

Appendix I - Case study Protocol

Section A: Overview of the research project

Virtual teams have become increasingly significant because such teams allow geographically dispersed employees to work across organisational, geographical, cultural and chorological boundaries. With the advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), diverse workforce can be gathered and information can be shared across companies and industries.

Although virtual teams enjoy the benefits of diversity, they present a variety of challenges to traditional approaches of communication and coordination. One of the challenges faced in the companies is about building and strengthening the ties that will bind employees who are distributed in different locations. Because of the geographical dispersion, it is more difficult for employees to rely on the traditional hierarchical means (e.g. direct supervision) and tangible elements (e.g. buildings, colleagues, visual and explicit rituals) in creating a sense of belonging in their organisation. Employers are constantly faced with the problem of employees shifting their loyalty elsewhere (Rock and Pratt, 2002). Indeed, the geographical dispersion and lack of face-to-face interaction in the virtual settings has resulted in reduction of communication cues and difficulty in socialisation as well as feelings of isolation and detachment from the organisation (Ahuja and Galvin, 2003; Lipnack and Stamps, 1997; Chidambaram, 1996). These challenges may lead to ambiguity in how the employees define themselves in their teams and in companies to which they belong (DeSanctis and Monge, 1999; Wiesenfeld et al., 1999) and consequently, their cooperative behaviour. In addition, employees often work in different types of teams such as in the co-located teams, virtual teams or teams which consist of both the 'local' and 'remote' members working at the same time. The flexibility of working in various teams may lead to preference and inequality in terms of commitment to one team versus another or a subunit versus the companies (Gregersen and Black, 1992).

The dispersed nature and inherent membership diversity in virtual teams leads to problems in developing and maintaining a sense of belongingness among the employees as

identifying and commonality among the employees may be much more difficult (Pratt, 2000; DeSanctis and Poole, 1997).

This research aims to explore and gather deeper understanding of the formation of identity in virtual teams and the effect of identity on conflict in the teams. In particular, it identifies factors that drive employees to identification with the teams and investigating the impact of identity on employee behaviour that is associated with conflict in virtual teams. Team identity can be viewed as the individual's perception of self as being part of a particular team. In other words, part of the perception of 'who one is' is dependent on the team which he/she belongs to or interact with.

The thesis first focuses on the process of how identity is formed by exploring the possible factors that impact on such formation. Based on the perception and behaviours of the employees, this research seeks to answer research questions: Why do employees identify or not identify themselves in virtual teams? What causes or makes a person feels that he is part of the team?

The formation of identity is a continuous process that requires constant maintenance and reproduction on a daily basis (Thompson and Mchugh, 2002, p.339). As employees interact with social structures which are conducted in a larger system through the companies that they belong to and work for, the study needs to be incorporated into a wider social context incorporating the interaction and interdependence of virtual workers and their social structures. Furthermore, with the dramatic and rapid changes in ICTs and organisational structures, the emergence of multi-locational opportunities for work, and the disturbance of cultural issues, there is a need to incorporate a more multi-faced and multi-level conceptualisation of environmental context into organisational research (Clitheroe et al., 1998). In other words, a more comprehensive approach in studying identity and conflict issues needs to integrate a wide range of environmental and behavioural units of analysis.

Therefore, the research questions will be considered contextually by identifying the personal factors descriptive of the individual(s) or group(s) and their interaction relevant to the local context. The relationships between the ICTs, task characteristics, group context,

organisational environment (DeSantis and Poole, 1994, p.125) and the formation of identity need to be examined.

Identity influences employees' behaviour at work. Turner (1987) suggests that the process whereby individuals become team members involves cognitive, emotional and behavioural alignment. As an individual's social identity is derived from the collective, a person's personality, ethics, morals and behaviours may be influenced by the team(s) to which he or she belongs. Thus, the alignment of behaviour is an automatic response to cognitive and emotional alignment, which can be achieved through social identification. In teams, when a shared identity is prominent, there tend to be higher levels of loyalty, trust and concern for one another and thus upholding the interest of the team as a whole. Identity influences collective and cooperative behaviour.

The second part of the thesis seeks insights into the consequences of identity in virtual teamwork. A team has to think as a unit and be committed to the team goal in order to reap performance (Lembke and Wilson, 1998, p.938). Hence, whether the establishment of identity in virtual teams is advantageous will be demonstrated via the individual's mindset (perceptions towards the colleagues in the same teams) and their collective behaviour in their daily working life. Many a time, performance in teams is measured by its ability to gain and value experience as well as manage disagreement (Tjosvold, 1991; Gruenfeld, et al., 1996). In other words, any unmanaged conflict would be detrimental to the team performance. Hence, the relationship between the emergent collective behaviour and conflict is studied.

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the formation of identity and its impact on virtual teams. It is hoped that results will be of interest and value to companies in recognising the potential contribution of social identity to the formulation of strategies for exploiting the benefits of working in virtual teams.

Section B: The case research methods

The current research examines identity and how it affects conflict in virtual teams. An in-depth data collection and analysis of virtual teamwork is required. Information gathered

will be more descriptive, thus qualitative research is more appropriate. Such research provides data rich in ideas, insights, explanations and suggestions. The qualitative approach is useful when the research is based on small samples but intended to provide insights and understanding of the problem settings (Malhotra, 1993).

The case study approach is chosen as a research method as such approach is often used to provide an in-depth and descriptive interpretation. In business, this approach is appropriate when the phenomenon being studied is complex. As variables influencing the phenomenon may come from different sources, detailed observations and in-depth interviews enable the researcher to explore the complexity of their causal mechanism and to relate them within their unique context and environment.

The researcher wishes to conduct an empirical study within more than one company operating virtual teams. Since the focus is on task processes, teams dealing with short term projects will be selected. The researcher hopes to observe the whole process of a project and to examine the interaction between team members in completing their tasks.

Section C: Research Procedures

1. Initial approach to companies
 - (a) Selection of cases

More than one company operating virtual teams is desired. The researcher hopes to conduct multi-case studies as evidence gathered from such approach is more convincing and robust (Yin, 2003). The researcher hopes to conduct research in more than two companies to allow for comparison purposes across the cases. Because the sample is targeted to virtual teams, individual team will be considered a single case. The researcher plans to conduct fieldwork in at least four virtual teams.

Table 1: Criteria for selecting cases

	Criteria	Rationales
'Virtualness'	Distributed in different locations and the team members communicate using the information and communication technologies (ICTs).	To examine if contextual factors such as proximity and the use of ICTs influence virtual workers' identity in virtual teams.
Virtual workers' engagement in teamwork	Members engaged in virtual teams and co-located teams at the same time.	To distinguish the way employees identify with co-located teams and virtual teams.
Types of virtual teams	Since the focus is on issues of conflict, virtual teams dealing with short term projects will be selected.	To observe employees' interaction in accomplishing the project and to capture potential conflicts that happened during the project.
Life span of the virtual teams	Virtual teams selected consist of permanent and temporary virtual teams.	To identify the effect of life span of virtual teams on members' identity in the teams.
Projects handled in virtual teams	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Projects involved in a variety of functions ranging from technical to service. 2) Consist of projects that require high interdependency to low interdependency of virtual workers; and projects with high urgency to low urgency. 	To identify the impact of task characteristics on members' identity in virtual teams.
Composition of workforce	multicultural	To embrace a more complete picture of multicultural aspects, which will provide a better understanding of the diversity of virtual teams in terms of location, demography, culture, information and value.

(b) Establishing contact

The researcher makes contact with relevant people and companies by telephone and emails prior to formally contacting companies requesting access to conduct her research. The researcher will utilise contacts obtained through attending business and academic conferences and workshops. Personal networking is also utilised to invite people and companies to participate in the research.

An initial letter inviting companies to participate is drafted (See Appendix IV) and sent out, together with an executive summary of the research project (See Appendix III) explaining the aims and objectives of the research and methods in collecting data.

2. Scheduling of field visits

The researcher seeks permission to carry out the research project within the company and to be able to interview employees involved in virtual teams. If permission is granted, the researcher hopes to begin the research in July 2006 with the project lasting for about one to two months or more. The amount of time spent per visit varies according as to the ways in which data are gathered, either via interviews, observation and the availability of the respondents in the organisations.

Virtual teams handling a short term project will be selected. The researcher hopes to observe the whole process of a project, to examine the interaction between team members in completing their tasks and to capture potential conflicts that occur during that period of time. Hence, the time that the researcher intends to spend in conducting the fieldwork will be determined by the project life span in every virtual team.

The duration of an interview takes an average of one hour per session and the observation sessions will depend on the permission granted in every organisation.

3. Expected preparation prior to site visit

Documents may be collected from the gate-keeper of the research prior to the site visit and during the site visit. Before contacting the companies selected, information about the particular companies will be gathered from various sources e.g. the annual reports, corporate announcements and the press. During the fieldwork, documents such as the organisational chart (the virtual teams), the company profile, job descriptions and the electronic correspondence of the employees can be obtained.

Section D: Research instruments

The qualitative case study approach will be used as the main method for data collection. Within it different sub-methods are used - interviews, observations, documents and records analysis. This approach for different methodological standpoints is termed triangulation (Gillham, 2000).

1. Interview

Interviews with team members as well as supervisors and managers will be undertaken to understand how the virtual team works. The cognitive framework in people's mindset and psychological underpinnings on the role of social conflict and inter-group relations can be known.

The plan is to carry out face-to-face and structured interviews with every virtual worker in the virtual teams. Semi-structured interview is chosen in order to assist the researcher in keeping to the agreed objectives. In business research, accessibility and time factor are always constraints, due to the busy schedule of the companies. As a result, the researcher plans to spend about an hour on every interview session.

a. The Interview guide

A set of semi-structured format interview questions is designed for the interviews. The structure of the interview comprises six parts and contains a detailed list of all issues to be discussed:

Introduction

The introduction aims to obtain information on when the respondents joined the company, their job description and responsibility. These questions are introductory and aim to have an overview of the interviewee's background and job function involved in the team and company.

Research objective (1) –

To explore the cognitive processes of the formation of identity, particularly the self-categorisation process when employees identify themselves with virtual teams

The self-categorisation process involves the cognitive perspective, so Turner's (1986) Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) is used to understand how employees categorise themselves within the teams. The operation of the social categorisation process is viewed as the catalyst of stereotyping and collective behaviour (Hogg and Terry, 2000). During the processes of categorisation, people cognitively represent the defining and stereotypical attributes of teams and these attributes are often used to characterise a team (central) and distinguish it from other teams (distinctiveness). Whetten and Mackey (2002) describe 'central' attributes as those that employees generally consider to be 'essential' to the organisation (p.16). From the employees perspective, what is 'essential' can be understood in terms of institutional structures, that is, 'we are a bank' is different from 'we are an accounting firm' and by members frequently using the notion of 'we' rather than 'I' without realising it. Further, the self-categorisation process involves social comparison - the criterion of distinctiveness construes the identity in the team through implicit or explicit processes of comparison. Distinctiveness can be predicated on comparison, on judgements of similarity and difference from comparable entities (Corley et al., 2006, pp.91-92).

Hence, by asking questions such as 'how well do the employees see themselves working in the team?'; 'to what extent do they see themselves working together as a team?' and 'to what extent do they think their group is distinct from other teams?', 'what are the things that the employees think they have in common with other members in the same team?', the researcher is able to understand at least the issues of centrality and distinctiveness, which may provide insights into the self-categorisation processes.

Research question:

1. How do virtual team members categorise and identify themselves in virtual teams?

Research objective (2) –

To study the motivational aspect of the formation of identity – identifying factors that determine the employees to categorise and identify themselves with virtual teams (why)

Such factors are examined from multi-layers or the broader context of the companies in order to appreciate the interrelationship among individuals, team and environmental influences that affect the process of identification in virtual settings.

Research questions:

2. What are the possible motivational factors that drive virtual team members to identification in virtual teams?
 3. To what extent do the virtual settings impact on virtual team members' motivation to identify with their teams?
 4. What is the role of management in promoting identification in virtual teams?
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Research objective (3) –

To examine the reaction and behaviour of virtual employees when facing identity threats during conflicts

Research questions:

5. What are the possible conflicts that arise in virtual teams and what factors cause such conflicts?
 6. How do virtual team members react to and deal with conflicts arising in virtual teams?
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Research objective (4) –

To evaluate how evolving self-enhancement strategies impact on members' behaviour that is associated with conflicts in virtual teams (i.e. employees' in-group and conflict handling behaviour)

Research questions:

7. What are the factors that influence the choice of self-enhancement strategies and how they relate to virtual team members' behaviours associated with conflicts?

b) The interview protocol

Appendix II	
Interview Questions – Revised version	
Sample: Virtual Team Members	
Part A - Brief overview of the project –	
The researcher introduces herself and gives a brief explanation about the purpose of the current study to the interviewee.	
Part B - Demographic data	
- Characterisation of social groups	
- To gain information about the respondents	
1.	Could you tell me your job position in the organisation?
2.	What's your age? What's your nationality?
3.	How many years have you been working in the organisation?
4.	What's your educational background?
5.	Did you start working as an (e.g. administrator) when you first entered the organisation?
6.	(a) Could you tell me more about your work in the organisation?
	(b) Approximately what percentage of your work is project based?
	(c) How many projects are you working on at the moment?
7.	Could you briefly explain your role in this *** project?
Part C – Identity in virtual teams and companies	
8.	(a) To what extent do you feel about yourself being a member in the *** team? (Please refer to Checklist 1)
	(b) To what extent do you think your team is different from other teams?
9.	(a) Do you like working for the organisation?
	(b) What do you like best about working for the organisation?
	(c) What is the worst thing about working for the organisation?
10.	Would you recommend your company as a company to work for to your friends? What makes you say that?
11.	Do you identify with the *** team in a similar way as well?

12. Does the perception that you have towards the company influence the way you think about the *** team?
- If 'Yes', How?
 - If 'No', why not?

Part D - Factors that determine identity in virtual teams

i) The individual factors – relates part A's answer to questions 8 and 9

ii) Characteristics of teams – the contextual factors

13. Do you enjoy working in the team which has members distributed in different locations?
- If 'Yes', why? (Benefits / Any excitement you come across while working in the team)

 - If 'No', what type of problems do you face working in such team?
(Please refer to **Checklist 2**)
 - Do you think the problems you mentioned above affect performance in the team?
 - If 'Yes', how? – (**relates to conflict in the teams**)
14. (a) What type(s) of interaction do you have with other team members working on the *** project?
(Please refer to **Checklist 3**)
- (b) What factor(s) do you think influence how often you have a meeting with others in this project?
(Please refer to **Checklist 4**)
15. (a) To what extent do you socialise outside working hours with others in the organisation NOT working on the *** project?
- (b) To what extent do you think socialising activity is necessary for the *** team?
- (c) Do you think lack of social interaction influences communication and coordination in the team?
i. If 'Yes', why?
- (d) What factor(s) do you think influence(s) the social interaction in the team?
(Please refer to **Checklist 5**)
- (e) To what extent is socialising activity initiated by the company? (**relates this questions to the intervening factor**)

iii) Task characteristics

16. Who allocates your work in the team?
17. How do you organise your work for this project? (In terms of priorities, scheduling, meeting objectives, volume, control, etc)
18. What discretion do you have in terms of when and where you work on this project?
19. (a) What deadlines do you have to meet and what interim reports (e.g. on testing results) are you required to produce for the project?
- (b) To what extent do you think the interim reports, (testing) schedule enhance your performance in the *** team?
20. (a) How's your performance in the team measured?

iv) The intervening factors

- (b) How frequently does the team leader informally discuss your performance with you?
21. (a) What action(s) does your supervisor take to establish a good team spirit?
- (b) What action(s) could your supervisor take to establish a better team spirit (to enhance communication and coordination in the team)?

Part E – Impact of identity on employees' in-group behaviour and conflict

22. (a) Do you know each other in the team very well? What makes you say that?
- (b) To what extent do you think you are similar to other team members? Do you think having something in common helps you to work together better?
(To identify: a) certain in-group behaviour,
b) Self-categorisation process – similarity-attracts)

(c) How do you see your contribution to the team? What are the things that you do which make you a good team-player in your team?

23. (a) What type of problem(s) do you meet when working with employees in the *** team?
 (b) For one of these problems, how did you handle it?

Part F – Feedback on the quality of the interview questions will be sought. The informants are welcomed to give their opinion and to advise areas that they think are important but have been omitted in the interview.

**** End of interview ****

Q. 8(a)

Checklist 1: THE SELF-CONCEPTION OF INDIVIDUAL(S) IN VIRTUALTEAMS

Please indicate the way you see yourself as a person in the following by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Self-conception	The degree of self-conception				
	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Not at all
Self-worth					
Self-image					
Sense of belonging					
Sense of identity towards the company					
Sense of identity towards the members in the same team					
Other(s) Please specify					

Q. 13(b)

Checklist 2: TYPES OF PROBLEM FACED WORKING IN VIRTUAL TEAMS

Please indicate the types of problem faced working in virtual teams by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Types of problem faced working in virtual teams	Tick one, or more if appropriate
Loss of a sense of belonging to the team due to the lack of face-to-face meeting	
Loss of identity in the team due to the lack of face-to-face meeting	
Difficulty in team spirit building due to the lack of social interaction in the team	
Trust among virtual team members is affected by the lack of social interaction in the team	
Delay in communication	
Misinterpretation due to the use of electronic media in communication	
Ineffective teamwork due to the lack of competency in using electronic media to communicate	
Ineffective teamwork due to the preference working with electronic media	
Misunderstanding due to the language barrier	
Miscommunication due to the language differences	
Other(s) (Please specify below)	

Q. 14 (a)

Checklist 3: FREQUENCY OF INTERACTIONS

Please indicate the frequency of interaction by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Interactions at work	FREQUENCY OF INTERACTIONS				
	Very Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Exchanging information about work					
Sharing knowledge about work					
Visiting sites and clients together					
Other(s) (Please specify below)					
Channel(s) of Interactions					
Face to face Meetings					
Tele-conferencing Meetings					
Video-conferencing Meetings					
Telephone conversations					
Electronic-mails					
Other(s) (please specify below)					

Q. 14(b)

Checklist 4: FACTOR(S) THAT INFLUENCE(S) THE FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

Please indicate factor(s) that influence(s) the frequency of interactions by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Factor(s) that influence(s) the frequency of meetings (<i>Face-to-face meetings and/or meetings via Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)</i>)	Tick one or more if appropriate
Geographical distance	
High cost of travelling and time consuming	
The cumbersome in using ICTs	
I dislike using ICTs	
ICTs are not effective communication tools	
Time zone difference	
Other(s) (Please specify below)	

Q. 15 (d)

Checklist 5: FACTOR(s) THAT INFLUENCE SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE TEAM

Please indicate factor(s) that influence(s) social interaction in the team by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Factor(s) that influence social interaction in the team (<i>Face-to- face social interaction and/or social interaction via Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)</i>)	Tick one, or more if appropriate
Geographical distance	
High cost in traveling and time consuming	
The cumbersome in using ICTs	
I dislike using ICTs	
ICTs are effective communication tools	
Time zone difference	
I perceive social interaction as not necessary in temporary virtual team	
I dislike socialising with people working in the same team	
Lack of common topics in communication	
I am too busy with my work and have no time to socialise with others	
I don't know other virtual team members in person, thus I don't see the need to socialise with them.	
Other(s) (Please specify below)	

2. Observation

Detailed observation is intended and it suits the case study research, as it helps to gain a more understanding of the social relationships among the tea employees. This method is a 'purposeful, systematic and selective way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place' (Kumar, 1999, p.105). Non-participant observation is chosen for the present study, whereby the researcher remains a passive observer, watching and listening to the activities and drawing conclusions from the observation. Prior to any visit to the companies, a checklist (see Appendix VIII) had been prepared beforehand based upon the research questions and objectives which enabled a particular focus to be given to the observation.

The researcher plans:

- 1) To have observation sessions in each company e.g. a walk-around in the companies, taking notes and observing social interaction.

- 2) To visit different sites (virtual workers may be distributed in different locations) where participants are located. This would help the researcher to gain an understanding of the company's daily operations, the social interaction among employees, the communication, work flow, and the transfer of information with regard to the project handling process.
- 3) To be able to sit in on some virtual team meetings (e.g. tele-conference meetings) to enable her to fully understand the context within which discussions take place.

Purpose of the observation:

- 1) To understand the work flow and to ascertain the functions or jobs performed in virtual teams.
- 2) To identify the contextual factors that impact on identity formation and collective behaviour in virtual teams.

The contextual factors may include:

- a. social interaction among the employees
 - b. social interaction between the employees and the ICTs - to get a picture of how employees use ICTs in communication and in accomplishing tasks.
 - c. the task handling processes
- 3) To capture the scene when conflict occurs – to understand why and how did conflicts happen and how the members deal with them.
 - d. Why did conflict occur?
 - e. How did it happen?
 - f. How did members resolve it?

3. Documents:

The researcher hopes to collect archival materials (e.g. annual report, organisational chart, company profile, job descriptions of the employees). Particularly, the researcher hopes to

obtain electronic-mails (emails) used in virtual teams in order to understand the work flow and communication; and to examine the underlying social structures, discourses which influence identity and conflicts in the teams.

Section E: Data analysis guidelines

After data is collected, the researcher moves on to the stage of analysis. The data collected from the interviews (which is captured in transcripts), documents, and observations are then coded, categorised and analysed using qualitative data presentation and analysis methods.

The analysis process begins with transcription of all the tape-recorded interviews in order to capture the narrative provided by the respondents into organised written text. Then, the data is sorted into manageable sections under categories in relation to the research questions.

The process proceeds with the work of sorting and classifying the data under the same topics and headings. An organised assembly of information permits the researcher to draw conclusions and take action. Information will be subsequently displayed in the form of tables. The researcher then ties together relevant bits or chunks of the data to the appropriate category/categories.

Next, a thematic qualitative analysis is used as the analytical method to make sense of the interview data, in which the explanations given by employees during the interview are matched to different themes. Each part of this analysis is driven by pre-existing theory, reflecting the theoretical context of the research. When the researcher compares the data, key themes and patterns of relationships will be identified.

This study analyse the cases based on first the team-based and secondly, the organisational level. By using a cross-case analytical framework, the researcher is able to evaluate the relative performance by looking for patterns and themes in the data that are common across the teams and across the companies. Similarities, differences in notable outcomes or attributes and their contributing factors are identified. Also, cross examination of the teams with similar profiles but different social settings will allow for diverse ways of

conceptualising and operating future plans. This can be achieved by extracting the lessons learned from the different contexts and examining their applicability to a given context. Although the virtual teams are characterised by different industries, sectors, social and cultural settings, there are certain aspects that are comparable and offer a valuable source of evidence and lessons. The diversity demonstrated in the factors that motivate virtual workers to identify with the virtual teams helps create an effective knowledge base for companies on issues of fostering identity in a diverse, geographically dispersed team. Apart from the cross-case analysis, cross-cluster analysis is used to compare data and patterns among clusters that have common traits regardless of case. Common traits could be the biographical traits or demographical characteristics of employees (e.g. gender, educational background, age, work experience). This approach helps the researcher to identify the social groups that virtual workers use to categorise themselves. In this research, the seven virtual teams (or cases) will first be analysed, followed by focusing on the companies to capture a larger picture.

The next step of data analysis involves drawing conclusions and verifying the data to develop meaning. Conclusion drawing and verifications take place during the data transformation process, as data is merged, clustered, sorted and linked together to derive patterns and themes (Yin, 2003). The final phase of the case study analysis is to re-conceptualise or develop ideas consistent with the theory through comparison with the theoretical framework, finding opportunities to replicate the research findings (Mile and Huberman, 1994).

Section F: Case study report

Upon completion of the study, a general report on feedback and current practice of the organisation will be presented to the management for its perusal. Issues of confidentiality may arise when collecting interview and observational data. Therefore, the researcher will clearly communicate to the participants before collecting data that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be protected. In addition, the confidential nature of the material will be respected, and no information will be published without permission of the companies.

Letter inviting individuals or companies to participate in the research (see Appendix III)

The executive summary of the research project for companies (see Appendix II)

_____ End of Case study Protocol _____

Appendix II – Proposal for Companies

The Executive Summary

Virtual teams have become increasingly significant because such teams allow geographically dispersed employees to work across organisational, geographical, cultural and chorological boundaries. With the advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), diverse workforce can be gathered and information can be shared across companies and industries. Although virtual teams (VTs) enjoy the benefits of diversity, they also present a variety of barriers or challenges to traditional approaches of communication and coordination. This research project aims to develop more insights into group interactions and inter-group dynamics particularly in the area of conflict in VTs. The first objective of the project is to examine process in which employees identify themselves within virtual teams. The influence of the contexts of virtual environment on team members' social identity in VT is looked into. Social identity can be viewed as the individual's perception of self as being part of a particular team to which the employees belong or with which they interact. Secondly, the researcher also proposes to look into the issues of conflict in VTs and subsequently, to examine the control mechanisms adopted in VTs. However, excessive control may affect trust and satisfaction as many VTs members may be knowledge workers who greatly value autonomy and discretion at work. Therefore, the researcher proposes to first understand the control mechanisms adopted in VTs and subsequently, assess the extent to which they affect the virtual team performance. This research project aims to identify the on-going impact of social identity have on conflict and control and subsequently the outcomes in VTs. It is hoped that results will be of interest and value to organisations in recognising the potential contribution of social identity to the formulation of strategies for exploiting the benefits of working in virtual teams.

Methods

The researcher wishes to conduct an empirical study within one or more organisations where employees are working in virtual teams. Since the focus is on task processes, teams dealing with short term projects will be selected. From this, the researcher hopes to observe

the whole process of a project and interaction between team members in completing their tasks.

Since this research aims to address the issue of social identity and how it could affect conflict and control in VTs, an in-depth analysis of the working of VTs is required. Interviews of team members as well as supervisors and managers will be undertaken to understand perceptions, behaviours and attitudes of team members towards virtual team working. This enables the researcher to comprehend the impact of the cognitive framework in people's mindset and psychological underpinnings on social conflict and inter-group relations. Where confidentiality allows, the researcher would hope to be able to sit in on some VTs meetings to enable her to full understand the context within which discussions take place. Besides interviewing, the researcher would also like to visit different sites where participants are located. This will help the researcher to gain an understanding of the organisation's daily operations, the social interaction among employees, the communication, work flow, and the transfer of information with regard to the project handling process.

The researcher seeks permission to carry out the research project within the company and to be able to interview employees involved in VTs. If permission is granted, the researcher hopes to begin the research in July 2006 with the project lasting for about one to two months or more. Upon completion of the study, a general report on feedback and current practice of the organisation gathered will be presented to the management for its perusal. Issues of confidentiality may arise when collecting interview and observational data. Therefore, the researcher will clearly communicate to the participants of the study before data collection that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants will be protected. In addition, the confidential nature of the material will be respected, and no information will be published without permission of the organisation.

Brief C V: Yee W Au (Carol)

Oct 2004 – Current	PhD student, School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University, UK
Oct 2003 – Sept 2004	MSc in Business Management with Human Resource Management, Heriot-Watt University, UK
Jan 1996 – Dec 1999	Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators (ICSA), UK (Professional degree - Graduate)
June 1993 – May 1995	Certificate in Accounting with Business Computing, Tunku Abdul Rahman College, Malaysia

A pilot project on virtual teams (VTs) has already been carried out as part of the MSc. The project examined the relationship between technology and team working associated with VTs, in three UK organisations that utilise VTs i.e. Shell, British Telecom (BT) and Alphatech.

Fieldwork for the current research project is conducted in one oil and gas company in Scotland. Access was obtained to study VTs in its R&D department where one team is composed of members from different branches (branches located in Scotland, Brazil, United States and Norway) of the organisation. So far, several visits have been made to the site in Scotland; observations were conducted of the team's conference meeting and interviews of team members are ongoing.

Appendix III – Letter for Companies

Dear Mr / Ms XXXX,

I was given your contact by XXX. My name is Yee Wei Au and i am currently doing my PhD research at Heriot-Watt University, UK. My project is to examine the social interaction and group dynamics in virtual teams. Employees who work in virtual team rely primarily on electronic forms of communication (e-mails, telephone, tele-conferencing, etc) in order to work together in accomplishing goals. The team members are geographically dispersed. My intention is to explore identity and conflict issues in virtual teams.

I am currently looking for more openings in business organisations to do fieldwork. With the distributed nature of your business in many parts of the world, I am sure branches will work closely with each other and most of the tasks are accomplished via virtual team working. I hope you can assist me to complete my studies by granting me permission to look at one or two virtual teams in your organisation.

Attached please find a copy of my research summary explaining the research purpose and methods of gathering data. Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Many thanks for your help.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Kind regards,

Yee Wei Au

e-mail: ywa1@hw.ac.uk

Office: 44-131 451 XXXX

Mobile: 44-XXX XXX XX XX

Appendix IV - Interview Questions

(This set of interview questions is a revised version of the one designed in interview protocol)

Sample: Virtual Team Members

Part A - Brief overview of the project

The researcher introduces herself and gives a brief explanation about the purpose of the current study to the interviewee.

Part B - Demographic data

- Characterisation of social groups
- To gain information about the respondents

24. Could you tell me your job position in the organisation?
25. What's your age? What's your nationality?
26. How many years have you been working in the organisation?
27. What's your educational background?
28. Did you start working as an (e.g. administrator) when you first entered the organisation?
29. (a) Could you tell me more about your work in the organisation?
(b) Approximately what percentage of your work is project based?
(c) How many projects are you working on at the moment?
30. Could you briefly explain your role in this *** project?

Part C – Identity in virtual teams and organisations

31. (a) To what extent do you feel about yourself being a member in the *** team?
(Please refer to Checklist 1)
(b) To what extent do you think your team is different from other team?
32. (a) Do you like working for the organisation?
(b) What do you like best about working for the organisation?

- (c) What is the worst thing about working for the organisation?
33. Would you recommend your company as a company to work for to your friends? What makes you say that?
34. Do you identify with the *** team in the similar way as well?
35. Does the perception that you have towards the company influence the way you think about the *** team?
- If 'Yes', How?
 - If 'No', why not?

Part D - Factors that determine identity in virtual teams

i) The individual factors – relates part A's answer to questions 8 and 9

ii) Characteristics of teams – the contextual factors

36. Do you enjoy working in the team which has members distributed in different locations?
- If 'Yes', why? (Benefits / Any excitement you come across while working in the team)

 - If 'No', what type of problems do you face working in such team?
(Please refer to Checklist 2)
 - Do you think the problems you mentioned above affect performance in the team?
 - If 'Yes', how? – (relates to conflict in the teams)
37. (a) What type(s) of interaction do you have with other team members working on the *** project?
(Please refer to Checklist 3)
- (b) What factor(s) do you think influence how often you have a meeting with others in this project?
(Please refer to Checklist 4)
38. (a) To what extent do you socialise outside working hours with others in the organisation NOT working on the *** project?
- (b) To what extent do you think the socialising activity is necessary for the *** team?
- (c) Do you think lack of social interaction influences communication and coordination in the team?
- If 'Yes', why?

(d) What factor(s) do you think influence(s) the social interactions in the team?
(Please refer to Checklist 5)

(e) To what extent is the socialising activity initiated by the company? (relates this questions to the intervening factor)

iii) Task characteristics

39. Who allocates your work in the team?
40. How do you organise your work for this project? (In terms of priorities, scheduling, meeting objectives, volume, control, and etc)
41. What discretion do you have in terms of when and where you work on this project?
42. (a) What deadlines do you have to meet and what interim reports (e.g. on testing result) are you required to produce for the project?
- (b) To what extent do you think the interim reports, (testing) schedule enhance your performance in the *** team?
43. (a) How's your performance in the team measured?

iv) The intervening factors

- (b) How frequently does the team leader discuss informally your performance with you?
44. (a) What action(s) does your supervisor take to establish a good team spirit?
- (b) What action(s) could your supervisor take to establish a better team spirit (to enhance communication and coordination in the team)?

Part E – Impact of identity on employees' in-group behaviour and conflict

45. (a) Do you know each other in the team very well? What makes you say that?
- (b) To what extent do you think you are similar with other team members? Do you think having something in common helps you work together better?
(To identify: a) certain in-group behaviour,
b) Self-categorisation process – similarity-attract)
- (c) How do you see your contribution in the team? What are the things that you do which make you a good team-player in your team?
46. (a) What type of problem(s) do you meet when working with employees in the *** team?

(b) For one of these problems, how did you handle it?

Part F – Feedback on the quality of the interview questions will be sought. The informants are welcomed to give their opinion and to advise areas that they think are important but have omitted been in the interview.

****** End of interview ******

Q. 8(a)

Checklist 1: THE SELF-CONCEPTION OF INDIVIDUAL(S) IN VIRTUALTEAM

Please indicate to the way you see yourself as a person in the following by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Self-conception	The degree of self-conception				
	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Not at all
Self-worth					
Self-image					
Sense of belonging					
Sense of identity towards the company					
Sense of identity towards the members in the same team					
Other(s) Please specify					

Q. 13(b)

Checklist 2: TYPES OF PROBLEM FACED WORKING IN VIRTUAL TEAM

Please indicate the types of problem faced working in virtual teams by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Types of problem faced working in virtual teams	Tick one, or more if appropriate
Loss of a sense of belonging to the team due to the lack of face-to-face meeting	
Loss of identity in the team due to the lack of face-to-face meeting	
Difficulty in team spirit building due to the lack of social interactions in the team	
Trust among virtual team members is affected by the lack of social interactions in the team	
Delay in communication	
Misinterpretation due to the use of electronic media in communication	
Ineffective teamwork due to the lack of competency in using electronic media to communicate	
Ineffective teamwork due to the preference working with electronic media	
Misunderstanding due to the language barrier	
Miscommunication due to the language differences	
Other(s) (Please specify below)	

Q. 14 (a)

Checklist 3: FREQUENCY OF INTERACTIONS

Please indicate the frequency of interactions by ticking the appropriate box (es).

	FREQUENCY OF INTERACTIONS				
	Very Frequently	Often	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Interactions at work					
Exchanging information about work					
Sharing knowledge about work					
Visiting sites and clients together					
Other(s) (Please specify below)					
Channel(s) of Interactions					
Face to face Meetings					
Tele-conferencing Meetings					
Video-conferencing Meetings					
Telephone conversations					
Electronic-mails					
Other(s) (please specify below)					

Q. 14(b)

Checklist 4: FACTOR(S) THAT INFLUENCE(S) THE FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

Please indicate factor(s) that influence(s) the frequency of interactions by ticking the appropriate box (es).

Factor(s) that influence(s) the frequency of meetings (<i>Face-to-face meetings and/or meetings via Information Communication Technology (ICT)</i>)	Tick one or more if appropriate
Geographical distance	
High cost in travelling and time consuming	
The cumbersome in using ICT	
I dislike using ICT	
ICT is not an effective communication tool	
Time zone difference	
Other(s) (Please specify below)	

Q. 15 (d)

Checklist 5: FACTOR(S) THAT INFLUENCE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THE TEAM

Please indicate factor(s) that influence(s) social interactions in the team by ticking the appropriate box(es).

Factor(s) that influence social interaction in the team (<i>Face-to-face social interactions and/or social interaction via Information Communication Technology (ICT)</i>)	Tick one, or more if appropriate
Geographical distance	
High cost in traveling and time consuming	
The cumbersome in using ICT	
I dislike using ICT	
ICT is not an effective communication tool	
Time zone difference	
I perceive social interaction is not necessary in temporary virtual team	
I dislike socialising with people working in the same team	
Lack of common topics in communication	
I am too busy with my work and have no time to socialise with others	
I don't know other virtual team members in person, thus I don't see the need to socialise with them.	
Other(s) (Please specify below)	

Appendix V: Detailed breakdown and biographical information of interviewees

Location	PEACE						
	Branch				HQ		
	UK				Singapore		
Team	Fleet (F)	Pricing (P)	Sales (S)	Customer Service (CS)	Fleet (F)	Trade (T)	Operation (O)
No. of Employees interviewed	2	2	3	6	1	11	3
Gender	Male - 2	Male – 7 Female - 4			Male - 1	Male – 9 Female – 5	
Age range	31-40: 1 51-60: 1	31-40: 1 51-60: 1	21 – 30: 1 31 -40: 2	21 – 30: 5 31 - 40: 1	41 – 50: 1	21 – 30: 4 31 - 40: 7	30-40: 3
Education background	Marine Engineering	Marine: 1 BSc in BA: 1	Degree level: 2 MsC level: 1	Degree level: 2 Diploma level: 2 A-levels : 1 GCSE: 1	Marine Engineering	Trade: Degree level: 8 Higher Diploma: 1 Diploma level: 2	Operation: Degree level: 1 Diploma Level: 1 Marine engineering: 1
Profession (Job scope)	Engineering (Technical)	Trade: Pricing (Quoting rates)	Sales and Marketing	Customer Service: Take booking, Invoicing, Collecting Fright charges	Engineering (Technical)	Trade: Sales, Pricing, Planning, marketing	Operation: Ship Planning
Years of Experience	0 to < 3 years : 1 3 to 5 years : - > 5 & < 10 years: 1	0 to < 3 years : - 3 to 5 years : - > 5 & < 10 years: 2	0 to < 3 years : 2 3 to 5 years : - > 5 & < 10 years: 1	0 to < 3 years : 4 3 to 5 years : 2 > 5 & < 10 years: -	> 10 years: 1	0 to < 3 years : 4 3 to 5 years : 3 > 5 & < 10 years: 4	0 to < 3 years : - 3 to 5 years : 2 > 5 & < 10 years : 1
Country	Britain: 1 India: 1	Britain: 2	China: 1 Portugal: 1 Indonesia: 1	Britain: 3 Europe: 1 Africa: 2	India	Singapore: 10 China : 1	Singapore: 2 Malaysia : 1
Race	British: 1 Indian: 1	British: 2	Chinese: 1 Portuguese: 1 Indonesian: 1	British: 2 Thai + British: 1 Spanish: 1 African: 2	Indian	Chinese (S'pore): 10 Chinese (China): 1	Malay: 1 Chinese: 1 Indian: 1

	FORTUNE			BATIK			DELIGHT		
Location	UK	US	Brazil (Br)	Malaysia (Mal)	Myanmar (Myan)	Singapore (S'pore)	Malaysia – Kuantan (Mal-K)	Malaysia – Kuala Lumpur (Mal-KL)	Malaysia – Melaka (Mal-M)
Team	R& D – IB Project			Shipping			HR – HR General Bulletin		
No. of Employees interviewed	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Gender	M	M	M: 1 F: 1	F	F	F	F	F	F
Age range	41-50	31-40	M: 41-50 F: 41-50	31-40	31-40	31-40	31-40	31-40	41-50
Education background	Mechanical Engineering: Degree level + Fellow of Engineering body	Mechanical Engineering: Degree level	M: Mechanical Engineering + Member of Engineering body F: Mechanical Engineering + Member of Engineering body	ACCA – Professional Degree level	Business Management: Degree level	Degree level	Language: Degree level	Master in Business Administration	Business Management: Professional Degree level
Profession (Job scope)	Engineering supervisor	Lead Metallurgist	M: Welding Specialist F: Engineering Manager -Material	Accounts and Admin Executive	Purchasing Manager	Division Manager	Personal Assistant	HR Executive	HR Manager
Years of Experience	> 10 & < 20 years	> 5 & < 10 years	> 10 & < 20 years	0 to < 3 years	3 to 5 years	3 to 5 years	3 to 5 years	0 to < 3 years	0 to < 3 years
Country	Scotland	US	Brazil	Malaysia	Myanmar	Singapore	Malaysia	Malaysia	Malaysia
Race	Scottish	American	Brazilian: 2	Malaysian Chinese	Burman	Singaporean Chinese	Malaysian Indian	Malay	Malaysian Chinese

Appendix VI - Interview schedule

Organisations	Interviewees - Designation	Face-to-face or telephone interview	Dates	Time spent
FORTUNE	Virtual team leader – supervisor (UK)	Face-to-face	16/12/2005	1 hour
	Virtual team member – engineer 1 (Brazil)	Face-to-face	16/1/2006	50 min
	Virtual team member – engineer 2 (US)	telephone	15/11/2006	1 hour 15 min
	Virtual team member – engineer 3 (Brazil)	telephone	29/11/2006	1 hour 10 min
PEACE	13 virtual workers were interviewed (London office) Designation: 2 engineers 2 pricing executives 3 sales and Marketing executives 6 customer service executives + assistants	Face-to-face	23/7/2006 to 28/7/2006	Average 1 hour per session
	15 virtual workers were interviewed (Singapore office) Designation: 1 engineer 11 Trade executives (sales and Marketing, pricing) 3 operational executives	Face-to-face	6/9/2006 to 14/9/2006	Average 1 hour per session
BATIK	1 virtual worker was interviewed (Singapore office) – Division manager	Face-to-face	14/9/2006	1 hour 15 min
	1 virtual worker was interviewed (Malaysia office) – Account and admin executive	Face-to-face	15/9/2006 to 27/9/2006	Average 1 hour per session
	1 virtual worker was interviewed (Myanmar office) – Purchasing manager	telephone		
DELIGHT	1 virtual worker was interviewed (Malaysia office: Kuantan) – Personal Assistant + HR personnel	Face-to-face	2/10/2006 to 13/10/2006	1 hour 5 min
	1 virtual worker was interviewed (Malaysia office: Melaka) – HR executive	telephone		50 min
	1 virtual worker was interviewed (Malaysia office: Kuala Lumpur) – HR manager	telephone		48 min

Appendix VII - An example of observation record: A diary note

Company: PEACE
Team: 2
Participant name: C of the UK branch and F of Singapore HQ
Unit title: the reactions and behaviour of members in handling conflict
<p>Activity context:</p> <p>F was engaged with a discussion with his UK colleague about the allocation of space in the vessels. F's aim was to fill up the vessel and to maximize profit. However, C was looking for a lower rate of freight charges to be given to his customer. As a result, conflict occurred between F and C.</p>
<p>Assessment criteria:</p> <p>Identify conflict that arises and describe the reactions and behaviours of these members when dealing with the conflict.</p>
<p>Activity:</p> <p>F picked up the phone and it was C from the UK. C asked about whether the HQ was willing to reduce the quote to \$1100 instead of \$1300. F' refused to agree with the quote that C was asking. Conversation ends with unpleasant feelings.</p> <p>After putting down the phone, F rushed off into his manager's room. After 20 min, F came out of his manager's room. He rushed straight to the water cooler to get himself a cup of cold water. Frustration and anger appeared on his face.</p> <p>When F was back to his desk, he sat down with the glass of water and was doing nothing. I asked F questions relating to the incident just happened over the phone. He took some time to explain what the incident was about. I asked F to describe his emotions at that moment. He replied, 'frustrated'. He continued, 'Sometimes I wonder how come they cannot understand and we have to explain again and again. To me, any conflict like this, it will affect my mood today. I am like... demoralised! Why do I want to go through the hassle, just give them the rate they want and it makes my day brighter. In the whole day, I will get e-mails discussing the same thing again and again'.</p> <p>I asked F whether this conflict turned out to be personal? He replied 'No. We won't take it personally because we all know this is dealing with work. He mentioned that his boss told him that he could jump</p>

about and scream like mad in the office, then cool down. He needs to take the email aside, go for a walk or drink a cup of water, think the incident through and reply to the email maybe an hour later. He stressed, 'our team guideline is - never put your emotion in emails'.

After 10 min, F started to open his emails and started to reply to the party involved in the conflict and explain why he couldn't agree with their quote. When F finished the email, I asked him how he went about solving the conflict. He replied, I reject him in a polite way, I replied that I regret that I cannot agree with his suggestion and stated down what is our best offer. To me, replying email showing your negative emotions by writing in sarcastic way is unprofessional. Even we think that the UK people are more open, I can tell you not everyone can accept confrontation. So, you never know, Let's say someone is not happy with the way you write; he/she thinks that you are more direct, maybe the next thing they will do is to c.c. all the emails to their managers, then the managers will come back to us and say, 'hey, why are you replying to emails in such a way? Then we will be in trouble'.

I asked him if he is happy with the way he reacted and handled conflict. He answered 'yes!'. He described himself as a 'person with a very bad temper and this is well-known in my department. When I decide to do it, I mean it. My colleagues always say that I am like a mad dog that often bangs its head. When I first worked in this office, I always put my feelings over the phone conversations. I am still learning on how to handle my emotions, even till today. If I am feeling angry, I'll try not to answer phone calls and my colleagues will help me on that'.

Supporting evidence: -

Assessment summary:

Conflict between F and C arose because of differences of interests between the HQ and the UK branch. F was able to control his negative emotion when facing conflict. Two reasons for that. – Firstly, he perceived that replying to emails in a sarcastic way because of negative emotion is an unprofessional way of handling things. Secondly, he received advice and support from his manager to handle conflict in a collaborative manner.

It can be summarised that self-image or the conception of self (acting professionally) affect members' conflict handling behaviours. In addition, company policies and management support in encouraging members to handle conflict collaboratively have impact on members' conflict handling behaviours and increase team efficiency.

Assessor: Carol Au

Signature: Carol

Date: 12/09/2006

Appendix VIII - Checklist for observation

The researcher plans:

- To have observation sessions in each company e.g. a walk-around in the companies, taking notes and observing social interaction.
- To visit different sites (virtual workers may be distributed in different locations) where participants are located. This would help the researcher to gain an understanding of the company's daily operations, the social interaction among employees, the communication, work flow, and the transfer of information with regard to the project handling process.
- To be able to sit in on some virtual team meetings (e.g. teleconference meetings) to enable her to fully understand the context within which discussions take place.

Purpose of observation	Events need to be observed	Tick
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To see whether team members identify with their team 	The extent to which team members enjoy working in the virtual team	
	The extent to which team members enjoy working in the company	
	The extent to which they work together as a virtual team	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ascertain the function and task performed in virtual teams • To understand the work flow 	The task performed in the virtual team	
	The interaction among team members in accomplishing a task	
	The interaction between the team members and the ICTs in accomplishing a task	
	The task handling processes	
	The transfer of information	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To sit in meetings and teleconferences 	Discussion among team members	
	The interaction between team members (this includes team members' interaction at work and social interaction)	
	The interaction between team members and the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To capture the scene when conflict occurs • To understand why and how did conflict happen and they ways in which the team members deal with the conflict 	Why did conflict occur?	
	When did it happen?	
	How did it happen?	
	The responses of team members when facing conflict	
	The emotions involved when dealing with conflict	
	How did members resolve it?	
	The ways in which management support the team members in resolving conflict	

Appendix IX - Coding manual for conflict in virtual teams

Information about the parties (Party A and Party B) involved in conflict	Conflict
<p>i. Team</p> <p>Team 1 (1) Team 2 (2) Team 3 (3) Team 4 (4) Team 5 (5) Team 6 (6) Team 7 (7)</p>	<p>v. Causes of conflict</p> <p>Misinterpretation (1) Miscommunication (2) Delay in communication (3) Differences in working approach (4) Differences in how e-mails are written (5) Differences in goal (6)</p>
<p>ii. Location</p> <p>UK (1) Singapore (2) US (3) Brazil (4) Myanmar (6) Malaysia – Kuala Lumpur (7) Malaysia – Kuantan (8) Malaysia – Melaka (9)</p>	<p>vi. Reaction to conflict</p> <p>Show anger or frustration (1) Confront (2) Avoid talking about it (3) Refer to the management (4)</p>
<p>iii. Position</p> <p>Managerial level (1) Below managerial level (2)</p>	<p>vii. Conflict handling behaviour and method</p> <p>Avoidance (1) Accommodation (2) Collaboration (4) Competition (4) Compromise (5)</p>
<p>iv. Gender</p> <p>Male (1) Female (2)</p>	
<p>v. Years of experience</p> <p>< 3 years (1) 3 to 5 years (2) > 5 years (3) 5 to 10 years (4)</p>	

Appendix X: Coding schedule for conflict in Team 1

No.	Information about the parties involved in conflict	Code	No.	Conflict	Code
i.	Team	1	v.	<p>Causes of conflict</p> <p>‘I would add though that you may misinterpret part of my e-mail as I wanted to check with Singapore whether we wanted to take equipment to V...’ (A wrote to B)</p>	1
ii.	Position	A-1 B-2	vii.	<p>Reaction to conflict</p> <p>‘I know full well that this is part of the process and there is no need for you to explain this to me...’ (A wrote to B)</p> <p>‘Yes, I did see that S’s report indicates a shortage of 20” for VIZA (I have been working for PEACE for nearly 8 years B!) but I was querying this in relation to what appeared to be a high figure... thus we will sometimes check with you for this reason...’(A wrote to B)</p> <p>‘I agree with your point on space utilisation. In the case of RF also, we are sometimes accepting (even if not a demand port for RF) ON THE CONDITION THAT we add costs to cover repositioning of the RF back to Singapore’ (A wrote to B)</p>	1
iii.	Gender	A- 2 B- 1	vii.	<p>Conflict handling behaviour</p> <p>‘As colleagues, rest assured that I pretty much speak my mind, but if you are unclear on my meaning then let me know. Even though we speak the same language, there is difference both in the working culture and in interpretation of e-mails when working with people remotely. I would not assume one thing or another but would always seek clarification to make an informed decision. Sometimes, things are misinterpreted on e-mail hence I will sometimes pick up phones to say HELLO to my dear Singapore colleagues! And at one penny per minute, the cost to PEACE is very small and beneficial to the company, I hope that you understand and don’t go switching on your answer-phones when I call!! (A wrote to B)</p>	1
iv.	Years of experience	A - 4 B - 4			

Appendix XI: Coding schedule for conflict in Team 6

No.	Information about the parties involved in conflict	Code	No.	Conflict	Code
i.	Team	6	v.	<p>Causes of conflict</p> <p>‘Please B, keep your lines of communication open with prompt response, we need to communicate more effectively to avoid any possible mistake’ (A wrote to B).</p> <p>‘Please note that the e-mail here is not online and sometimes may only reach the destination few hours later, and occasionally never’ (A wrote to B)</p> <p>‘Thank you for your reminder. I do not quite understand why the shipping co. had called you as I had already followed as per your instruction in your earlier e-mail to put T as the notify party; which our Singapore shipping co. had done too’ (B wrote to A).</p>	2, 3
ii.	Position	A-6 B-2	vii.	<p>Reaction to conflict</p> <p>‘Please be reminded again, this country has a very STRICT rule on importation. That is why we ask you to assist us by keeping us informed of the shipment well in advance and let us CHECK the documents before submission. I hope you understand the seriousness of this matter’ (A wrote to B).</p> <p>‘We also hope see to seek your kind cooperation to let us know in advance how to draft B/L so I can timely inform the shipping co. I don’t have a clear instruction on amount to declare... The B/L had already been amended immediately when K from Malaysia e-mail me the instruction on B/L details for this case’ (B wrote to A)</p>	1, 2
iii.	Gender	A- 2 B- 1	vii.	<p>Conflict handling behaviour</p> <p>‘Now that I have your attention to this matter, we would also like to find out more details so that we all can learn something her to prevent from making mistake in future shipment... However, if you think it is important for you to have the information well in advance, please just let us know but it is better only after we have the import license and L/C... ’ (A wrote to B)</p>	1
iv.	Years of experience	A - 2 B – 2			

Appendix XII: Coding schedule for conflict in Team 2

No.	Information about the parties involved in conflict	Code	No.	Conflict	Code
i.	Team	2	v.	Causes of conflict Conflict occurred because of differences in interest between the HQ and the UK branch.	2, 3
ii.	Position	A-1 B-2	vii.	Reaction to conflict B - frustrated	1, 2
iii.	Gender	A- 2 B- 1	vii.	Conflict handling behaviour B - Able to control his negative emotion - Did not express his anger in replying e-mail - Handled conflict collaboratively – explained in a polite manner the situation and reasons why the suggestion of A was being turned down.	1
iv.	Years of experience	A - 2 B – 4			

(Note: This schedule is based on diary note of observation data presented in Appendix VII)