Minding the gap: A study of aspects that influences virtual leadership

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Abstract

In order to meet this growing demand of globalization, business relationships are growing more and more virtual, with people having little or no face-to-face contact and instead resorting to the use of information communication technology (ICT) for daily interactions. In order for companies to remain successful they need to adapt their way of working to the increasing multi-nationality, virtual complexity of organizations today.

Therefore, this study has focused on investigating what aspects that can influence virtual leadership, in this complex context. This has been done by performing a case study at one multinational organization that employs virtual leadership.

Overall the results indicate that there are many aspects that may influence the practice of virtual leadership. The nature of trust in virtual work from this study coincided with much of previous research in the field, as well as the importance of communication and presence. It was also found that change and uncertainty in the organization could negatively influence virtual leadership while an open organization culture could positively influence it. Culture was found to influence virtual communication, and virtual leadership to some extent.

The most important find was that the perception of virtual leadership varied greatly when addressing the project manager or the personnel manager. One of the biggest conclusions drawn from the result of the study was the importance of educating people in virtual communication and leadership, as not knowing the nature of virtual communication may lead to a negative perception of it.

Key-words: Virtual leadership, virtual teams, intercultural communication, several virtual leaders, complex virtual networks.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION 4
   1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS 4
   1.2 PURPOSE & SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY 5
   1.3 DELIMITATIONS 5
   1.4 DISPOSITION OF THE PAPER 5

2. METHOD 6
   2.1 CASE STUDY 6
      2.1.1 PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION 7
      2.1.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS 8
      2.1.3 SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES 8
      2.1.4 DESIGNING THE INTERVIEW GUIDE 9
   2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW 10
   2.3 DATA ANALYSIS 10
   2.4 ETHICAL ASPECTS 11

3. LITERATURE REVIEW 12
   3.1 ASPECTS OF VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP 12
      3.1.1 VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP 12
      3.1.1 ENABLING VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP 13
      3.1.2 VIRTUAL TEAMS 13
      3.1.3 LEADING VIRTUAL TEAMS 14
   3.2. ASPECTS OF VIRTUAL WORK 15
      3.2.1 TRUST 15
      3.2.2 FACE-TO-FACE 15
      3.2.3 PRESENCE 16
      3.2.4 ATTRIBUTION 16
      3.2.5 MEANS OF COMMUNICATION 17
   3.3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION 17
      3.3.1 CULTURE 18
      3.3.2 LEADERSHIP & CULTURE 18
      3.3.3 VIRTUAL TEAMS AND CULTURE 19
      3.3.4 CULTURAL MAPS AND TAXONOMIES 19

4. THE CASE STUDY COMPANY (CSC) 21
   4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF CSC 21
   4.2 LEADERSHIP AT CSC 21
   4.3 UNIT X 21
5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS 22

5.1 VIRTUAL WORK 22
   5.1.1 TRUST 22
   5.1.2 FACE-TO-FACE 23
   5.1.3 PRESENCE 25
   5.1.4 COMMUNICATION 26

5.2 ORGANIZATION & LEADERSHIP 28
   5.2.1 TRUSTING LEADERSHIP 28
   5.2.2 LEADERS OR MANAGERS 29
   5.2.3 CONSISTENCY VS. CHANGE 30
   5.2.4 RESISTANCE 31

5.3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION 34
   5.3.1 OPEN CULTURE 34
   5.3.2 CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING 35
   5.3.3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION 36

6. CONCLUDING CHAPTER 39

6.1 CRITICAL REVIEW AND FUTURE RESEARCH 41

7. APPENDIX - INTERVIEW GUIDES 47

   7.1 EMPLOYEE (ENGLISH) 47
   7.2 EMPLOYEE (SWEDISH) 48
   7.3 MANAGER (ENGLISH) 49
   7.4 MANAGER (SWEDISH) 50

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: DISPOSITION OF THE PAPER 5
FIGURE 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERVIEWEES 9
FIGURE 3: LOCATIONS OF MANAGERS 9
FIGURE 4: INGLEHART AND WELZEL’S CULTURAL MAP OF THE WORLD 20
FIGURE 5: THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF CSC 21
1. INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter gives a brief overview of the theoretic research the thesis aims to contribute to and the problem it aims to address. The problem formulation as well as purpose, aim, and research questions are presented. A brief section of delimitations are also presented.

In today’s business world, leaders struggle with two interdependent forces; the increasing globalizations of organizations with divisions and stakeholders that often extend worldwide; and the explosion of communication technology that results in more frequent daily interactions between colleagues who are dispersed in different geographic locations (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Jarvenpaa & Tantiveri, 2003; Watson, 2007; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). In order for companies to remain successful they need to adapt to the increasing multi-nationality and complexity of organizations today, without slowing down. In order to meet this growing demand of global structures, business relationships are growing more and more virtual, with people having little or no face-to-face contact and instead resorting to the use of information communication technology (ICT) for daily interactions (Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003).

Virtual teams, teams that mainly use ICT as forms of communication, are becoming more and more common and have become an important element of an organization’s ability to achieve their business objectives (DeRosa, 2009; Colfax, Santos & Diego, 2009; Staples & Webster, 2008). Because of these increasingly dispersed teams, leadership is no longer something that is exclusively performed face-to-face and instead virtual leadership, is becoming more and more common (DasGupta, 2011; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003).

However, what seems to come across as the continuous weakness in the theoretical field regarding virtual leadership is that it is mainly focused on the management of virtual teams and very little research concerns leading individuals (DasGupta, 2011). As organizations become increasingly virtual, leaders of all kind will have to be more adaptive in order to lead people in all areas of the world and build their entire relationships virtually. Furthermore, employees face the difficulty of having to build many relationships with co-workers virtually, while also dealing with possible cultural differences (Dekker, Rutte & Van Der Berg, 2008).

Because of this lack of research on leadership of individuals, in the context of workplaces growing more virtual, there is a need for empirical data that takes a broader view of regarding what aspects are important when leading individuals and teams in these environments, as well as what aspects that can influence the practice of virtual leadership. In response to this lack of empirical data, this study aims to look into the problems and possibilities surrounding virtual leadership in practice, as employees are a part of these complex virtual networks where they may also have more than one virtual leader.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study will be fulfilled by answering the main research question: *What aspects influence the practice of virtual leadership?*

In order to help answer the main research question, the following sub-questions are asked:

- From the perspective of employees and managers in virtual organizations, what are the most important aspects of working virtually?
- From the perspective of employees and managers in virtual organizations, what organizational and leadership aspects can influence virtual leadership?
- What effects can culture have on virtual communication in these complex virtual organizations?
1.2 PURPOSE & SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate problems and possibilities with virtual leadership of individuals that are also a part of virtual teams or other virtual relationships. It will look into what is deemed important for virtual leadership in these complex environments of virtual relationships in culturally diverse environments. The significance of the study is to provide empirical data regarding virtual leadership in practice, in global and virtually complex organizations.

1.3 DELIMITATIONS

Due to the restricted time frame and scope of the study, only one global company was included, in order to gain a thorough understanding of that particular organization. Due to time limitations only one unit of said company was a part of the study, and the 4 countries examined were the main countries involved with that unit. Due to geographical dispersion, the main part of the interviews was performed virtually.

It is not possible, in any size of the study, to completely answer the proposed research questions, due to their open nature. This study will therefore only be a part of the truth about what is important in virtual leadership in practice, and the answers provided are from the perspective of the employees and managers at CSC. This is also a delimitation of the study, as any other undertaking would have been impossible in the tight timeframe of this study.

1.4 DISPOSITION OF THE PAPER

| 1. INTRODUCTION | The introductory chapter gives a brief overview of the theoretic research the thesis aims to contribute to and the problem it aims to address. The problem formulation as well as purpose, aim, and research questions are presented. A brief section of delimitations are also presented. |
| 2. METHOD | The method chapter describes the methodology of the research. The purpose of this chapter is to define, describe and justify each method by discussing strengths and weaknesses as well as alternative methods. |
| 3. LITERATURE REVIEW | In this chapter, existing research is presented in order to understand the theoretical field the study is centered around as well as the theory used for the analytical part of this study. The chapter present important aspects of Virtual Leadership, Virtual Work, as well as intercultural communication. |
| 4. CASE STUDY COMPANY | This section of the report will present the Case Study Company, CSC, and the sub-unit where the Case Study took place. The meaning of this section is to provide understanding of the organization and give a background to the study performed. |
| 5. RESULTS & ANALYSIS | This chapter presents the results and analysis from the interviews at CSC. The results are presented in themes that are analyzed separately. The aim is to get a better understanding of the empirical findings and to discuss possible reasons for different results. |
| 6. CONCLUDING CHAPTER | The concluding chapter presents a summary of the findings from the study. The research questions are answered followed by some concluding remarks. Also a discussion on the limitations of this study and proposed future studies are included. |

Figure 1: Disposition of the paper
2. METHOD

The method chapter describes the methodology of the research. The main data of the study was collected through a case study at a large IT-company. The primary data collection method for the case study has consisted of qualitative semi-structured interviews with the company's employees. The purpose of this chapter is to define, describe and justify each method by discussing strengths and weaknesses as well as alternative methods.

There are a number of ways to conduct research, and one way for researchers to make decisions on how to conduct it, is by choosing a philosophical framework, also called paradigm (Collis & Hussey, 2009). For this study the researchers have embraced an interpretivist paradigm, this because the research is about investigating the perceptions of individuals within a contextual setting. The interpretivist paradigm works under assumption that reality is subjective and dependent on context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), which suits the purpose of the study being made. The opposite would have been to adopt a positivist paradigm, which supposes that reality is objective and unchanging (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), which would not have suited the aim of the research.

Furthermore, interpretivist studies tends to use small sample sizes from one natural location and produce rich qualitative data (Collis & Hussey, 2009), which this study did through a case study at a specific company by using qualitative data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data tends to involve more human contact and a creative process of theory development rather than hypothesis testing (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014; Collis & Hussey, 2009) and is more suited for research asking questions like “how”, “why” or “what” (Ritchie et al., 2013). During the research an inductive approach was used for the data collection, in order to avoid influencing the participants with already gathered themes or theories. Only three broad categories were introduced to the participant's; virtual work, leadership and culture. However, it was clear from the preliminary study that the participants were well aware that these areas were included in virtual leadership, due to their answers in the company survey performed before this study was conducted. Inductive research uses theory as a way to understand the results rather that a deductive research where the results is aimed to prove a theory (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014; Collis & Hussey, 2009). During the analytical phase of the research, the researchers adopted more of an abductive approach, where one moves between the theory and the empirical data in order to allow the empirical data to influence the interpretation of the theory and vice versa (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014). An abductive approach has its strengths in responsiveness in the empirical data, while its weakness lies in the analyzing phase taking a long time.

The specific data collection methods that were used were primarily a case study with semi-structured interviews, and a literature review. These methods will be thoroughly discussed in the coming sections. Another method that was briefly considered was benchmarking, as it would give insight on how other companies in the industry worked with virtual leadership. However, a lack of time and a belief that response rates would be low resulted in the method being discarded. The duration of the study was eighteen weeks.

2.1 CASE STUDY

In order to investigate what possibilities and problems that can be found with virtual leadership, the methodological approach that was chosen was a case study. Case studies generate detailed data where the complexity of reality is more successfully captured than if one experiment, or several smaller cases or surveys are used (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014). Case studies are common methodologies associated with the interpretivist paradigm (Collis & Hussey, 2009) and are suitable when the aim of the study is exploratory, explanatory or descriptive (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014; Yin, 2014). Since the aim of the report is to explore the problems and possibilities surrounding the practice of virtual leadership, the case study is a viable method for the thesis.
In order to keep the case from becoming too broad, boundaries were set that focused on limiting time and activities, as well as definition and context (Yin, 2014). For instance the case study took place during the months of January-March, in order to leave enough time for analyzing collected data. Furthermore, the case study was performed at one subunit of one company, therefore narrowing the scope of the case study further. The company selected, the Case Study Company (CSC), was selected for its growing use of virtual leadership and its presence in several different countries, giving the researchers a chance to research possible cultural differences in the perception of virtual leadership.

The drawback to using a case study is that it cannot as easily be generalized as other types of methods. However, a well-performed and described case study can lead to a discussion about analytical generalizability where the findings of the case be beneficial and applicable on other cases (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014). As discussed by Blomkvist & Hallin (2014) a case study can use a number of different data gathering methods, for instance, interviews, observations, collecting written documents like reports etc. Case studies also allow the possibility of combining different methods, which is a means for increasing the validity of the study (Collis & Hussey, 2009). The gathering methods used for the case study was semi-structured interviews and company documentation making the data gathered from the case study mainly qualitative.

2.1.1 PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

In order to gain insight to the context of this study a preliminary investigation was carried out during the very first weeks of the thesis, and where preliminary data was gathered from a variety of different activities (Collis & Hussey, 2009). The goal was to make initial decisions about what would be emphasized throughout the study, i.e. what aspects of CSC that would be considered within this research. During the preliminary investigation a deep and broad understanding for the problems at the studied unit at CSC was reached, which is essential when using the case study methodology (Yin, 2009). As it was not a part of the main data collection method, the preliminary study was mainly to gain insight into the case company, prior to the study.

DOCUMENTATION & SURVEY

During the research, the authors were privy to internal documentation from the company, including but not limited to information about: leadership, organizational culture, employee branding, internal leadership education etc. The literature gave a clear understanding of how the company aimed to work with leadership and virtual leadership.

A few weeks prior to the start of this study, an internal survey about leadership was conducted, and the results of the unit studied were available to the researchers. The results contained both ranking questions as well as open comments and provided a lot of information needed in order to understand the current situation at the sub-unit at CSC.

PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

In order to gain an understanding of the perceived problems within the unit of study at CSC, several unstructured, individual interviews were conducted. These interviews were performed at CSC weeks before the primary data gathering was initiated and they gave room to any concerns regarding issues or challenges within the thesis. In total 5 interviews were performed with 4 different people, who all gave insight to the workings at CSC and the perceived problem.

The people included in the preliminary interviews where either working with leadership development at CSC, in human resources, or as a manager in the organization. The interviews averaged between 30-50 min and provided a lot of initial data about the inner workings of the company.
OBSERVATIONS
During the preliminary study, several observations were made at CSC. The researchers were invited to attend a two-day introduction for new employees where the growing globalization and open culture was discussed. Furthermore, the researchers were invited to workshops about leadership and lectures and workshops to which the authors of this study were included. Observations are noticeable hard to document (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014; Collis & Hussey, 2009), however it is important to give a full understanding of the entire data collection process, where observations were conducted.

2.1.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS
Most of the gathered data from the case study was gathered through semi-structured interviews. Interviews allows insight in how different people resonate around a certain question formulation through relatively easy means (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014) and semi-structured interviews allows for follow-up questions during the interview if necessary (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014; Collis & Hussey, 2009), which was considered useful for this study. Open-ended questions were used to ensure that the interviewee gave answers that reflected their own thoughts rather than the organization's thoughts (Collis & Hussey, 2009).

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted both with the case company's managers and its employees in order to reach a deep understanding of remote leadership through asking questions about how the participants do, think or feel (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Because CSC's organizational structure being complex and large, it was decided that only one subunit would be examined in the study. The managers that were interviewed were picked to have similar job positions, nevertheless one of the managers had dual role, where one role that was higher up in the organization. The employees were all software developers in the same subunit with similar positions. By collecting data from the same subunit but from 4 different countries and two different organizational positions, a type of data triangulation was performed, which helps to reduce bias in data sources (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Furthermore none of the results were shared before all interviews were conducted, in order for the interviewees to raise their honest opinions without being influenced by the results (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The interviews averaged about 30 min and all except one was done virtually. Only one of the virtual interviews was done with video, as per the request of the interviewees. All interviews were recorded upon the agreement from all interviewees, and thorough notes were taken. Both researchers were present during all of the interviews in order to avoid bias (Collis & Hussey, 2009) and one was in charge of conducting the interview while the other took notes and made sure all areas of interest had been covered. The interviews were directed with the help of a guideline with a set of semi-structured questions created by the researchers for this particular study and it acted as a checklist of which areas needed to be covered.

Although semi-structured interviews is sometimes criticized for being time consuming, especially during the analyzing stage (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014; Collis & Hussey, 2009; Ritchie et al., 2013), this method was considered the most appropriate data gathering method for this study.

2.1.3 SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES
The interviewees were selected from CSC with the help of a supervisor at the company, who also provided necessary contact information to the participants. All of the interviewees were contacted and invited for an interview via email, and all but one interview were conducted virtually. In total, sixteen employees were interviewed, which was deemed an appropriate number for the aim and scope of the study.
The participants were chosen by two categories primarily, their role within the organization and their nationality. Furthermore, the participants had worked at the company between 3-31 years, and 4 of the participants were women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th># of employees</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role within the organization</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finnish</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment time</td>
<td>1-4 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15+ years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Characteristics of interviewees

Due to the anonymity agreement with the participants of the study, none of the interviewees will be named and their specific job-title and unit will be withheld. Due to the lack of women in the study, the gender of the participants will be private as well, in order to further keep their anonymity. Each quote presented in the study will be quoted with a code, three letters for the country they are from; SWE, CZE, IND or FIN; and either the number 1-3 for the employee who said it, or an M, for a manager. SWEM then represents the Swedish manager, and IND2 is the second Indian employee.

2.1.4 DESIGNING THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview guide was created using the preliminary investigation and the preliminary theoretic framework. In order to avoid influencing the interviewees with expected answers, the interview guide was not ordered into themes based on previous studies regarding remote leadership, but was divided into general themes of introduction, leadership, communication, teamwork, culture and feedback.

The interview started with a few standard questions that help the interviewee relax before asking hard questions. These standard questions included their main work tasks, how long they had been employed at the company and how they came to work there. The rest of the interview guide was designed to be flexible in order to allow the interviewee to talk freely around the subject. In order to gain as much information from the interviewee as possible first an open questions would
be asked where the interviewee was allowed to talk freely around the subject (Yin, 2012), and then they were asked to specify different elements of what they had said (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Moreover, the questions were designed in a way that the most disputed questions were in the end.

The interviews were conducted either in Swedish or English, depending on the respondent's nationality. Therefore, Swedish were used if the interviewee was Swedish, and English was used for the three other nationalities. Any citations or quotes from the Swedish employees were therefore translated to English by the authors. The interview guide can be found in both English and Swedish in the appendix.

2.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The main aim of the literature review was to provide a further understanding of the context of the study, as well as aid the analysis of the findings. Furthermore, it helped to gain a deeper knowledge of the fields related to the subject and purpose of the study, as well as help develop the subject of the thesis (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Besides contributing to the theoretical framework, the literature also helped the process of data gathering and the answers to the sub-questions of the thesis.

The literature was collected throughout the entire thesis and composed of articles from journals, books, and other published works. The literature was found on various scholarly databases, and the primary databases were; the Royal Institute of Technology's library database Primo, Google Scholar, Scopus and Web of Science. Furthermore, a small portion of the literature was in the researcher's own possession or gathered from the library at Royal Institute of Technology. For the preliminary literature review the main search words were “virtual”, “leadership”, “culture” and “organizations”. This was the broad spectrum that was used in order to gain a very broad view of the research performed, but not influence the research too much in order to avoid guiding the interviewees.

When the interviews had been performed, a more thorough search was performed with more narrow searches. In the research field of remote leadership, the search words included the terms: e-leadership, eLeadership, virtual leadership, distant leadership, tele-leadership, leading from a distance, leading through telecommunications, leading through ICT, leading virtual organizations, leading virtual teams, and leading virtual workforces. Other keywords such as “trust”, “skills”, “problems”, “possibilities” etc. were added for more specific literature. Several reviews that summarized the field were also used as starting points for literature and when relevant articles were found, the articles cited works were scoped for more probable literature. When a narrower spectrum of literature was provided, further investigation of the frequently cited authors, as well as their reference lists allowed for a compact amount of literature for the thesis.

When themes of the analysis of the data had reached a stage of almost completion, the literature review became more integrated with the themes, as an abductive approach was used during theme definition. At this point searches of literature that were connected to the themes were conducted, which included search words like; micromanagement, cultural intelligence, intercultural communication, culture and virtual teams, culture and leadership etc.

2.3 DATA ANALYSIS

During the analysis of the data in the interviews, several steps were taken. First of all the interviews were transcribed for easier analysis. After that a conventional content analysis was used (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), also described as inductive category development (Mayring, 2000). In this type of analysis, researchers avoid using preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), and instead allow the categories to develop from the data. Many qualitative methods share this initial approach to study design and analysis due to it main advantage, which is gaining direct information from study participants without imposing preconceived categories.
on them (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). However, as the study proceeded a more abductive approach was used, where the researchers moved between the empirical data and the theory in order to further develop the analysis. The first step involved reading all of the obtained data separately and repeatedly in order to gain an understanding of it all (Tesch, 1990 as cited by Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). After that the data was read word by word in order to determine codes by highlighting words that seem to capture key thoughts or concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morgan, 1993). Next, first impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis was summarized for each interview (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During this process, labels for codes emerged that were reflective of more than one key thought and were sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked. At this point, theory was added into the analysis in order to further develop the themes and reach further understanding of the results (Blomkvist & Hallin, 2014). Several iterations were made between the theory and the empirical results in order to reach the final definitions. Finally, definitions for each category, subcategory, and code were developed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Quotes from the interviews were included as a way to present the reader with the themes developed. The themes, and the quotes connected to them, were then matched with the existing theory and earlier findings in order to gain deeper understanding for the empirical findings.

2.4 ETHICAL ASPECTS
The study was conducted at CSC and one of the conditions that had to be fulfilled, if the study was to be authorized by the company, was to sign a nondisclosure agreement (NDA). The NDA is a legal contract between the researchers and the company in question. It was agreed that sensitive information, such as name, unit and gender would not be disclosed in the study. Only the researchers know what a specific employee has said. The employee at CSC who provided the names for the interviews can figure out who said what of the managers, due to the fact that only one manager from each country was interviewed. However, no third party can figure out who participated in the study, and the report given to CSC did not separate managers from employees, in order to keep the anonymity of the managers intact.
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, existing research is presented in order to understand the theoretical field the study is centered around as well as the theory used for the analytical part of this study. The chapter presents important aspects of Virtual Leadership, Virtual Work, as well as Intercultural Communication.

The literature review is the basis for the theoretical framework that is used for the analysis and conclusions of this study. The research questions address three major areas within the field of Virtual Leadership; Aspects of Virtual Leadership, Aspects of Virtual Work as well as Intercultural Communication.

3.1 ASPECTS OF VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP

There are many aspects that can be considered important in virtual leadership, however these are aspects that were found important for this study, or have been briefly touched upon during the research. It is not the aim of this research to give an exhaustive description of all aspects of virtual leadership.

3.1.1 VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP

In this study, Zaccaro & Bader’s (2003) definition of Virtual Leadership has been used where it is defined as leadership where many of the processes of leadership is conducted largely through information communication technology (ICT). While most researchers view virtual leadership as an extension of traditional leadership, some have been noted see it as a fundamental paradigm change in the way leaders and followers relate to each other within organizations and between organizations (e.g., Avolio & Kahai, 2003).

The overall reason for companies’ need of virtual leadership is because their organizational structure demands it. Today, the geographic distance between workers is increasing (Watson, 2007), and this changing organizational structure, such as dispersed teams, divisions, subunits, customers, stakeholders, or suppliers (Zaccaro & Bader, 2003), leads to employees having to communicate through ICT (Avolio & Kahai, 2003; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). This in turn, cause organizations to set new demands on their employees ability to communicate and work together across borders and cultures (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

The field of virtual leadership has been largely focused on; what is different and what is common between e-leadership and traditional leadership (e.g., Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Oertig & Buergi, 2006; Weisband, 2008), what opportunities and challenges are there with this form of leadership (DeRosa, 2009), what new skills are needed by this new generation of leaders (DeRosa, 2009), and more (DasGupta, 2011).

The main advantages of virtual leadership are: the possibility to use talent wherever it exist (Colfax, Santos & Diego, 2009), the opportunity to enhance organizational performance by assembling better multi-functional teams, and doing this while cutting costs and scoping for better knowledge management (DasGupta, 2011). The main challenges of virtual leadership are: bridging the physical distance from the followers, communicating effectively team members, conveying enthusiasm and inspire followers electronically, building trust with someone who may never see the leader (DasGupta, 2011).

While virtual leadership seemed a task only relevant for international businesses a couple of years ago, it is now considered essential for almost any business that strives to grow and expand. This is amplified by the fact that there are researchers who believe that you can practice virtual leadership without being geographically dispersed as virtual leadership is about leading people through the use of ICT rather than leading from a distance (Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004).
3.1.1 ENABLING VIRTUAL LEADERSHIP

Many researchers have pinpointed the importance of the organization showing the importance of virtual leadership by enabling virtual teams, expressing its importance throughout the organization by setting standards or creating a positive and pleasant environment etc. (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998; Oertig & Buergi, 2006). Research shows that physically co-located employees report significantly higher levels of satisfaction with management than remote employees do (Watson, 2007). Distance has a tendency to make faceless abstractions of people, which makes it more important for managers not lose sight of the fact that the employees all are people, with all that that entails – needs for belonging, meaning, accomplishment, and recognition (Brake, 2006).

If the organization states norms and values that focus on collaboration, respecting and working with people from all cultures, keeping criticism constructive, and sharing information, this will set the standard for how people work together virtually (Duarte & Snyder, 2006). A dynamic, nonhierarchical, technologically advanced organization is more likely than a highly structured, command-driven one to implement virtual work successfully (Apgar, 1998; Jarvenpaa & Tanriverdi, 2003).

Furthermore, a lack of optimism and support in initial phases of implementation, often leads to substandard performance (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998) or lack of commitment (Duarte & Snyder, 2006), as member do not feel as if it is important. Therefore it is important that the organization leads the way by showing their commitment to this type of work by promoting an open culture (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

3.1.2 VIRTUAL TEAMS

As the literature regarding virtual leadership is mostly about how to lead virtual teams it is important to understand the problems and possibilities with virtual teams to help understand virtual leadership. Although the use of virtual teams is growing daily there are no commonly used and generally agreed upon definitions of virtual teams (Curseu, Schalk & Wessel, 2008; Martins, Gilson and Maynard, 2004).

Virtual teams have generally been defined as functioning teams that rely on ICT to communicate while crossing several different boundaries (e.g., Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Lipnack & Stamps, 1999; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2001). The most commonly noted boundary is geographical dispersion (e.g., Cohen & Gibson, 2003; Griffith et al., 2003; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2000), however, there are researchers that suggest that co-located teams (i.e., teams located in the same geographical location) can also exhibit high levels of virtuality (Avolio, Kahai & Dodge, 2000; Hertel, Geister, & Konradt, 2005; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004). This is due to the belief that it is not the boundaries that matter, as much as the use of ICT in interactions and processes of the teams.

This belief has lead to researchers shifting their focus from defining virtual teams as a type of team that contrasts from traditional co-located team (e.g., Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Oertig & Buergi, 2006; Weisband, 2008) and are instead focusing on virtualness as a potential characteristic of all teams (e.g., Griffith & Neale, 2001; Griffith, Sawyer & Neale, 2003; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Martins, Gilson & Maynard, 2004). And while much research on virtual teams suggest that communicating virtually is a disadvantage (e.g., Cordery & Soo, 2008) many researchers believe that the advantages in ICT and the increase of team members understanding and usage of technological capabilities, can lead to it being an advantage (e.g., Maynard et al., 2011; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005).

Virtual teams has become a common element in organizations due to the changes organizational structure and dispersion (Morello, 2005; Staples & Webster, 2008), and they have also become a
large part of an organization's ability to achieve its business objectives (DeRosa, 2009; Colfax, Santos & Diego, 2009; Staples & Webster, 2008). However, many companies have trouble implementing virtual teams and most companies new to global development teams are unsatisfied while those with longer experience are satisfied (Eppinger and Chitkara, 2006).

Furthermore, the type of virtual team, their tasks and the context in which they operate has an extreme range, making general guidelines for virtual teams difficult, if not impossible (Zigurs, 2003). Different researchers has tried to categorize virtual teams in a number of different categories; Duarte and Snyder (2006) present that virtual teams can come in seven different categories, Cascio and Shurygailo (2002) present 4 different types of teams, while Zigurs (2003) mean that virtual teams have four dimensions to their virtuality and that there are an unlimited amount of virtual teams. It is not the purpose of this study to go into the detail of virtual teams, however, it is important to note the complexity of researchers view of them.

3.1.3 LEADING VIRTUAL TEAMS

As the virtual teams are very different from one another it is difficult to give general guidelines on how to lead them, especially as leaders in virtual teams also come in many different forms (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Zigurs, 2003). While research shows that leading virtual teams should not be considered completely removed from leading co-located teams, there are a number of ways that leading virtual teams differs from leading a conventional co-located teams.

For example, in a virtual environment it is often hard to establish a position as leader. Oertig and Buergi (2006) write that in order to influence people in virtual teams, over which they have no real authority, a leader has to develop trust and respect from the team. Because of the importance of trust, managers have to be more deliberate and planful about building that trust and maintaining it than in conventional teams (Berry, 2011; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Gerke, 2006; Malhotra, Majchrzak & Rosen, 2007; Zaccaro & Bader, 2003). Including employees in decision-making can lead to them feeling an increased sense of self-efficacy, associated with a perception of being trusted by the manager (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). More on trust in virtual teams will be presented in the chapter regarding virtual work.

Another issue that makes it harder to establish leadership in a virtual team is that, in contrast to a co-located team, it is difficult to spot the person who has the highest rank. In a co-located team it can for example be done by the clothes the leader wears or the position they have at the meeting table, however these sign are lost in a virtual context (Zigurs, 2003). Having infrequent face-to-face contact with the team is one of the biggest challenges of leading virtual teams according to virtual leaders (DeRosa, 2009; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2001; Oertig & Buergi, 2006).

There has been a lot of research looking into how specific leadership styles affect the performance of virtual teams, for example; transformational leadership (e.g., Hambley, O’Neill & Kline, 2005; Howell, Neufeld, & Avolio, 2005; Purvanova & Bono, 2009), transactional leadership (e.g., Hambley, O’Neill & Kline, 2005; Howell, Neufeld, & Avolio, 2005), collaborative (e.g., Oertig & Buergi, 2006) etc. However, as stated earlier, the general belief is that no particular leadership style is needed in a virtual team, and that each leader will have to adapt their leadership style according to what has the best impact (Cascio & Shurygailo, 2002; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Oertig & Buergi, 2006; Zigurs, 2003).

What is considered important virtual communication is the need of structure. Structured communication and planning are things that have been deemed important in virtual work and leading virtually in order to avoid the ambiguity that is more common in virtual communication (Brake, 2006; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2000; Maynard et al., 2011). In traditional teams, vague or unclear expectations can be clarified through casual conversation in the hallway, but virtual teams need more structure because this casual chat is not available to them (Berry, 2011). Lurey and Raisinghani (2001) also states that well developed processes are a determining factor for team member satisfaction. As a leader, continuously doing what you say you will do, i.e. being
consistent and predictable is one way of building and maintaining trust (Brake, 2006). Furthermore, demonstrating reliability by adhering to a communication schedule has shown to increase trust in the leader (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012).

Another important element is to support a pleasant environment and a pleasant atmosphere, where the leader accepts weaknesses, shows empathy and communicates trust (Brake, 2005; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Oertig & Buergi, 2006). Moreover, some researchers have found that feedback might be an important tool in order to bridge geographical disconnectedness and increase cohesion and trust (Hertel, Geister & Konradt, 2005). Lack of feedback processes has been linked to reduction in social exchanges (Losada, Sanchez, & Noble, 1990) while the support of feedback can lead to an increase in motivation, satisfaction and performance of virtual team members (Hertel, Geister & Konradt, 2005; Huang & Lai, 2001). Therefore, it also important for the virtual leader to push for feedback processes for the group or person they are leading (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

3.2. ASPECTS OF VIRTUAL WORK

There are many aspects that can be considered important in virtual work, however these are aspects that were found important for this study, or have been briefly touched upon during the research. It is not the aim of this research to give an exhaustive description of all aspects of virtual work.

3.2.1 TRUST

One of the most mentioned aspects in virtual work that is needed for a virtual environment to function is trust (e.g., Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2001; Oertig & Buergi, 2006; Powell et al., 2004; Zigurs, 2003). Trust has a large effect on team member satisfaction, which in turn has been shown to improve virtual team effectiveness (Lurey and Raisinghani, 2001). Another factor that pinpoints the importance of trust in virtual work is that trust development is deemed crucial for project completion in virtual teams (Powell, Piccoli & Ives, 2004). Another problem with trust is that people in virtual environments can learn to distrust coworkers after only one or two negative communications early in the relationship, which can have huge effects on the future cooperation (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

Trust development in virtual teams is also presents significant challenges as difficult to do over virtual communication (Curseu, Schalk & Wessel, 2008). There are many reasons for this, for instance it is difficult to assess teammates’ trustworthiness without ever having met them (McDonough, Kahn, & Barczak, 2001). Another reason is the high turnover of team members of virtual teams, and being a member of many constellations (Oertig & Buergi, 2006). Moreover, Greenberg, Greenberg, and Antonucci (2007) states that trust is difficult to establish in virtual teams because the method used in conventional co-located teams, building trust over time through a history of reliable behavior, is something hard to replicate in virtual teams where there is no physical contact or history.

However, Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1998) argued that trust between virtual team members and leaders do not operate in the same manner virtually as it does in face-to-face encounters. In virtual settings, trust has more of a temporary nature and needs to be formed swiftly, that is, ‘members act as if trust is present from the start’ (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998).

3.2.2 FACE-TO-FACE

A common way of improving trust is having prior knowledge or history before building a virtual relationship, often done by face-to-face communication in the early ages of the relationship (Alge, Wiethoff, & Klein, 2003; Cramton, 2001; Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Oertig & Buergi, 2006; Powell, Piccoli & Ives, 2004). This sort of early meeting, a kind of kick-off, should focus on relationship building while also establishing ground rules for the future cooperation (Lipnack &
Stamps, 1997; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2001; Powell, Piccoli & Ives, 2004). Initial field data that compare virtual teams with and without such kick-off meetings confirm a general positive effect on team effectiveness (Hertel, Geister & Konradt, 2005).

Experimental studies demonstrate that getting acquainted before the start of computer-mediated work facilitates cooperation and trust (Alge, Wietthoff, & Klein, 2003; Bos et al., 2002). However, face-to-face communication is not only an important part in the initiation of virtual work. In non-routine situations that contain high interpersonal or emotional components or ambiguity and uncertainty usually require technologies with higher social presence (Duarte & Snyder, 2006). Furthermore, there has been research that supports that negotiations and conflict management should rather be performed face-to-face, because they involve complex interaction and the need to build trust (Bos et al., 2002; Jensen et al., 2000; Hertel, Geister & Konradt, 2005).

3.2.3 PRESENCE

Something that has not been as well commented on in research is presence in virtual environments. Instead many researchers have viewed presence as social richness; thus the extent to which a medium is perceived to be sociable, warm and intimate (Panteli, 2004). However, presence encaptures the importance of being “there” in the virtual environment and being accessible and responsive, i.e. being present, is one way to build trust and relationships in virtual environments (Brake, 2006).

A part of what makes face-to-face communication a presence rich environment is nonverbal cues. Nonverbal cues, such as nodding, eye contact, quizzical expressions, and frowning, are the natural indicators to whether or not a message requires further explanation (Straus & McGrath, 1994). Nonverbal cues might convey as much as two thirds of message content, and their absence may potentially result in misinterpretation, decreased trust, and inaccurate perceptions of self and others (Cramton, 2001; Hart & McLeod, 2002; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Straus & McGrath, 1994). All of these nonverbal cues allows for people to seem present in the conversation without having to speak, a nod can indicate that you are listening, but that you do not have anything further to say at that time.

Silences in co-located teams can be deciphered and decoded through these nonverbal cues. However, as there are a limited number of familiar cues in the virtual environment, people are unable to make confident judgments on why it is silent, making silence in virtual communication more ambiguous and uncertain (Cramton, 2001; Panteli, 2004; Straus & McGrath, 1994).

3.2.4 ATTRIBUTION

An effect of the ambiguity of virtual environments is attribution. People that are communicating by electronic means, generally assume that the cause of a communication conflict is due to a characteristic or behavior of an individual rather than technological problems (Cramton, 2001). This allows silence to be interpreted as a character fault of the one who is being silent, rather than a wrongly addressed email-address, for instance. As virtual team leaders often struggle to know what their team members are working on because of the distance, some leaders resort to using cues to assess team status, for example email traffic is often used as an indicator of whether or not a virtual team member is making progress on a task (Mitchell, 2012).

According to Lea & Spears (1991, 1992, 1993) (as cited by Cramton, 2001), people who do not know each other that well and that communicate through virtual communication, experience feelings of isolation, anonymity, and deindividuation. As a consequence, a phenomenon known as attribution becomes common, were people conclude the attributes of the person they are communicating with, on the basis of the few social cues they glean (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012; Lea & Spears, 1991, 1992, 1993) as cited by Cramton, 2001). This leads to assumptions being made about the other party, from a few indicators, and that is one of the facets that can lead to distrust being formed very quickly in virtual relationships.
Attribution can for example lead to silence being interpreted as laziness or disinterest, while it can be result of an innocent cause. This can then also lead to members of the virtual environment feeling that another person is not being present, as they are being silent. There is also a tendency to generalize attributions, particularly negative ones, to others in the same location (Cramton, 2001; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). This means that one person being silent in one location, may lead to an entire group of people being categorized as lazy, disinterested, or not being present.

3.2.5 MEANS OF COMMUNICATION

It is difficult give exact recommendations for what means of virtual communication to use in a virtual environment, as communication is highly dependent on personal preferences and situations (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998). Face-to-face communication, as stated previously, is often seen as a communication method with a lot of presence, while virtual communication, emails especially, is perceived as less warm and contain higher levels of negativity that face-to-face communications (Berry, 2011; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). However, e-mail gives the chance for thoughtful answers and more direct knowledge transfer as it is lacking in nonessential words (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Hamilton & Scandura, 2002). While e-mail communication may be seen as a less rich form of communication, richness of a media is also dependent on how well you know the other person (Zigurs, 2003). For example, you can read a lot more context into an email from your friend because of your knowledge and perception of that person, then you could read into an email from a stranger. This was further shown in a study by Hart & McLeod (2003), where messages from 123 different people were studied, and it was concluded the people who share a close personal relationship often sent shorter and more impersonal messages.

As mentioned earlier being structured in virtual communication is considered important as it helps to avoid the ambiguity that is more common in virtual communication (e.g., Brake, 2006; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2000; Maynard et al., 2011). Therefore, is important that the organization and/or the team establish protocols for how to communicate, how often, and by what means (Duarte & Snyder, 2006; Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1998). It is especially important to establish how frequent the communication should be as frequent communication in virtual environments can result in improved working relationships among team members and increased perceptions of trust in leaders (Hart & McLeod, 2002).

Compared to co-located teams, virtual teams often have a harder time communicating about informal or social matters (Cummings, 2001). Straus (1997) argued that virtual communication might further constrain social interaction by the physical effort involved in typing what may be seen as nonessential words. However, there have been studies that show that a higher degree of personal communication can increase trust and cooperation in virtual teams (Bos et al., 2002; Greenberg, Greenberg & Antonucci, 2007; Olson & Olson, 2012; Zheng et al., 2002). Therefore, team leaders should not only accept, but also should encourage and promote social communication in order to improve interpersonal relations among their employees (Greenberg, Greenberg & Antonucci, 2007; Panteli, 2004).

3.3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Since virtual teams and virtual leadership often cross cultures (Duarte & Snyder, 2006), the discussion of culture and intercultural communication is an important part of virtual leadership. Cultural differences appear to lead to coordination difficulties, and create obstacles to effective communication (Powell, Piccoli & Ives, 2004). Research has shown that in a meeting between different cultures, it is the different practices that people tend to notice first and if these differences are unknown before an encounter, they can lead to misunderstanding and frustration (Plum et al., 2008). Furthermore, the same research stated that in order for people to act appropriately in situations where cultural differences are important, the people need to feel motivated to create results with people who are different from themselves, and to have the courage to change (Plum et al., 2008).
The diversity in virtual teams is often high since the members can be separated by geographical distance and therefore has different cultural backgrounds. Because of this the risk of conflicts and misunderstanding are increased in virtual environments (Curseu, Schalk & Wessel, 2008). When misunderstandings arise between people of different nationalities, it is easy to explain it as a cultural misunderstanding, and thereby placing the responsibility of the misunderstanding on cultural differences rather than the individuals in the encounter (Plum et al., 2008). Cultural understanding is both about having an understanding of one’s own culture, and being able to understand people with another cultural base and it is about accepting your own part in the communication (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Plum et al., 2008).

More and more companies starts to invest in language and intercultural communication training, training is particularly important for new members of project teams working on different continents, to help reduce potential distrust, and allow teams to work together efficiently (Guirdham, 2005; Oertig & Buergi, 2006;). Learning to work well with other cultures can be seen as extra important since multicultural groups tend to be either very effective or very ineffective (Hambrick, et al., 1998).

3.3.1 CULTURE
A wide range of definitions has been used for the term “culture”. Culture has for example been defined as a set of reinforcements (Skinner, 1981), as the collective programming of the mind and as patterned ways of thinking (Hofstede (1991) and Kluckhohn (1954) as cited by Gelfand et al., 2007). Although definitions of culture vary, many emphasize that culture is something shared, something that is adaptive or has been adaptive at some point in the past, and that it is transmitted across time and generations (Gelfand et al., 2007). Cultural traits are something you learn and not something that you are born with, it can be seen as a result of the social imprint rather that the genetics. Hofstede (1980) describes culture as the collective mental programming that separate one group of people from another.

It is important to note that different definition of culture opens up for more interpretation and not only as simple as something between members of a country (Plum et al., 2008). In today’s society other large groups are formed, due to the growing population and continuous globalization, and allows for more complex views of culture. A large group of the same national culture can then be separated into smaller cultures, for example the members of an organization, or members of a certain profession, or people who share the same hobby, such as yoga, football or even competitive gaming (Lustig & Koester, 2010).

While culture can be divided in separate groups, it is rather simplistic to view culture in such a divided manner. As people are a part of several different cultures, it can be difficult to try to discern what parts of a person's culture is a part of their organizational, national or professional culture (Plum et al., 2008). While a person’s nationality often impacts his or her values (Hambrick et al., 1998), national values cannot legitimately be translated at the individual level, and therefore it is also risky to “categorize” someone solely based on their nationality (Guirdham, 2005). Furthermore, organizational cultures are rarely one unified culture as it is a merger of the company’s trade, it’s different national cultures and it’s special characteristics (Plum et al., 2008). This is also important in order to avoid stereotyping, as inaccuracy can lead to errors in interpretations and expectations about the behaviors of others (Lustig & Koester, 2010) and Plum et al. (2008) suggest that the closer two cultures are to each other, the greater the risk for misinterpretation are.

3.3.2 LEADERSHIP & CULTURE
Besides affecting communication between people from different cultures, culture has the possibility of affecting how you view leadership (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Yukl, 2010). Studying leadership from a cross-cultural perspective has become increasingly important as an increasing global world demands companies to gain better understand leadership in different cultures (Yukl,
2010). Due to this, today’s managers are under more pressure to know the cultural factors, social values and the degree of motivation of the workforce in the work setting (Herbig and Genestre 1997; Yukl, 2010). The managers also have to know how people from other countries perceive them and how they interpret their actions. Some aspects of leadership theory can therefore be relevant in all cultures, while other aspects are only applicable in certain cultures (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Yukl, 2010).

Most of the research regarding leadership during the past half century has been conducted in the United States, Canada and within the Western world (Den Hartog et al., 1999; Yukl, 2010). But during the last couple of years you can see an increasing interest in developing knowledge of international management to meet the needs of global business development both within, but also outside the Western world (Gelfand et al., 2007; Tsui et al., 2007; Yukl, 2010).

3.3.3 VIRTUAL TEAMS AND CULTURE

Virtual teams are usually multicultural, and they have a tendency to be either very effective, or very ineffective (Adler 1986; Hambrick et al., 1998). The effectiveness can be explained by that they have access to a broader knowledge base and their heterogeneity boosts innovativeness (Ozgen et al., 2011) and they having a harder time to build team spirit and relationships can explain their ineffectiveness.

Studies show that companies can gain from educating their employees in intercultural communication, as it helps to reduce potential distrust, and allow teams to gel more quickly and work together efficiently (Oertig & Buergi, 2006). Research surrounding virtual teams has indicated that leaders that help to overcome barriers to intercultural communication lead more successful teams (Van Ryssen & Godar, 2000). Furthermore, bringing cultural differences to the surface is critical to helping a team succeed and can help to create a virtual team culture that builds on differences and understanding that culture consists of values and shared assumptions (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

Previous studies have shown that teams with members from different cultures outperform homogeneous teams (Dekker, Rutte & Van den Berg, 2008) and it is argued that multicultural teams can provide strategic advantages for organizations (Gelfand et al., 2007).

3.3.4 CULTURAL MAPS AND TAXONOMIES

One way of getting a broad idea of cultures is to use cultural maps. Cultural maps are brief descriptions of cultures in order to provide general knowledge about cultures of their perception of a certain phenomena, such as leadership. This section will briefly present some of theory that is interesting for the study.

One of the cultural maps that have been very cited is Hofstede’s study with his cultural dimensions, which was conducted in the seventies (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Plum et al., 2008). His study has produced many hypotheses regarding cross-cultural differences in leadership (Den Hartog et al., 1999). However, Hofstede’s research has got a lot of criticism, due to the fact that it is now over three decades since the study was conducted as well as the fact that it was only conducted within one big company with a western organizational culture and therefore might affect the values of the employees located in different countries (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Plum et al., 2008), but it also made it possible to draw some conclusion because of the few parameters involved (Plum et al., 2008).

There is also another project called The GLOBE Project (Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research), which is a cross cultural study regarding leadership where the primary purpose was to investigate to what extent effective leaders are universally, but it has also tried to explain cultural differences in leadership behavior and different perceptions about leadership (Lustig & Koester, 2010).
Hofstede's dimensions describe the following cultural expectations for some of the social behaviors of culture: power distance refers to relationships with people higher or lower in rank, uncertainty avoidance to people's search for truth and certainty, individualism-collectivism to expected behaviors toward the group, and masculinity-femininity to the expectations surrounding achievement and gender differences (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Den Hartog et al., 1999; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Plum et al., 2008).

The dimensions of power distance and uncertainty avoidance in the GLOBE-project, are identical to Hofstede's, but they divide Hofstede's dimension individualism-collectivism into two components: in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism. Similarly, Hofstede's dimension of masculinity-femininity has been divided into two components: gender egalitarianism and assertiveness. There are three remaining dimensions in the GLOBE-project which are based on a work done by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck that will not be presented further in this thesis (Lustig and Koester, 2010).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) have also tried to update Hofstede's work, but use the same dimensions. The strength in their work has been their detailed explanation about how to create space for both of the involved parties when their cultural preferences differ (Plum et al., 2008). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) also expresses that “Culture is like gravity: you do not experience it until you jump six feet into the air” and in their book they examine the visible and invisible ways in which culture impacts on organizations. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

While Hofstede, the GLOBE-project and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner have all looked into the dimension of Leadership & Cultures, there have been studies that try to map culture from other perspectives. Inglehart and Welzel (2010) have also done a cultural mapping of the world, which is focused around values, as seen below. Inglehart and Welzel (2010) use two dimensions of values; Traditional vs. Secular-Rational values and Survival vs. Self-expression Values, presented below.

Traditional vs. Secular-Rational values describes the contrast between societies in which religion is very important and those in which it is not (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010). Furthermore societies close to the traditional pole have a high level of national pride and emphasize the importance of parent-child connection and deference to authority (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).

Survival vs. Self Expression Values is linked with the transition from industrial society to post-industrial societies—which brings a divergence between Survival and Self-Expression values. The countries close to the self-expression pole are countries that are wealthy and where survival is taken for granted, which leads to priorities being shifted to an emphasis on subjective wellbeing, self-expression and quality of life (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).

Figure 4: Inglehart & Welzel's cultural map of the world (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).
4. THE CASE STUDY COMPANY (CSC)

This section of the report will present the Case Study Company, CSC, and the sub-unit where the Case Study took place. The meaning of this section is to provide understanding of the organization and give a background to the study performed.

4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF CSC

The case study was performed at an IT company, CSC, founded during the late 20th century. CSC employs over 10,000 experts that operate in over 20 countries. The company provides services in several different industries and focus on developing long-term relationships with their customers while providing the full cycle of IT services.

4.2 LEADERSHIP AT CSC

CSC has a strong view of what a leader at CSC is like and how they should act. The prime directive of the leader is to build an open culture where people are encouraged to step out of their comfort zone and are free to make mistakes in order to learn. A leader at CSC has to lead by example and give credit where it is due, while continuously provide feedback to the employees in order to give them the tools to make their own decisions and grow. A leader at CSC also has to have a deep understanding of, not only CSC, but also the industries in which their teams are working. The leader need to have a clear focus on the financial parts of the projects and make sure that the team manages to reach their goals. As virtual work has become more and more common at CSC, they have seen the importance of investigating in different aspects of virtual leadership. But regardless of their awareness, no further education or training has been given to the leaders or employees at CSC.

4.3 UNIT X

The company has several different divisions focused on different aspects of the company and the study was performed at one of the divisions concerning customer services. Furthermore only one sub-unit of that division was a part of the case study; called Unit X. The main function of Unit X is to support customers with their legacy systems. Legacy systems are old or outdated computer systems in need of being replaced. Because of this the Unit are working with systems that are being downsized and replaced. Since the market for this sort of work is decreasing, as more and more companies are replacing their old systems, Unit X has experienced large cutbacks and downsizing. While CSC are continuously trying to provide other locations for the employees no longer needed at Unit X, there has been a large number of employees let go as a result of the drawback, and the lack of need of their expertise in other areas of the company.

![Figure 5: The organizational structure of CSC](image)
5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the results and analysis from the interviews at CSC. The results are presented in themes that are analyzed separately. The aim is to get a better understanding of the empirical findings and to discuss possible reasons for different results.

The results presented are based on the inductive content analysis of the interview data comprised from sixteen transcribed interviews. The purpose of the chapter is to form the basis of the conclusion for the research questions, which is the reason for the order of the results. Overall the chapter aims to understand the reasons and causes for the results, by analyzing and finding possible correlations with earlier research. This is done in an attempt to answer the main research question, regarding the aspects of virtual leadership in complex virtual organizations.

The content of the results and analysis is divided under three categories; Virtual work; that discuss issues surrounding all types of virtual work, Organization & Leadership; that discuss aspects of virtual work and the organization; and finally Intercultural Communication; that discuss issues surrounding culture and virtual work, this in unity of the asked researched questions. During the content analysis, several themes were discovered in the different categories. In order to clarify the themes, quotes from the employees were selected that particularly illuminated the essence of what the themes were about.

5.1 VIRTUAL WORK

During the interviews, several aspects were brought up regarding what was important in virtual work. Only the themes that were the most commented on, in most or all of the interviews, were selected as the main aspects of virtual work. The themes that was most commonly commented on were the following:

- Trust
- Face-to-face
- Presence
- Communication

The four themes mentioned above are described in detail and analyzed below.

5.1.1 TRUST

One aspect of virtual work that was important for the employees was trust: “I think the most important thing is the trust between you. Because if you cannot see each other, you have to trust each other that it works.” – FIN1.

The employees also expressed that it was easier building trust when you have a prior knowledge of one another: “When I came back from Sweden, after being among the team for several weeks, the trust continued to grow in our group. I think it’s because of that trust that it is working very well in our project. I think it’s very important to build that trust when you are in different locations.” – IND1.

“To get the trust between people going both ways you need to know how the people work. So I think that it is important, in the beginning when a team or leadership relationship is formed that the are some face-to-face communication so that people get to know the characteristics of the people and how they work.” – FIN2.

Generally research in virtual leadership and virtual teams shows that in order for a remote environment to function, trust is one of the most important aspects (e.g. Kelley & Kellaway, 2012; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2001; Oertig & Buergi, 2006; Powell et al., 2004). Furthermore, there has been research that shows that one mean of improving trust is having prior knowledge or history between group members or leader and employee, often by face-to-face communication (Alge, Wiethoff, & Klein, 2003; Cramton, 2001; Duarte & Snyder, 2006).
Something that complements the need of trust was the employee's lack of trust, mainly concerning the other locations' efficiency. One of the Swedish employees expressed the difficulty working with the Indian office: “If we are all sitting here then we know what is going on, but at a distance it’s very hard knowing what is being done and what isn’t, you don’t know what happens in the other locations” – SWE2. The employee expressed that the Indian office always took longer time to respond and were slower in their work. In contrast to that, one of the Indian employees expressed the same in response to working with Swedes: “It’s hard when you can’t see what they are doing, it’s difficult to say how much time they are taking. But looking at the issues and the work, we can see that it should not have taken so much time.” – IND2.

There has been plenty of research that shows that trust is hard to build over virtual environments (e.g. Curseu, Schalk & Wessel, 2008; Greenberg, Greenberg, & Antonucci, 2007; McDonough, Kahn, & Barczak, 2001). There has also been research that shows that trust should form more quickly in virtual environments than conventional work groups (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998) and that distrust can also be formed quicker; even as quickly as after only one or two negative messages early in the team’s life (Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

The nature of trust in virtual environment, the need of establishing it quickly so distrust is not formed, can be one of the reason that many felt that they did not trust the other party. As trust in conventional teams is something that is usually built over time through a history of reliable behavior (Greenberg, Greenberg, & Antonucci, 2007), and as this usually not an option in virtual environments, people might tend to distrust people if left on their own, without previously knowledge on how to work in these environments.

One of the Finnish employees stressed the importance of having teams that lasted longer than only one project: “We in our team have worked together for a long time, and people have learned to trust each other, and they know each strength and weakness of each person. I mean of course in the beginning there is always learning, so I think it's essential that team are longer living than one project.” – FIN2.

This too can be a result based on the general belief that trust is something that has to build over time, however as research has shown previously, this is not true for virtual environments (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). From the findings of the study, it is clear that when trust is not there in the virtual relationship, the employees began to questions the other sites' efficiency and actions, as seen in the case of the Swede and the Indian above. This can potentially lead to exclusion of those who employees feel is not trustworthy. If all of the employees located in Sweden believe that the people in India take more time for fixing a problem, they might keep the problems to themselves, partly so that they can solve the problems themselves, and partly to avoid further communication with the Indians. This can then lead to difficulties with cooperation within the team, and that the team is divided into several smaller teams which work on their issues, without input or feedback with the other teams.

It is clear that trust has a critical influence on the team’s collaboration. As trust is built differently in virtual relationships than in face-to-face relationships, it can be concluded that time and effort into establishing trust virtually, and education the employees about the nature of trust in virtual teams, is an important aspect of virtual work.

5.1.2 FACE-TO-FACE

Another aspect, which is strongly connected to trust, was the use of face-to-face communication, especially in the beginning of a professional relationship: “It is always worth it that people come there from here and here from there, because then you know each other and are familiar, you have developed some kind of comfort with each other.” – IND1.
"I think that it is important, in the beginning when a team or leadership relationship is formed that there is some face-to-face communication so that people get to know each other." – FIN2.

“You have to meet the people you are leading, you can’t create a good relationship without meeting face-to-face.” – SWEM.

This correlates with research in virtual leadership and virtual teams that pin-point the importance of face-to-face meetings in order to getting acquainted and clarifying the general rules of the teamwork (Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Lurey & Raisinghani, 2001; Powell et al., 2004).

The interviewed employees believed that face-to-face communication was vital in the beginning of the relationship, but that it became easier to work virtually with time; “After awhile, when you’ve gotten to know each other I think it works pretty well. It’s only a little difficult in the beginning, but after awhile it doesn’t feel like it matters that much.” – SWE1.

However there were employees that believed that meeting face-to-face was not as vital in their cooperation: “Sometimes it is good to talk to people face-to-face, but it is also possible to work remotely. I think you can still build the same level of trust.” – CZE3. The employee expressed that sometimes it was easier discussing issues if you had a distance between you, and that it actually was easier to communicate via chat or email: “I would say when I have problems with some guy it would be worse if they were here. It’s easy to talk to some people, and it’s hard to talk to other people, so if they are remote it makes this partly worse, but not so much in general.” – CZE3.

Most employees also agreed that there were some things that you cannot do over the phone: “If you want to discuss something like the salary or evaluation, then that really should be done face-to-face. It is not proper to do that over the phone.” – CZEM. And the important meetings in general are done face-to-face: “I just had a development meeting and in that instance we do meet face-to-face. So for the important meeting we do see each other.” – SWE3. This coincides with beliefs that negotiations and conflict management should rather be performed face-to-face, because they involve complex interaction and the need to build trust (Bos et al., 2002; Jensen et al., 2000; Hertel, Geister & Konradt, 2005).

People are generally well versed in how to build relationships face-to-face, as this is the general way to communicate and build relationships. However, virtual relationships and communication is becoming more integrated with everyday life, also indicating that this might be easier for future generations. As already seen partly in this study, people can build strong relationships completely virtually, for example one of the interviewed Indians, who expressed that one of their previous project managers now acted as a mentor with daily communication, years after the project they had together.

Generally, the younger interviewees were more positive about virtual work, and although it was clear that the employees feel that face-to-face is important for their relationships, people who built relationships completely virtually also succeeded in building trustful relationships. Taking this one step further, perhaps face-to-face communication is not as important in virtual work, as learning how to build relationships and trust without it. Seeing as most companies might not like to spend the sort of money that would be required in order to allow everyone to meet the people they are working with face-to-face, especially seeing as a big reason for outsourcing to other countries is due to cost cuts, it might be reasonable to invest in clear guidelines for the employees in how to build relationships virtually instead. So even though the employees felt that meeting face-to-face was important in all virtual work, it can be argued that in most instances this is not possible or at least not plausible.
5.1.3 PRESENCE

Most of the employees highlighted the importance of reaching people when they are needed; “What makes our project work is because whenever I have something to ask, I can directly reach management through mail or chat and the concerns always get solved.” – IND2.

“The most important thing is easy access. My manager is so busy, and that’s the only problem, that they are in meetings all the time and I have to wait.” – FIN1.

“It’s difficult when you don’t have the same time schedule. I generally work from 6 to 15, and my manager works from 12 to 24, or even during the nights. It is difficult then to meet her in the right time, if you need something at 6 in the morning, it is difficult.” – CZE2.

Presence has been a term coined in virtual work, as the feeling of a person being “there” (Panteli, 2004). Generally when the employees expressed the difficulty with virtual work, it was waiting for the response from the other person, them being virtually silent, that was one of the main problems. There has been research that express that silence in virtual communication is much more ambiguous and uncertain than silence in face-to-face communication (e.g. Cramton, 2001). People can be silent for a number of reasons: because they agree, because they disagree, because they are physically absent, because they have not received what you sent, etc. One of the Czech employees stressed the importance of getting a quick response: “I would say the most important thing is quick response time, that’s probably best. That the person immediately answers questions, even if just to say ‘I don’t know now, but I’ll check it for you’, that’s better than that they just forward it and wait until it returns before they reply, because then I don’t know what’s going on.” – CZE1.

Silence allows for interpretation, as in the case of the Swede and the Indian who expressed that they did not know what the other was doing. Both of the employees expressed that the other party took more time than necessary with issues or responses and then concluded that they were inefficient. This might be seen as a drastic assumption, but Cramton (2001) explains that people communicating by electronic means, generally assume that the cause of an communication conflict is due to a characteristic or behavior of an individual rather than technological problems. As a consequence, a phenomenon known as attribution becomes common, were people conclude the attributes of the person they are communication with on the basis of the few social cues they glean (Lea & Spears, 1991, 1992, 1993 as cited by Cramton, 2001). Because of this, silence may be interpreted as laziness or disinterest, while it can be result of an innocent cause, such as a wrongly addressed e-mail.

Both the Swede and the Indian mentioned one occasion where they found that the other took longer time to perform their task, and preceded to say that all Indians or Sweden takes longer performing tasks. This could be explained by the fact that people tend to generalize attributions, particularly negative ones, to others in the same location (Kelley & Kelloway, 2012). One of the Czech employees took this phenomena one step further and believed that no one in India knew how to code; “It is know that Indians don’t know how to code, it’s like 99% of them, that makes it hard to cooperate with them.” – CZE3. When discussed further it was clear that this opinion had roots in an earlier project filled with conflicts: “I would update some code, and there was some Indian guy who would break my code so I couldn’t even compile it, I couldn’t even start the application. And then I would fix it and the next day something would be broken somewhere else. Then it’s hard to cooperate, when it’s every day, and it was like that in one project.” – CZE3.

It is clear from the findings that virtual communication allows for plenty of assumptions to be made about the other party, and that silence is a contributor to that. Silence can lead to people thinking a person is lazy, or uninterested or even unintelligent. This might feel drastic, but imagine the same thing happening in a face-to-face communication; someone makes a statement, and the other party is completely silent, or perhaps someone asks a question and the other person
does not respond, because they do not have the answer. At least in that situation the first person can perhaps understand what that silent person is feeling, by taking in their body language or facial expression, but in virtual communication this is not possible. This pinpoints the importance of simply sending a reply of OK', virtually communicating that you are nodding your head, in response to someone’s statement, as this allows the other person to understand that their communication has been received.

This pinpoint the importance of being there in the virtual communication, to show that one is present. Many employees felt irritated about not knowing why the other party was silent, and this simple correction, of always sending a response to indicate that the message has been read, that you are working on the problem, or if you disagree with the statement, etc., can greatly improve the communication. Really it is about providing written communication instead of the visual clues you give in a face-to-face conversation.

5.1.4 COMMUNICATION

Many of the employees described how it was not the same to communicate through virtual means as to talk to a person face-to-face: “If you don’t have your boss co-located then the relationship is not at all the same. When you are in the same location you can just go and chat with them without e-mailing or calling, which you might not do at all. If you have a boss co-located it is much easier and it is not the same, having them at a distance.” – SWE2.

There are a number of things that the employees named as the issues with a virtual relationship, one example was the intangible difference between being co-located and dispersed: “When you see someone, and you meet them day to day, you tend to know the person a little more. I mean interacting directly with the person and communicating via mail are two different things. It’s very difficult to judge someone only via chat, I mean to really know someone.” – IND2.

One of the reasons why virtual communication does not feel as warm or as present as face-to-face can be the lack of nonverbal cues (Straus & McGrath, 1994). Nonverbal cues, such as nodding, eye contact, quizzical expressions, frowning etc. are the natural indicators as to whether or a message requires further explanation or not. It has been found that nonverbal cues might convey as much as two thirds of message content, and that their absence may potentially result in attribution, misinterpretation, decreased trust, and inaccurate perceptions of self and others (Cramton, 2001; Hart & McLeod, 2002; Straus & McGrath, 1994). Virtual communication is generally perceived as less warm than face-to-face communication and contain higher levels of negativity that face-to-face communications (e.g. Berry, 2011). This can also explain the employees expressing that the virtual communication was simply not the same as face-to-face contact.

This speaks of the importance of supplementing visual or social cues that are missed in virtual communication, with verbal or written cues. This is done in phone communication as well, for example, using humming to indicate that you are listening. This is one way of supplementing nodding with verbal cues, and the same can be done for written communication. Straus (1997) argued that virtual communication may further constrain social interaction by the physical effort involved in typing what may be seen as nonessential words. However, many may see those nonessential words as the aspect that enrich the communication, and might make the difference between people being in agreement or just thinking that they are.

The employees also spoke of how you could miss undercurrents in email when you do not know each other: “When you know someone; how they work and their specific characteristics, and if they write an email in a certain way, there might be an undercurrent that you can understand, that you wouldn’t if you didn’t know them. So if you know people it is easier.” – FIN2.
Zigurs (2003) points out that richness in media is not only about how many cues that are available in the media, but also about how well you know the person you are communicating, as expressed by the Finnish employee. When you know the other person you often send more frequent, short, simple, and seemingly impersonal messages, as shown in a study by Hart & McLeod (2003).

Many of the employees also pinpointed that the communication was not as frequent, when you were not co-located: “If you have the manager at the same location and you want to ask something, then you can just walk by their desk and ask. But if they are located elsewhere you will think: should I really email them? Which might lead to that you do not ask your manager at all.” – SWE1.

“I guess you would have chats, but it may not be as often as when you’re face to face, to be honest. Because when you are co-located you can just go around and say hi sometimes. It may happen when you’re not, but it may not be as frequent.” – IND3.

In virtual teams, frequent communication can result in improved working relationships among team members and increased perceptions of trust in leaders (Hart & McLeod, 2003). Many of the employees found that it was difficult to have small talk in virtual environments, to simulate the casual chat had around the coffee machine, or in the office during a break. However, both frequent and casual conversation has been proven to improve virtual relationships, which argues that it is important for the relationships to work (Bos et al., 2002; Olson & Olson, 2012; Zheng et al., 2002).

It was also mentioned during the interviews, that you might only reach out to people when there is a problem, as the communication then felt more necessary, which also leads to the virtual communication taking on a more negative tone. If communication is usually about problems or negative comments, one might see the entire aspect of virtual communication as a negative thing. This could lead to employees not wanting to read the last message from team members, as it is most likely about issues or problems. Furthermore, you might stop communicating positive messages, or personal messages, as you might ask yourself why the other party would care.

It seems that the overall feeling surrounding virtual communication, was the feeling of it being a negative and cold communication method, which is also seemingly infrequent. This might then lead to further distance being inserted between dispersed co-workers, rather than bringing them together.
5.2 ORGANIZATION & LEADERSHIP

During the interviews, several aspects were brought up regarding what aspects that influenced the virtual leadership, and the employees all had or had had one or several leaders at a distance during the time at the company. The aspects that were commonly commented on in all interviews or in the majority of the interviews are presented below. The main comments can be grouped into five themes:

- TRUSTING LEADERSHIP
- LEADERS OR MANAGERS
- CONSISTENCY VS. CHANGE
- RESISTANCE

These four themes mentioned above are described in detail and analyzed below.

5.2.1 TRUSTING LEADERSHIP

When it came to leadership most employees agreed that they preferred a project manager who delegated responsibility and listened to their employees: "My manager is a very good listener to begin with. He always takes input from his team members, and he tries to make decision based on what we want. Not all of the decisions, but at least the ones that affect the team. I think that’s a quality all managers should have. He tries to support the team in every way that he can actually." – IND3.

"There are some managers that are very committed to their work and they are very focused on their work and their team and they try to cooperate with every team member. And they try to help you any time you need help. At the same time we are able to listen to your concerns and raise them up to upper management if they have to." – IND2.

Trust has been shown to have a large effect on team member satisfaction, which in turn has been shown to improve virtual team effectiveness (e.g. Lurey and Raisinghani, 2001) and trust development is deemed crucial for project completion in virtual teams (Powell, Piccoli & Ives, 2004).

Including employees in decision-making, was seen as good leadership: “A good manager is someone who trusts in people and give them responsibility of directing their own way of working. Someone who is open, who will discuss and listen to you.” – FIN2.

“My manager trusts me and I trust them, and that is a good quality. Even if there are no other options, they will have trust in us.” – IND1.

Kelley & Kelloway (2012) showed that including an employee in decision-making, may lead to that employee feeling an increased sense of self-efficacy, associated with a perception of being trusted by the manager. This again shows the importance of trust, and it also shows that managers have to be more deliberate and planful about building that trust and maintaining it.

However, as pointed out by the Finnish manager, there is an uncertainty in distance, as things might be interpreted in a certain way without your knowledge: “If you are changing your routine then tell them why. Otherwise they will think something weird is happening and there might be rumors that you can’t bear because you’re not there. Then it’s very difficult to cut the wings of the rumors.” – FINM. This coincides with Kelley & Kelloway (2012) statement that the opportunity for third parties to influence the leaders and employees’ perception of trust is increased in virtual relationships. This may also be connected to the fact that trust in virtual teams is seen as being harder to build and easier to lose.

When it came to the personnel manager most employees wanted someone who cared about them and that was friendly: “The best boss I have had, they were the best because you could talk to them about absolutely everything, which I think is the most important. No matter if it is about work or private life, or anything you should be able to discuss it with your boss, if there is anything on your mind.” – SWE2.
It’s not always about work, we do talk about other general things, and we may go and have a cup of coffee sometimes and it’s not always that we have to have professional talk, it could just be a cup of coffee and a chat. We can really talk about anything, it’s actually very open and they are pretty approachable. I don’t see that barrier of going to talk to them as a manager or something so I think we share a sort of bond.” – IND3.

There have been studies that support that a pleasant and positive atmosphere enables virtual leadership (e.g. Oertig & Buergi, 2006) and as distance has a tendency to make faceless abstractions of people (Brake 2006) this leads to leaders having to be more focused on the fact that people in virtual environments are in fact people too. A friendly manager, who portrays that they genuinely care about the employee, may then allow for a more successful virtual leadership.

Overall the employees wanted leaders that appreciated them, that cared for them, that were open with their communication and that trusted them. Again we see the importance of trust in virtual work and virtual leadership, and furthermore that generally people want their virtual who cares about them. However, the employee also indicated that not only was trust hard to build virtually, but it was also harder to communicate caring when the leader was not physically present. It was harder to build a relationship in the same way, that they did not become friends in the same matter, and that they did not feel that their leaders cared in the same matter as when they were co-located. This pinpoints the importance of guidance in how to build relationships over virtual communication, and that an effort needs to be made in order for the employees to feel that the leaders care about them. This also indicated that leaders need to know how to act in order to successful show caring and trust over virtual communication.

5.2.2 LEADERS OR MANAGERS

The employees put a definite emphasis on the difference between their two closest managers: “My closest manager, the personnel manager is different from the person that is responsible for the project I work with, so I have duplicate managers. At first it was confusing because I wasn’t so sure what issues belonged to the responsibility to the personnel manager and what the project manager was responsible for.” – FIN2.

It was also clear that different employees felt that they were closer to different managers, and in some cases, not close to any manager: “For me managers are just in the position that they exist. They really have no strength over me, I communicate directly with the customer. My manager is just a guy who is sitting here. The most important thing is that he gives me money.” – CZE1.

Many felt that they were closer with their project manager, as they had more daily communication, however, the personnel manager had the responsibility over personal development, providing them with new projects and giving them help, and support in their overall work. Having several different managers, who have different responsibilities lead to some employees comparing these leaders to each other and making assessments regarding who the better leader, is. This comparison might not be conceivable or fair to either of the leaders, as they have different responsibilities.

None of the employees saw any problem with having their project manager located in a different city or even a different country, as the communication was still daily and they were so well integrated in their work. However, when discussing the prospect of their personnel manager being or having been in another location, it was clear that this was much harder to understand and accept. This can have many reasons, but one reason could be that the project manager simply suits virtual leadership better, because of the structure of their communication and frequent communication.

As many of the employees indicate, when your manager is in another location, you are more likely to contact them only when there are difficulties, however, for the project manager there are daily project meetings that forces communication in between these instances. This implies that
more opportunities to communicate might improve the perception of having the personnel manager located at another place. It also suggests that it is important to clear out expectation of your different leaders.

The employees also emphasized the difference between managing and leading, especially the managers themselves: “I’m more of a leader than manager, because I lead people. I try to be fair and equal. I try to listen to everyone and I’m really interested in what people want and what they have to say. I try to treat everyone equally and I want to make sure that I discuss with each and everyone.” – FINM.

“I would say that there are many different types of leaders, and I would place them in two groups. Those who are focused on their own, where leadership isn’t given as much space, but they focus more on the management parts. And then there are those who are of the new era of leaders, who think more outside the boundaries and create a good environment and think about the individuals and about being open.” – SWEM.

Furthermore, many of the employees discussed instances of micromanagement, which was commented on in every country except Sweden: “I've never had problems with my current manager, but my first manager... They were practically stopping emails making our situation worse and they made life quite like hell for us. I mean we were students, with very little experience, very bad English, like all students are. And they didn't like us, so we had a lot of problems communicating, just trying to get things through this person.” – CZE1.

“Here in India, well most people are not satisfied with their managers. When it comes to the work managers here, I have some expectation that they should not boss so much, they should act as manager but be more friendly. I would not say so for every manager here, but whatever I've seen so far. The managers, they only try to manage people, but they should stop that and try to see how they are working and help them in their daily work, not just managing the things or managing the people, but helping them with their work.” – IND1.

“When I came to my current team, it was not easy. It was a lot of micromanagement at first when I came to the team, very old fashioned. Now days it's easier, because I've been active in saying that people should make decision themselves and organize their own work the way that they want. And now the manager is beginning to trust people and that they can manage things themselves.” – FIN2.

As stated previously, most of the employees felt that virtual leadership conducted by their project manager worked well, while they were negative about having their personnel manager at a distance. This could indicate that project management is more suited for virtual work, or it can indicate that people have become used to this and no longer perceive it as a problem. Research conducted in virtual leadership is generally about the leadership of virtual teams and much of that research is actually about managing the team, such as setting time schedules and structuring feedback processes etc., rather than leading them. As the employees at CSC have a different leader for the things that are generally seen as leadership rather than management, such as development, motivational, feedback etc., this may also explain why they feel a stronger resistance for virtual leadership from their personnel manager rather than virtual management from their project manager.

5.2.3 CONSISTENCY VS. CHANGE

The importance of trust in virtual work is as already stated very important, both for the employees at CSC and in previous research. Many researchers state the importance of virtual leaders to set and maintain values, boundaries, and consistency in order to build trust (e.g. Brake, 2006; Duarte & Snyder, 2006).

The Finnish manager talk about the importance of being systematic in the way you work virtually: “I think you have to be very consistent and logical in how you act. I explain to my employees what are the rules and how we are working. And after that it’s been very easy because then everybody know what I expect from them, and I think that is very important when you have employees in different locations.” – FINM.
Structured communication and planning are things that have been deemed important in virtual work and leading virtually in previous research, as it helps to avoid ambiguity (Lurey & Raisinghani, 2000; Maynard et al., 2011). As seen earlier in the study, presence was important in virtual communication as it shows that the other side is “there”. Being structured and consistent may then be a way of showing presence. Research has shown that being consistent and reliable improves trust in virtual communication (Brake, 2006; Kelley & Kelloway, 2012), which further pinpoints the importance of consistency.

One of the Czech employees spoke of the frustration of having a manager who did not schedule communication: “I think time organization and time scheduling is important. I would appreciate if my manager would set a meeting beforehand so I could be prepared for that meeting. Now, my manager can call me whenever, and does call me whenever, and it disturbs my work when they call me 3 times a day to ask something.” – CZE2. Being inconsistent or unpredictable seems to have the opposite effect of consistency, and is then something not appreciated in virtual work.

In contrast to consistency, many of the employees, especially in Sweden and Finland, discuss the rapid change that CSC is undergoing currently, and how that affects their daily work: “The organization has changed a lot and there are a lot of personnel negotiations going on, people here are switched out with Indians or people from Czech. The more they take in from global sourcing, fewer are left to work here. Our jobs disappear and that’s how you experience it. So it has been a bit harder because of this, you feel more pressure” – SWE2. “We have personal negotiation ongoing which is causing some problems. Maybe we are so used to them, but every time we publish personal negotiation they cause some things. People start becoming worried, and some, not many but some have motivational issues. And some they want to do more and somehow try to prove that they are still working at CSC in the future too.” – FINM.

Duarte & Snyder (2006) pinpoints that non-routine situations that contain high interpersonal or emotional components or ambiguity and uncertainty usually require technologies with higher social presence. It can be argued that the negativity surrounding virtual leadership is closely related to that the organization is currently undergoing much change and ambiguity, which is in turn affecting the employees’ view of virtual leadership. Furthermore, not being able to be structured and dependable can negatively affect all leadership, but those who feel that they are distanced from their leader might feel even more uncertain of their role in the future.

When it is harder to build and maintain trust at a distance, rapid change and uncertainty seems to be keenly felt over distances. Also, the employees described how they do not understand much of the decisions made by the leaders at the company, which leads to them losing trust in their situation and future. This may in turn lead to motivational issues with the employees who might then, as some already do, not feel as if they are important for the organization. Overall, change and ambiguity seems to amplify over virtual communication, where being structured and consistent has a positive effect, and inconsistency and distrust makes people less satisfied with their work.

5.2.4 RESISTANCE
There was a notable resistance against virtual leadership, especially when it came to the personnel manager. All of the employees had a personal manager located in the same country, and only employees in Sweden and Finland had personnel managers that were located in a different location. Although many were negative towards not being co-located, this negativity was especially from Swedish employees: “Spontaneously I would say, since I’ve had leaders both locally and remotely, that of course it is much better to have a leader seated locally. You always try to make it work remotely, and it does, you have to make sure it does, but it’s not as good as having your leader locally. It is just that you

31
don’t get the same relationship as if you were located in the same location, you don’t get to know them as well, it becomes more of a strict relationship, more formal.” – SWE3.

“If you don’t have your boss co-located then the relationship is not at all the same. When you are in the same location you can just go and chat with them without e-mailing or calling, which you might not do at all. But if your boss is located in a different city, then maybe you only talk to them if you have a problem, and you don’t get to know each other. If you have a boss co-located it is much easier and it is not the same, having them at a distance.”
– SWE2.

One of the strongest reasons for not wanting their personnel manager in another location, was the lack of natural contact with them on a day to day basis: “We have a personnel manager and a project manager. Generally, I would say that the personnel manager has a very small role in day-to-day work, so we often don’t need to interact with them in a day-to-day basis. It’s the project manager that we interact mostly with.” – IND1.

It was also expressed by the Indian employees that virtual leadership was something that they were not very positive about: “Leadership from a distance is not taken that easily or accepted that easily here. Maybe it’s because of cultural difference, because we are different cultures and we are different overall, but I feel that if we were given a choice, it would not be there, we would not be doing it the way it’s organized today.” – INDM.

Even employees who were experiencing no troubles in their virtual work, still found that virtual leadership was not something positive: “Virtual leadership is a thing that perhaps would not work most of the time, but here in our projects it works very fine. Because mostly what happens is that there is a difference between cultures. So a leader in Sweden be might not be aware of how the people here work. I am not saying that about my project, but in general their expectations could be different and the expectation here could be different.” – IND1.

There has been research that support that physically co-located employees are more satisfied with management than remote employees (e.g., Watson, 2007). However, some employees expressed that much of the change and uncertainty that they are feeling at their department currently, might be influencing the feedback that they are giving: “It’s difficult to measure if a manager is good or bad with feedback, because sometimes it becomes a tool for showing your anger to your manager, if you have any issues with your manager. The employees always try to put the lower ratings to the managers they don’t agree with, that I think will make it difficult to say if a manager is good or bad with that output.” – IND2.

Much of the negativity and dissatisfaction surrounding virtual leadership might then stem from the uncertainty and ambiguity surrounding the organization and individual employees future, rather than an actual problem. Furthermore, much of the negativity seemed to derive from the fact that virtual leadership removes comfort zones. Much of the arguments surrounding why the employees did not want their personnel manager in another location, was because it was easier when they were co-located. This indicates that the employees simply did not know how to handle having them in another location, rather than that they believed it did not work. While many agreed that they preferred having a personnel manager co-located, none of them could exactly describe what they were missing in the relationship, or if they, in fact, missed anything at all.

During the entire course of this study, none of the employees expressed any positive aspects of virtual leadership, and the only positive view of virtual communication was that one Czech believed that sometimes it was easier to solve problems when you are not co-located. This spontaneous negativity aimed at virtual leadership will of course have effects on the performance and implementation of leadership. Research has shown that a lack of optimism and support in initial phases of implementation, often leads to substandard performance (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998) or lack of commitment (Duarte & Snyder, 2006). If the employees enter into the relationship thinking that it is bound to fail, they will be less likely to agree that it is actually
working, and if it fails then they will feel that that was justified, rather than thinking about what went wrong. Furthermore, thinking that it is bound to fail, will allow for the employees to argue against putting in as much effort into the relationship.
5.3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

During the interviews, several aspects were brought up that can be connected to intercultural communication. Some of the aspects were commonly commented on in all interviews or in the majority of the interviews. The main comments can be grouped into three themes:

- OPEN CULTURE
- CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
- INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

These three themes mentioned above are described in detail and analyzed below. Supporting quotes that complement the themes are provided.

5.3.1 OPEN CULTURE

During the interviews it became clear that the interviewees felt that the flat organizational hierarchy allowed them to approach almost anyone in the organization:

“...We have the freedom to meet people and approach anybody you like and discuss things and share and collaborate. We're not restricted to the hierarchical way of working, where you have to talk to your manager first and then go higher. But here you can just approach anyone you want to and it’s a very united way of working.” – IND3.

“We don't really have a strong hierarchy. We don't have it as clearly as there being subordinates and managers and that there are different levels of managers, but it's quite flat at least operative wise. We try for transparency and more visibility and that people should be free to express their thoughts and ideas openly.” – INDM.

This belief that an open culture enables virtual work has been previously stated in research (e.g. Duarte & Snyder, 2006). If the organizational norms and values are focused on collaboration, as well as have an overall respect for people from all cultures, this will enable virtual work. However, organizational cultures are rarely one unified culture as it is a merger of the company’s trade, it’s different national cultures and it’s special characteristics (Plum et al., 2008). This shows that it’s a complex entity and that one organization might have many different subcultures in different locations as well.

The employees spoke of a recent initiative at the company where the organization pushed for a more open culture, with more cooperation and communication, however it was very differently perceived in different countries. In India it was noted that there had been a change for the better, and over all the Indians spoke of the open and cooperative culture: “The culture is very good, it is in fact the best culture I've ever seen in any of the organizations I've worked with previously. The people are very friendly here, so it's not a boss and an employee kind of relationship it's more friendly. I would say that we are helping each other a lot. If there are any problems or some confusion when it comes to the requirements, functional or technical problems, then we help each other to solve it.” – IND1.

However, in the Czech Republic, very few of the employees knew anything about this initiative and in Finland it was described as a sort of marketing material that was not realized in real life. It was clear from the interviews that different people were more or less interested in being open in their communication: “I definitely act differently when speaking to my employees outside of India. I feel specifically because we take care about culture being different. We always try to be bit more courteous and polite mostly because we are speaking to someone from another country, so of course there is a little bit more care that is being taken.” – INDM.

“I don’t care about if it’s comfortable for them to speak with me, I don’t care about their feelings. If I need something I just go and ask, and ask, and ask, and ask until it’s solved.” – CZE1.

The different views of what open communication and culture will of course have an effect on the success in their communication. The Czech employees were overall very critical towards the
Indians and their very different values and culture: “Sometimes with the Indians it’s not that simple. Just talking to them they quite often have different values and although it’s not a direct problem, it leads to more misunderstandings. It’s mainly during lunches or when we’re discussing something and everyone have different hobbies and so on. The good thing is that Czechs and Swedes are quite similar, there are some small differences but culturally we are very close.” – CZE1.

The Czech employees overall felt more comfortable with other Swedes and Finnish people, as their culture was closer to each other, and this allowed for less misunderstandings. However, there has been research that states that the closer two cultures are to each other, the greater the risk for misinterpretation, as expectation is then that they understand each other completely (e.g. Plum et al., 2008). It is also important to note that culture is not exclusively about national culture as every person is a part of many different intertwined cultures.

There has been research that states that in order for people to act appropriately in situations where cultural differences are important, the people need to feel motivated to create results with people who are different from themselves, and to have the courage to change (Plum et al., 2008). This indicates that by having an open culture over the entire organization, a company can lay a foundation for good intercultural communication and cooperation between the employees, something that seems to be present at CSC: “People are highly motivated so we have a really good way of cooperating. People are helping each other and you can even say that people have fun when they work.” – FINM.

Overall, the employees felt that the openness of the organizational culture enabled their cooperation and communication. Although the organizational culture was generally open, the different countries offices showed signs of forming smaller sets of culture, which were more or less enabling of virtual work and collaboration. As an open culture has shown to improve virtual work, it is deemed important to continue enabling it. Being motivated to learn about different ways of doing things, cannot only empower virtual work, but all forms of cooperation. The organizational culture can then have a large part in influencing an open culture to enable all forms of intercultural communication.

5.3.2 CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

People tend to discuss culture from a view of how that culture is different from their own culture: “Just talking to them they quite often have different values….” – CZE1.

“If you compare with India, it’s quite different…” – FIN1.

“Generally it takes much longer for them compared to us…” – SWE2.

Research has shown that in a meeting between different cultures, it is the different practices that people tend to notice first and if these differences are unknown before an encounter, they can lead to misunderstanding and frustration (Plum et al., 2008). Therefore, having an idea about the other party before a meeting can greatly improve the encounter.

An example of a cultural misunderstanding was given by one of the Swedish employees, who expressed one of the frustrations experienced with working with Indians: “In a project you would ask them to have it done by Friday, but then during the Monday meeting they aren’t ready. So then you ask: ‘Can you have it by Friday?’ and they say ‘Yes’, and still nothing happens. You expect them to answer honestly, but you will never get a no, no matter what you ask. Will you be ready? ‘Yes.’” – SWE2.

When misunderstandings arise between people of different nationalities, it is easy to explain it as a cultural misunderstanding, and thereby placing the responsibility of the misunderstanding on cultural differences rather than the individuals in the encounter (Plum et al., 2008). However, it is important to understand that it is not cultures that misunderstand each other; it is people who misunderstand each other. In order to succeed in intercultural communication, it is therefore
important not only to have a general understanding of the other person's culture, but your own as well.

The Swede believed that it was understood that the question: ‘Will you have it done by then?’ actually meant ‘Have it done by Friday’, and that the Indian replying ‘Yes’ meant that they both understood that it would be done by Friday. But perhaps the Indian did not in fact see the question ‘Will you have it done by Friday’ as meaning ‘Have it done by Friday’, or they believed that by answering no would have been offensive, as saying no is generally considered rude in India. If you add the fact that Indians try to be extra polite when communicating with foreigners, as the Indian manager expressed, then the misunderstanding is understandable.

The misunderstanding in itself is not in the fault of either party, however, there was a fault in not recognizing their own part in it. If the Swede had understood a bit about the Indian culture, perhaps they had asked a different kind of question, for example: ‘How long do you think this will take you?’ or they would not have taken that yes as seriously as if a Swede would say it. At the same time, if the Indian knew that the Swede expected an honest answer rather than politeness, perhaps they would not have answer in the same manner and instead said: ‘I will try my best’. There is also fault in not expressing the misunderstanding, if the Swede had opened up a discussion with the Indian and expressed their frustration, they could have perhaps reached an understanding. Instead the Swede made the assumption that Indians are slower, perhaps even lazy or lacking in initiative.

Another example is that several people commented that things are slower on the Indian side: “In Sweden and Finland, if we have something to do, we just do it. In India if they have any problem they just sit and wait for someone to help them, but we ask.” – FIN1.

“Misunderstandings happen all the time, I would say. Everything takes much longer in India, maybe it’s a lot that they have a difficulty taking their own initiatives and that they have to ask first.” – SWE3.

Looked at from another perspective, an Indian expressed frustration with working with Swedes: “I’ve seen that Swedes always try to be perfect in everything that they do, and generally in only one projects. But here in India we are involved in many different things, different projects, and we may not be as perfect in everything. Also it’s different because the office time there is 8-17 and they will only work during that time. But here in India, we tend to work more hours, we can work well beyond their office hours and many do.” – IND1.

So from the Indian perspective Swedes are trying to be perfect in fewer projects and during fewer hours, while Indians work longer, on more projects and are not as perfect. From the eyes of the Swede, Indians are slow, but from the eyes of the Indian, it is the Swedes who are too perfect, perhaps even rigid or bureaucratic, in their projects. This pinpoints the importance of avoiding attribution, or stereotyping in intercultural communication. It is therefore important to take a step back and view something from several viewpoints, asking yourself ‘Why did I annoyed?’, ‘How could I have prevented it?’, ‘What do I do next time?’ and understand your owns cultures fault in the communication.

5.3.3 INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

During the interviews, it was clear that the different countries have very different working and living conditions. For example, in Sweden and Finland people were worried of being replaced with people from the Czech Republic and India: “The organization has changed a lot and there are a lot of personnel negotiations going on, people here are switched out with Indians or people from Czech. The more they take in from global sourcing, fewer a left to work here. Our jobs disappear and that’s how you experience it. So it has been a bit harder because of this, you feel more pressure” – SWE2.
"We have personal negotiation ongoing which is causing some problems. People start becoming worried, and some, not many but some, have motivational issues." – FINM.

This is something that creates a rather threatening environment for the employees according to the Swedish manager: "We move a lot of the jobs to India and Czech, mostly routine-work etc., things that are not as customer-specific. This makes the employees here feel that their jobs are disappearing and it becomes a very threatening environment for them." – SWEM.

At the same time the Czech employees feel that they are valued less: "CSC is like low-cost, low-paying company in Czech Republic. I don’t care about whatever they dream to create, for me it’s more important that the customer is satisfied and that my project is still working." – CZE1. Finally the people in India work longer hours have smaller offices and are offered unhealthier snacks than the free fruit offered in Sweden and Finland.

All of these things might have an effect on how the employees react to virtual work. Working together with people who are in significant different conditions might harbor resentment and it might infest the communication with negativity. Perhaps the Swedes and Finnish employees feel that it is important to express that the Indian employees are taking longer to perform the same tasks, due to their insecurity of their positions. Or the Indian’s feel resentment because they have to work longer and work in worse conditions than the Swedes and Finns.

Besides the organization specific things that are related to the company in the different countries, there is also the broader view of aspects that are different in the different countries. Intercultural communication is about everything that the people at a cross-cultural meeting do in different ways (Plum et al., 2008). Looking into what the employees said in general, India was the odd one out, as having the most different values and view of work etc. This is not entirely surprising as the other three countries are all European, with similar values, especially when compared to India (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).

Cultural differences was also one of the reasons that the employees felt that virtual leadership did not work: "Virtual leadership is a thing that perhaps would not work most of the time, but here in our projects it works very fine. Because mostly what happens is that there is a difference between cultures. So a leader in Sweden he might not be aware of how the people here work." - IND1.

Another aspect that makes intercultural communication more complex is that communication in virtual work also includes the merging of different native languages, and everyone conforming to the same language: "Misunderstandings happens quite often, especially with the people located in the Czech Republic. Maybe it’s a difficulty communicating, mostly with English, as there are some who speak very poor English. It’s better with the people in India, but they usually have better English than we do." – SWE1.

"English is rather different in different parts of the world so it takes time to understand the different accents. And when the language is not your native language, it’s not that clear all the time. So you need to double check everything to see that people have understood." – FIN2.

Besides the obvious problem of people not finding the right words in their second language, there can also be differences in how people perceive different words. Using too easy words, because you do not have the vocabulary might give of a certain impression, while using difficult words might give another. Either way, using English as a communicational language means that people who are better at English might be given more room to express themselves, or given more weight in discussions, while a person who is uncomfortable speaking it may not say much or many not be appreciated when they speak.

As seen previously there are elements of the communication where misunderstandings happen, either from differences in culture, or perceived differences in culture. Studies show that
companies can gain from educating their employees in intercultural communication, as it helps to reduce potential distrust, and allow teams to gel more quickly and work together efficiently (e.g. Oertig & Buergi, 2006). Furthermore, research surrounding virtual teams, has indicated that leaders that help to overcome barriers to intercultural communication, lead more successful teams (Van Ryssen & Godar, 2000). As an open culture was believed to enable the collaboration and virtual communication within the organization, it can be assumed that having the same viewpoint in intercultural communication might improve that communication as well.
6. CONCLUDING CHAPTER

The concluding chapter presents a summary of the findings from the study. The research questions are answered followed by some concluding remarks. Also a discussion on the limitations of this study and proposed future studies are included.

The purpose of this study was to explore what problems and possibilities that surround virtual leadership in practice. In order to fulfill the purpose the following main research question was proposed: What aspects influence the practice of virtual leadership? In order to answer the research question, three sub-questions were proposed and answered through a case study at a large multinational company.

Sub-question 1: From the perspective of employees and managers in virtual organizations, what are the most important aspects of working virtually?
The employees and managers discussed 4 aspects that were deemed important while working virtually:
- Trust: Trust was regarded as important in virtual work, due to it both being harder to build and easier to lose in virtual relationships.
- Face-to-face: Face-to-face communication was deemed important as a starting point for building virtual relationships.
- Presence: Being able to reach the other party and getting a quick response was important as it showed that the person was being present in the virtual relationship.
- Communication: The virtual communication was found being infrequent, negative and cold by the employees.

Sub-question 2: From the perspective of employees and managers in virtual organizations, what organizational and leadership aspects can influence the practice of virtual leadership?
The employees and managers discussed 4 aspects surrounding leadership and the organization the influenced the practice of virtual leadership:
- Trusting leadership: Building and maintaining trust as a leader, and portraying caring of the employees was deemed difficult at a distance.
- Leaders or managers: There was a vast difference in if a boss was acting as a manager or a leader, and micromanagement had a negative impact on the employee's feelings of importance and openness to change.
- Consistency vs. change: Being consistent in actions was important while change and uncertainty had a negative impact on the relationship between employee and leader.
- Resistance: The spontaneous negativity aimed at virtual work can influence the outcome of it.

Sub-question 3: What effects can culture have on virtual communication in these complex virtual organizations?
3 aspects surrounding culture were found to influence the virtual communication:
- Open Culture: An open organizational culture helped to open the barriers of virtual work, while different sub-cultures of the organization had more or less of an open culture.
- Cultural understanding: Not understanding another person's culture, as well as not understanding your own culture, might lead to misunderstandings in virtual communication.
- Cultural differences: Differences in culture, both national and organizational can influence the communication.
**Main research question: What aspects influence the practice of virtual leadership?**

What has become very clear in this study is that there are many different aspects that can influence the practice and perception of virtual leadership. There have been aspects that are not necessarily a part of virtual leadership in practice, but aspects that nevertheless can influence the perception or practice of virtual leadership. What can be said however is that it is in essence a very complex situation.

What has been found in the study is that communication is the most important aspect of virtual leadership. Without communication people are unable to collaborate, to understand each other or successfully build relationships. What was also seen from the study was the importance of being open in your communication in order to form trust, avoid distrust and avoiding misunderstandings. Virtual communication was in general seen as cold or impersonal, or a necessary evil, which suggest that perhaps a more positive standpoint can open up for a more successful virtual communication.

Research shows that virtual leadership is becoming more and more popular, and the trend suggests that it will be even more so in a matter of years, perhaps even the most common form of leadership. Many of the interviewees held a firm belief that co-located leadership is unquestionably better and none of the interviewed in this study said anything that was particularly positive about virtual leadership, the greatest compliment it received was ‘it works’. There are many aspects of virtual leadership that can be very positive for the people involved, for example it allows people to stay in whatever geographical location they want removing the necessity of people having to relocate for their jobs. This is just one of the positive elements of virtual leadership, but the spontaneous negativity expressed by the participants of this study, indicate the importance of educating employees in the subject, in order to give a more nuanced view of virtual leadership.

None of the participants in this study had in fact received any training in virtual communication or virtual leadership. Because this was the case, very differing accounts of how managers acted, and very different views of virtual communication was found. However, it was seen that being deliberate, consistent and structured had a more positive effect, while being unpredictable and not present had a negative effect on the communication. While many expressed that face-to-face communication was important in the beginning of the relationship, people had build successful relationship without it. However, when it came to building relationships between personnel managers and employees, all felt that you had to meet before leading or being led virtually.

One very interesting find in the study was how the employees were more open and accepting of having their project manager in a different geographical location, while having their personnel leader was perceived as very negative thing. This could indicate that project management is more suited for virtual work, or it can indicate that people have become used to this and therefore no longer perceive it as a problem.

In conclusion, there are many aspects that may influence virtual leadership, which only strengthens the importance of educating participants before entering into virtual work. The fact that virtual work is different from co-located work is something that has been proven in research and in practice, which means that simply acting as if it will solve itself, is perhaps not a particularly good way of going about it.
6.1 CRITICAL REVIEW AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In any study it is important to discuss the limitations of the study as well as its generalizability in order to gain a clear idea of what impact the study can have. As this study has been limited to being performed in a course spanning 20 weeks and 30 credits, it had to be limited to that timeframe and work effort. Because of this, the size of this study has been limited to one subunit of one company, and limited to 4 countries. If there had been more time it would have been interesting to investigate different companies, to see how different organizational culture would impact the virtual communication, this is also what can be studied in future research.

When it comes to the small sample that was the core of this research, it can be argued that the generalizability is not very extensive as the study was only conducted in one company, which can be believed to have a very specific culture. A study with several different IT companies could strengthen the findings generalizability in order to draw conclusions about the field in general. However, as many of the findings were reinforced by previous research, such as the importance of trust and face-to-face communication, it can be argued that it is already quite general ideas that are found in the study. It also speaks for the credibility of the findings.

When it comes to credibility of the study, it can be looked at from two possible perspectives, reliability and validity. As this was an interpretive study, reliability does not mean that the same results is expected to be found in a repeat study, rather it is about if the results can be understood and explained in this particular case. Some of the elements that were deemed important by the employees and managers are surely connected to their specific situation, such as the changing organization and that’s effect on the virtual communication, and their negativity towards it. Also, as many of the findings are things already found in other studies, it can be argued that the study is reliable, at least in those issues. When it comes to validity, the study’s aim was to explain important aspects of virtual leadership in these complex situations as well as provide empirical data to that fact. To do so, it asked questions about what people found to be important. One of the important aspects of validity is that the study is in fact measuring what it means to. As the study was about what the people believed to be important, it could be argued that by interviewing said people, it is in fact measuring what it aims to, and is therefore valid. Also, it was never the intention that the study would completely exhaust all possible aspects of virtual leadership, which would not have been possible anyway.

The most important and interesting finding of this study, was that people were more negative towards virtual leadership than virtual management. This is not something that has been remarked upon specifically in previous research, and therefore this is a very interesting and vital point to further research in the future. As the relationship between the personnel manager and employee seemed to be more vulnerable to distance, in this study, it is interesting to see if these are findings that are common in all organizations and not just the one studied.

The scope, and findings of this study did not allow for extensive conclusions to be drawn about intercultural communication, partly because of the limited sample of participants from a single country, and because they all at least had one culture in common, the organizational culture of the company. For future work it would be interesting to further investigate the cultural differences between different countries, and the impact culture may have on working virtually. The cultural differences found in the study were not big enough to draw any clear conclusion about how different cultures impacts the virtual communication, but this could be seen as an interesting research project for the future.

In conclusions many of the findings of this study is reinforced by already established research and theories, and that strengthens the credibility of this study. However, when it comes to the specific theme of virtual management vs. virtual leadership more research is needed in order to claim that this is true for all or many companies, and this is what future research must look into.
CITED WORKS


Gerke, S. K. (2006). If I cannot see them, how can I lead them?. *Industrial and commercial training, 38*(2), 102-105.


7. APPENDIX - INTERVIEW GUIDES

7.1 EMPLOYEE (ENGLISH)

Introduction

● How long have you been employed at CSC?
● Describe your main work tasks
● How long have you worked at the sub-unit you are working at right now?
● Why did you choose CSC as an employer?

Leadership/Culture

● Describe the culture at CSC
  ○ (What is it like working at CSC? Compare it to the feeling of other companies; is it more open, friendly, very hierarchical, do you speak with your boss in a friendly way?)
  ○ Do you feel that the culture has changed since you started working here?
  ○ Are you familiar with the concept Open Source Culture?
● Describe the best manager you’ve had
● Describe CSC’s view of leadership
  ○ Describe a typical CSC manager
● Do you communicate with people from different countries in your work?
  ○ Have you ever experienced misunderstandings or conflicts with people from other countries?
    ■ Which countries?
    ■ Give examples

Your team

● Describe your closest team
  ○ Describe how you communicate
  ○ Describe your cooperation
● How do you make decisions?
  ○ Do you have a lot of responsibility?

Your managers

● Describe the relationship between you and your closest manager
  ○ Describe their most important function to you
  ○ Describe how you communicate
  ○ Describe the qualities of your manager
● How active are you in the leadership between you and your manager?
  ○ Do you influence/give feedback on your manager’s way of doing things?
    ■ Give examples
● Describe the relationship between you and your closest leader at a distance
  ○ Describe the most important function of that manager
  ○ Describe how you communicate
    ■ Have you ever had troubles communicating?
    ○ Give examples
  ○ What do you need from that manager in order for your cooperation to work?
7.2 EMPLOYEE (SWEDISH)

Allmänt
- Hur länge har du jobbat på CSC?
- Kan du beskriva dina arbetsuppgifter?
- Hur länge har du jobbat på den avdelningen du är nu?
- Varför valde du CSC som arbetsgivare?

Ledarskap/Kultur
- Beskriv organisationsskulturen på CSC
  - Upplever du att organisationsskulturen förändrats sedan du började på CSC?
- Beskriv den bästa chef du haft.
  - Vad var det som gjorde den personen till en bra ledare?
- Beskriv CSCs syn på ledarskap
  - Beskriv en typisk CSC chef
- Kommunicerar du med människor från andra länder i jobbet?
  - Har det någonsin uppstått missförstånd eller konflikter med medarbetare från andra länder?
    - Vilka länder?
    - Ge exempel

Ditt team
- Beskriv ditt närmaste team
  - Hur kommunicerar ni?
  - Hur samarbetar ni?
- Hur jobbar ni med beslutstagande?
  - (Vilka steg måste tas för att ett beslut ska fattas?)
  - Hur mycket eget ansvar har du?

Dina chefer
- Beskriv relationen mellan dig och din nuvarande manager.
  - Beskriv den viktigaste funktionen din manager har för dig
  - Beskriv hur ni kommunicerar
  - Beskriv din chefs egenskaper
- Hur aktiv är du i ledarskapet mellan dig och din chef?
  - Påverkar du/ger du feedback om din chefs tillvägagångssätt?
    - Ge exempel
- Beskriv relationen mellan dig och din närmaste chef på distans
  - Beskriv den viktigaste funktionen den chefen har för dig
  - Beskriv hur ni kommunicerar
  - Vad behöver du av denna för att ert samarbete ska fungera?
    - (Känner du att du får den support du behöver av din distans-ledare?)
    - Har du och din chef någon gång haft problem med att kommunicera?
      - Ge exempel
7.3 MANAGER (ENGLISH)

Introduction

• How long have you been employed at CSC?
  ○ Why did you choose CSC?
• How long have you been in the position you have now?
• Have you been in a management position before?
• Describe your tasks as a manager

Management at CSC/Culture

• Describe the organizational culture at CSC
  ○ Has the culture changed since you started at CSC?
  ○ Are you familiar with the concept Open Source Culture?
• Describe CSC’s view of leadership
• What directives do you get from CSC on HOW you should lead your employees?
  ○ Are you given specific CSC-tools?
• Have you received any management training?
  ○ Was there anything you focused on specifically during that training?

Leadership

• Describe yourself as a leader
  ○ What is the most important function you provide your employees?
    ■ Would the answer be different if we ask your employees?
• Describe the work process of the teams
  ○ How do you communicate?
  ○ How do you work with teambuilding?
• How active are you with asking for feedback on your leadership?
  ○ Are your employees active in providing you with feedback?
• Describe the experience of leading at a distance
  ○ Do you do anything different when leading at a distance?
  ○ Do you have any previous experience with leading at a distance?
7.4 MANAGER (SWEDISH)

Allmänt
● Hur länge har du jobbat på CSC?
● Varför valde du CSC som arbetsgivare?
● Hur länge har du haft den position du har nu?
● Har du haft tidigare uppdrag som chef?
● Beskriv dina arbetsuppgifter som chef

Att jobba som chef på CSC/Kultur
● Beskriv organisationskulturen på CSC?
  ○ Upplever du att organisationskulturen förändrats sedan du började på CSC?
  ○ Har du hört om Open Source Culture?
● Beskriv CSCs syn på Ledarskap
● Hur mycket direktiv får du från CSC om hur du ska leda?
  ○ Får du några specifika “CSC-verktyg” för hur du ska arbeta som ledare?
● Har du gått några ledarskapsutbildningar?
  ○ Var det något specifikt som man fokuserade på under dessa utbildningar?

Ledarskap
● Beskriv dig själv som ledare
  ○ Vad är det viktigaste att du gör för dina anställda?
    ■ Skiljer det sig om vi frågar dem samma fråga?
● Beskriv hur det fungerar i teamen.
  ○ Hur kommunicerar ni?
  ○ Hur jobbar ni med teambuilding?
● Hur aktiv är du med att söka feedback om ditt ledarskap?
  ○ Är dina anställda aktiva med att ge dig feedback om ditt ledarskap?
● Beskriv hur det är att leda på distans
  ○ Gör du något annorlunda i ditt distansledarskap?
  ○ Har du någon tidigare erfarenhet av att leda på distans?