a previous form of communication (preferably face-to-face or telephone) should be established to have recipients more open and accepting during the use of IMs.

- Use the identified benefits of the relevant technologies as a guideline for the context of use in the organisation.

  - o <u>Face-to-face</u>: The personal touch and relationship building that result in clearer understanding and trust between parties that communicate face-to-face. As established from the results as frequent as possible to establish a relationship but be mindful of overusing unplanned face-to-face interactions.
  - o <u>Telephone</u>: Provides a quick manner to elaborate and give clarity to previous information sent via email to someone in a different location. This communication is mainly used as a support structure and not a first source of communication. Therefore, to get the best out of its benefits establish clear context and expectations in the initial contact, i.e. face-to-face, email, etc.
  - o <u>Video Conference</u>: Even with high data costs, it saves money in the form of reduced travel costs. Offers opportunities for rich discussions for small to medium groups in different locations when emergency decisions are required. The quality of the technology is key in order to mimic face-to-face communication as far as possible and reap the benefits of physical communication cues, like body language, tone, etc.
  - o <u>Email</u>: Offers individuals the time to plan and strategize their communication. The results show Management and individuals should not underestimate the importance of communication training on this platform as it is most frequently used. The know-how of using the technology with be useless if the intended message is not brought across effectively.
  - o <u>Instant Messaging</u>: Offers a platform to share information and concerns when emergencies arise to assist team members in real-time situations. As reflected in the respondent's views, this platform requires guidelines of use, like, hours of availability, response times, etc. to avoid individuals feeling negative about IMs in the workplace an ultimately avoiding them.

7.5   Limitations of the study

Even though an adequate response rate (see Section 4.4.1) was achieved to obtain a high-level view of the South African context, a higher response rate within the organisations could have influenced the results of the questionnaire. Additionally, the researcher also approached more organisations to study and compare their virtual team conditions but received responses from only the two organisations studied; a wider range of organisations could have strengthened or influenced the outcomes and recommendations that stemmed from the study. However, the researcher feels that a thorough picture of communication in virtual teams within the South African context was obtained and provided suitable recommendations for management as well as adding value to existing literature on the topic.

7.6   Future research required

This study concludes that more qualitative research is required on trust and shared identity and the impact on team productivity.

The implications of the study reveal that there are still trust issues in the South African organisational environment and the biggest contribution of this study was to add views from the South African perspective to existing literature on virtual teams.

7.7   Concluding remarks

The researcher feels that the 'softer issues' of virtual team communication is overlooked, as organisations are trying to surpass the competition and generally only try to fulfil the basic technical requirements, on the assumption that employees should align with and 'be ready' for working in a virtual team productively to make the organisation a profit. The core of this research study as well as the recommendations is summarised impeccably in a quotation from Virgin Founder and CEO Richard Branson (2013:1) "trust is the core of great teams and if virtual teams are an inevitability in a competitive global economy, do not be the company that 'misses the trick'".

To successfully work with other people, you have to trust each other. A big part of this is trusting people to get their work done wherever they are, without supervision.

If you provide the right technology to keep in touch, maintain regular communication and get the right balance between remote and office working, people will be motivated to work responsibly, quickly and with high quality.

Working life isn't 9–5 anymore. The world is connected. Companies that do not embrace this are missing a trick.

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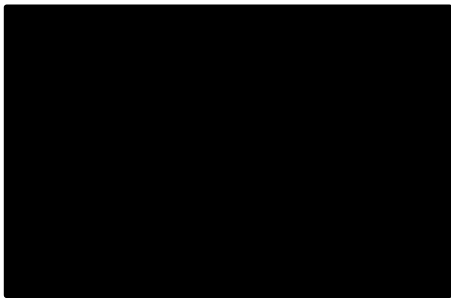
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - CLEARANCE LETTER FROM COMPANY A

Wednesday, 11 May 2016

Dear ███████████

I, <u>NAZLEY HENDRICKS</u> declare that:

- I am a registered student (student number 200692240) in the Faculty of Business & Management Sciences at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology completing my Master of Technology in Office Management and Technology.
- I shall maintain the confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants, and maintain security procedures for the protection of privacy.
- My proposed Thesis title is: *Does distance influence communication in a Financial Wellness organisation in South Africa?*
- I will make my Thesis available for the Company to peruse at any time before publishing/submitting as final to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

I hereby seek permission to:

- use the ███████████████████ as a case study for my research maintaining the confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants and the company, and maintaining security procedures for the protection of privacy.
- interview staff members from the ███████████████ for my research studies. This will be in the format of either online survey, face to face interviews or Lync interviews.
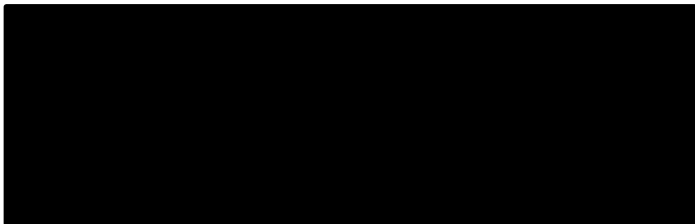
I, ███████ Head of Human Resources in ███████████ hereby give permission for the above.

████████████

_____

Nazley Hendricks

Nazley Hendricks

11 May 2016
Date

11 May 2016
Date

APPENDIX B - CLEARANCE LETTER FROM COMPANY B

24 September 2018

Dear █████████████████

I, Nazley Hendricks, am a registered student (student number 200692240) in the Faculty of Business and Management Science at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology completing my Master of Technology in Business and Information Administration (formerly Office management and Technology).

I hereby seek permission to:
- Use the company, the █████████████████████████████ as a case study for my research maintaining the confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants and maintain security procedures for the protection and privacy of the participants and the company.
- Interview staff members from ███ for my research study. This will be in the form of either an online survey, face-to-face interviews or video conferencing interviews.

I, Nazley Hendricks, declare that:
- I shall maintain confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants and maintain security procedures for the protection and privacy of the participants and the company.
- My proposed Thesis title is "The influence of virtual teams on business communication in a South African organisation."
- I will make my thesis available for the Company to peruse at any time before publishing/submitting as the final to the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

I, ██████████ Chief Operating Officer of ██, hereby give permission for the above.

_____
██████████ Chief Operating Officer

24 |09| 2018
Date

_____
Nazley Hendricks – Student

24 Sept 2018
Date

APPENDIX C - CLEARANCE LETTER FROM CPUT ETHICS COMMITTEE

Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee	Faculty:	**BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES**

At a meeting of the Research Ethics Committee on 02 November 2017, Ethics Approval

was granted to Nazley Hendriks (200692240) for research activities

Related to the MTech/DTech: Mtech Office Management and Technology at the Cape Peninsula

University of Technology

Title of dissertation/thesis/project:	THE INFLUENCE OF VIRTUAL TEAMS ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN A SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN FINANCIAL ORGANISATION. Lead Researcher/Supervisor: Dr A. Viljoen

Comments:

Decision: APPROVED

	02 November 2017
Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee	**Date**

Clearance Certificate No | 2017FBREC471

APPENDIX D – QUESTIONNAIRE

September 2018

Dear Participant

I am currently registered for a Master of Technology in Business and Information Administration (formally Office Management and Technology) in the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology and hereby invite you to participate in a case study for my thesis.

The title of my thesis is: The influence of virtual teams on business communication in a South African organisation. The aim of the case-study is to understand business communication within virtual teams, as a basis, to suggest effective and efficient guidelines/practices to improve the use of communications technology to enhance trust and to build a shared identity for an organisation in South Africa. The Research Ethics Committee of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology has granted approval for this study.

Please take note that your participation in the study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are not obliged to answer any questions that you are uncomfortable with, however for comprehensive statically comparison the more responses received the more the valuable and legitimate the results of the study will be. The questionnaire will take *approximately 15 minutes* to complete. All collected information in this study will be treated as confidential. In addition, the results of the research will be reported as a collective summary, and no individually identifiable information will be presented. The data will be used for statistical reporting in support of the literature study and to propose recommendations to management. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me, Nazley Hendricks (Nazley.Hendricks@gmail.com) or my postgraduate supervisor, Dr A.S. Viljoen (Viljoena@cput.ac.za).

This questionnaire is divided into sections: Section A (Biographical Information); Section B (Communication and Technology); Section C (Trust and Identity). Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements by marking one of the responses below. I will appreciate your response *on or before 05 October 2018*.

Please accept in advance my sincere gratitude for your participation in this research study.

Kind regards

Nazley Hendricks (Postgraduate student)   Dr A.S. Viljoen (Supervisor)

CONSENT GRANTED BY INDIVIDUAL

Note: The implication of completing the questionnaire is that informed consent has been obtained from you. Thus, any information derived from your online form (which will be totally anonymous) may be used for publication, by the researcher.

SECTION A: GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Please tick √ or mark with an X to indicate you answer.

Please indicate your location.

☐ Gauteng   ☐ Western Cape   ☐ KwaZulu Natal   ☐ Satellite Branch

SECTION B: COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY

(including communication channels, technology, benefits, and barriers)

1. Audience	Co-located colleagues (office within walking distance)	Virtual team colleagues (another city, province, etc.)	Equally Co-located and Virtual Team Colleagues	N/A
Who do you **mostly** communicate *face-to-face* with?				
With who do you **mostly** communicate via *telephone* (including Landlines, Mobile and Teleconferencing)?				
With who do you **mostly** communicate via *video conferencing* (including Lync calling, Skype, etc.)?				
With who do you **mostly** communicate via *email* with?				
With who do you **mostly** communicate via *Instant Messaging* (e.g.				

Whatsapp, Lync Messaging etc.)?				156
Please add any additional comments:				

2. Frequency	Often	Some-times	Seldom	Never
How often does your business unit/team communicate *face-to-face*?				
How often does your business unit communicate via *telephone* (including Landlines, Mobile and Teleconferencing)?				
How often does your business unit communicates via *video conferencing* (including Lync calling, Skype, etc.)?				
How often does your business unit communicates via *email*?				
How often does your business unit communicates via *Instant Messaging* (e.g. Whatsapp, Lync Messaging etc)?				
Please add any additional comments:				

3. Quality of communication channel	Very Good	Good	Accept-able	Poor	Very Poor
How well does your business unit/team communicate *face-to-face*?					
How well does your business unit communicate via *telephone* (including Landlines, Mobile and Teleconferencing)?					
How well does your business unit communicates via *video conferencing* (including Lync calling, Skype, etc.)?					
How well does your business unit communicates via *email*?					
How well does your business unit communicates via *Instant Messaging* (e.g. Whatsapp, Lync Messaging etc)?					
Please add any additional comments:					

4. Understanding of communication	Most of the time	Some of the time	Seldom	Never	Please comments on why you feel this way.
How often is there *misunderstandings* of communication delivered by your business unit/team *face-to-face*?					
How often is there *misunderstandings* of communication delivered by your business unit/team via *telephone* (including Landlines, Mobile and Teleconferencing)?					
How often is there *misunderstandings* of communication delivered by your business unit/team via *video conferencing* (including Lync calling, Skype, etc.)?					
How often is there *misunderstandings* of communication delivered by your business unit/team via *email*?					
How often is there *misunderstandings* of communication delivered by your business unit/team via *Instant Messaging* (e.g. Whatsapp, Lync Messaging etc)?					
Please add any additional comments:					

5. Quality of listening skills	Very Good	Good	Acceptable	Poor	Very Poor
Our virtual team really listen to one another and try to understand the feelings and points of view of each other.					
Our co-located team really listen to one another and try to understand the feelings and points of view of each other.					
In our virtual team we have the freedom to express ourselves on any issue at any time.					
In our co-located team, we have the freedom to express ourselves on any issue at any time.					

6. How has the *flow of information and communication* changed due to increased use of Information Technology at your workplace?

Direction	Increased	Increased some-	No change	Decreased somewhat	Decreased	Comment
From employees to managers						
From managers to employees						
From employees to employees						

7. How has the *speed of information and communication* transfer been affected by the increased use of information Technology at your workplace?

Direction	Increased	Increased some-	No change	Decreased somewhat	Decreased	Comment
From employees to managers						
From managers to employees						

From employees to employees						

8. Do you feel the Division has the *correct technologies* to ensure trust, shared identity and location is not a barrier in creating one Divisional way of work?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Please Explain.

_____

_____

9. Do you feel the Division has the *correct training* in place for use of relevant communication technology to ensure trust, shared identity and location is not a barrier in creating one Divisional way of work?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Please Explain.

_____

_____

10. What is the *main purpose* for using each of the following communication channels?

Face-to-face	
Telephone	
Email	
Video Conferencing	
Instant Messaging	
Other, please specify.	

11. What are the *benefits* when using each of the following communication channels?

Face-to-face	
Telephone	
Email	
Video Conferencing	
Instant Messaging	

12. What are the *barriers* when using each of the following communication channels?

Face-to-face	

Telephone	
Email	
Video Conferencing	
Instant Messaging	

SECTION C: TRUST AND SHARED IDENTITY

1. *Transparency and Alignment. How well do leaders set a clear direction and help create a sense of a shared purpose?*				
Leaders in my organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
• Share the rationale for their decisions				
• Help connect employee actions to the strategy				
• Involve people in decisions that affect them.				
• Look for win-win solutions				

2. *Trust: How trustworthy are people?*				
Please rate the following statements as far as you agree to them.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
• I believe most people are basically good and kind.				
• I believe most people can be trusted.				
• I believe most people trust others.				
• I trust my *direct manager*				
• I trust my *virtual team*				
• I trust *co-located team*				
• I trust in my *organisational values*				
• I feel trust in my *direct Manager* is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job.				

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
• I feel trust in my *virtual team* is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job.				
• I feel trust in *co-located team* is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job				
• I feel trust in *my organisational* values is a requirement in order for me to do an effective job				

3. *Accountability, Consistency and Predictability. Do leaders hold themselves and others accountable for being consistent in their actions and words?*				
Leaders in my organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
• Are consistent and predictable				
• Hold themselves and others accountable				
• Pay attention to how results are achieved				

4. *Capability. How well do leaders' efforts improve the organization's capacity to execute, so that people see their goals as challenging, but realistic?*				
Leaders in my organisation…	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
• Ensure people have the skills to succeed				
• Provide opportunities to learn from experience.				
• Provide resources needed to complete tasks.				

5. Identity: How important is identity in the organisation? 163				
Please rate the following statements as far as you agree to them.	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
• I primarily identify myself in the work context with my *Team* identity.				
• I primarily identify myself in the work context with my *Divisional* identity.				
• I primarily identify myself in the work context with my *Organisational* identity.				

APPENDIX E – DECLARATION OF EDITING

ES VAN ASWEGEN
BA (Bibl), BA (Hons), MA, DLitt, FSAILIS

DECLARATION OF EDITING

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The master's thesis by **Nazley Hendricks** has been edited, and the references have been checked for correctness and conformance with the CPUT Harvard bibliographic style guide. Each item in the references has been cross-checked for in-text citation, and the candidate has been advised to make the suggested changes to the thesis.

Dr ES van Aswegen
1 November 2019