

Associations among Personal Characteristics, Work Related Factors, and Virtual Distance

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ABSTRACT

This study examined associations among work related factors, personal characteristics, and the virtual distance between employees and their work teams. Hypotheses related to these associations were derived from previous studies and tested using data collected from a sample of 238 employees from a multinational telecommunications company. The findings confirmed significant associations reported in previous studies: between age and job satisfaction; between work position, level of responsibility, and the extent to which work was challenging and interesting; and among the personal characteristics and the work related factors. In this organization virtual distance had significant associations with work position, gender, and age but contrary to previous findings it did not have a significant association with an employee's level of education. Contrary to previous findings, virtual distance was significantly positively correlated with the extent to which work was challenging and interesting, and the extent to which work provided opportunities for new learning and career growth. These were the only work related factors that had significant correlations with virtual distance. The findings contribute to theory and practice related to the management and development of virtual work environments and show clearly that in this telecommunications company virtual distance was not having a negative impact in relation to important work related factors.

Keywords: Personal Characteristics, Virtual Distance, Virtual Work Environment, Work Functional Level, Work Related Factors

INTRODUCTION

Developments in communication technologies or systems, and the convergence of several broadband technologies have had a significant impact on how people work together. Organizations no longer need to co-locate work teams and this provides opportunities for cost savings, flexibility, innovation, and higher resource utilization as well as increased competitiveness and global growth (Markus, Manville, & Agres, 2000; Mowshowitz, 2002; Alomaim, Tunca, & Zairi, 2003; Coggins, 2011). However, several studies have reported that virtual organizations with work teams distributed in multiple locations present problems as well as benefits (Putnam, 2001; Anderson & Shane, 2002; Prasad & Akhilesh, 2002; Peters & Manz, 2007; Bjorn & Ngwenyama, 2009). In the context of information technology companies Sobel-Lojeski and Reilly (2008) reported increased complexity in work operations, misunderstandings among workers, and risks of breakdown in communication.

The concept of a virtual organization was evident first in studies by economists in the 1970s concerned with the transaction cost theory as the basis for outsourcing practices which emerged in the 1980s. Different approaches to developing virtual

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