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# Trends in Global Virtual Teams

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 VIRTUAL TEAMS SURVEY REPORT - 2016



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY, KEY FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS

In April 2016, RW<sup>3</sup> CultureWizard invited clients, end-users, and business associates engaged in global business activity to participate in its fourth biennial global virtual teams survey. The survey had 1,372 respondents from 80 countries, which indicates continuing interest in this subject.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (ANALYSIS)

#### UBIQUITY OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

We cannot overstate the importance of virtual team work inasmuch as it is the basis of how global business is conducted today. The survey points out how ubiquitous virtual teamwork is, and perhaps because of that, team members may fail to recognize the challenge of working with culturally diverse colleagues, especially in a virtual setting. No matter how sophisticated we become or how commonplace global virtual teams are, organizations will thrive and members will find it more rewarding the more people recognize that it takes special skills to fully capitalize on the enormous potential of global virtual interactions.

The 2016 survey indicates that corporate teams are now almost entirely virtual, and 41% never meet in person. What is significant is that virtual teams are now even more global with members located in even more countries. In this year's survey 48% of respondents revealed that more than half of their teams include members from other nations. In 2014, that figure was only 41%, and in 2012 it was only 33%.

#### SHARP DISPARITIES IN PERCEPTIONS ABOUT LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

Perhaps the most profound finding is on the Global Teams Leadership question. It appears that team leaders believe they are better prepared to lead intercultural teams than do those who are members of their teams. For example, 58% of respondents (who are participants on teams) indicate that global team leaders are *not* adequately prepared to lead multicultural teams. But when we asked respondents who self-identified as leaders of teams to rate *their own* ability to lead effectively across countries and cultures, nearly all of them (96%) rated themselves as either effective or highly effective! Moreover, 98% of respondents said they are comfortable leading multicultural teams (vs. local teams). Almost the same percentage (96%) said they are comfortable leading virtual teams (vs. leading co-located teams). Clearly, there is a disconnect here.

#### INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT COLLABORATION FACES SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL BARRIERS

The number and importance of global virtual teams is growing, with a full 85% of respondents working on virtual teams and the same percentage indicating that this team work is critical for their business success. Not surprisingly, about a fifth of all respondents spend over half of their workday on these teams.

While technology continues to make global collaboration more accessible, and participants' familiarity with meeting technology makes it easier, the same cannot be said about the cultural barriers to communication. Survey participants indicated that in spite of the growing value, increasing importance, and frequency of virtual team meetings, culturally based challenges to effective collaboration and leadership continue to be significant obstacles.

#### THE NEED FOR GLOBAL BUSINESS SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Inasmuch as all of the survey participants work in the international arena and interact on a relatively frequent basis with colleagues from other cultures, and all of their organizations (to some degree) have active diversity initiatives, they are cognizant that culture has a profound impact on work styles and expectations.

Today, people *expect* to encounter cultural differences. Survey responses and verbatim comments both point out that while participants are aware of these issues, they are often not prepared to cope with them. Regardless of their role on their global virtual teams, they can all benefit by improving their intercultural communication skills. People still underestimate how consequential those differences can be, and they haven't developed the skills to be agile in a multicultural environment. Being aware of—and anticipating—a problem is not a solution.

This challenge is perhaps most profoundly demonstrated by three findings.

- First, only 22% of respondents have participated in virtual team training, and only 34% in formal global leadership training.
- Second, while 98% of self-identified global team leaders were happy with their intercultural leadership skills, only 19% of team members felt that the great majority of their team leaders were well prepared for the challenge.
- And finally, 68% reported that cultural challenges were the biggest hurdle to global virtual team productivity. Although only 18% of respondents (still an unacceptable level) reported that their companies have lost business opportunities because of cultural misunderstandings, we nevertheless believe that this figure is severely understated. However large that number is, we are aware that some of those lost opportunities must have had a significant impact on company performance.

#### SUBTLE CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF VIRTUAL TEAMWORK

The verbatim comments alerted us to the frustrations that many team members feel about subjects such as team participation and decision-making. Therefore, we believe that some cultural observations will enhance the reader's understanding.

#### DECISION-MAKING

While some cultures automatically assign decision-making authority to the person who is closest to the transaction (regardless of their rank), other cultures elevate decision-making to the highest level accessible. Furthermore, some cultures that are more risk-tolerant believe that speedy decisions are critical and that modifications can always be made. Others are less concerned about speed and want to be sure that decisions are completely considered because once they are made, they should not be modified.

#### PARTICIPATION

A similar observation can be made about participation. While some cultures expect that multiple organizational levels will be present in the same meeting, and those individuals are expected to participate based on the information they have to share (rather than their organizational level), other cultures expect that only the most senior people will contribute. Although this is changing on a superficial level, this behavioral penchant still exists below the surface. This is confusing to team members from different cultures because they don't always understand why certain members are present at a meeting but not contributing.

#### LEADERSHIP

Survey participants clearly point out that a great deal of work is needed to develop leaders capable of maximizing the potential of global virtual teams. For example, there is a huge gap between the perspectives of team members and self-identified leaders. This gap in skills is not surprising given that global virtual leadership is rarely taught and is not a component of standard leadership programs. When you consider that the additional challenges presented by the multicultural makeup of these teams are magnified by their virtual nature during interactions, leaders must possess intercultural skills (a global mindset) and be cognizant of how their leadership behaviors are seen through alternative cultural lenses.

Leaders also need to be aware of how trust is built and maintained on their teams. Since trust in some cultures is assumed and in others it needs to be earned, building trust across cultures is a required skill. Maintaining trust and confidence, regardless of culture, is a leadership requirement since in all cases, trust is fragile and can be eroded inadvertently.

## KEY FINDINGS

- 85% of respondents work on virtual teams.
- 63% of respondents work on one to three teams; 22% work on at least four virtual teams.
- 85% of respondents say that virtual team work is *at least* somewhat critical (54% extremely critical and 31% somewhat critical).
- Almost 20% of respondents spend over half of the day interacting on virtual teams.
- Only 22% of respondents received training to increase their productivity on virtual teams.
- Almost half (48%) of respondents report that over half of their virtual teams include members of other cultures.
- Almost one quarter (23%) of respondents say their virtual teams fail to capitalize on their cultural diversity.
- Less than one third (28%) of virtual teams have a team charter or use guidelines to achieve high performance.
- 18% were aware that an intercultural misunderstanding has cost their team or company an opportunity.
- 41% report that their virtual teams never meet in person, 28% once a year, and 31% at least twice a year.
- 73% report that the advantages of their virtual teams outweigh the challenges.
- The following were cited as some of the biggest challenges for global virtual teamwork:
  - Colleagues who do not participate (79%)
  - Pace of decision making (79%)
  - Time required to make decisions (75%)
  - Different role expectations held by team members (74%),
  - Follow-through of team members (74%).
- Lack of face-to-face contact has the greatest impact on productivity in the following areas: understanding the full context of what people communicate (51%), managing conflict (48%), and establishing trust and building relationships (45%).
- 58% of respondents report that less than half of global team leaders are prepared to lead multicultural teams; only 19% claimed that at least 75% of leaders are prepared in this way.
- 36% of respondents identify themselves as leaders of global virtual teams; of those, only 2% to 4% feel uncomfortable leading global virtual teams.
- 96% of these leaders rate themselves as effective or highly effective in their ability to lead across countries and cultures.
- 74% of respondents have had formal leadership training; only 34% have had formal *global* leadership training.
- Compared to previous years' surveys, teams have more globally distributed members than ever before; they cited changes in the following areas:
  - Change in geographical distribution (79%)
  - Change in cultural diversity (74%)
  - Change in cross-disciplinary focus (73%) and gender diversity (40%)

## CONCLUSIONS: KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Based on this survey, past surveys, and our ongoing consulting activity in the virtual team global arena, we have developed a set of best practices for effective virtual teamwork.

1. **Team charter:** Create structures and guidelines for team interaction. This is crucial and should be one of the first activities of the team. Since culture has an impact on team behavior, it's important to discuss and establish operating rules—especially for activities such as how meeting times are scheduled, the decision-making process, expectations about participation and debate, and methods for expressing disagreements.
2. **Agenda:** Create an agenda beforehand. This provides the necessary time for people to formulate their thoughts and questions.
3. **Summary notes:** Distribute a short recap after each meeting so that everyone understands what occurred.
4. **Time-zone rotation:** Vary the time of virtual meetings to accommodate the schedules of participants in each of the different time zones. This more fairly spreads the difficulty and inconvenience of attending.
5. **Trust:** The importance of trust cannot be overstated. It is built by members adhering to their commitments and investing in relationships with other team members.
6. **Relationships:** Take time to develop relationships. Allow time to share some personal information such as hobbies, vacations, etc. to find commonalities and areas in which you share interests.
7. **Participation:** Be sure everyone participates by soliciting opinions and polling participants. For those who are reluctant to contribute, consider using pre-meetings and taking specific subjects offline, as appropriate.
8. **Language difficulties:** Since accents remain a big challenge, be sure to maintain an environment where people can ask for clarification. Circulating summary meeting notes is always helpful.
9. **Offline discussions:** Feel free to set aside particularly challenging situations and negative feedback for a separate, private discussion, at which time it can be addressed more appropriately.

## BACKGROUND

### ABOUT RW<sup>3</sup> CULTUREWIZARD

RW<sup>3</sup> CultureWizard is a global business skills development and training organization. Since 2001 we have been providing online and instructor-led training, coaching, and consulting to more than 150 leading businesses around the world. We focus on enhancing global teamwork, building global leadership skills, and preparing international assignees and global business travelers to succeed.

CultureWizard, our online learning platform, provides continuous access to a unique set of interactive skill-building and information resources. The mobile platforms make that information accessible wherever and whenever they're needed.

### SURVEY PURPOSE

In 2010, we pioneered a 17-question survey to discover the extent of global virtual teams and to identify areas of challenge faced by virtual team members. We expanded it in 2012 and 2014, and this year (2016), we posed 34 questions designed to elicit information about the following topics:

- The importance and advantages of having virtual teams in organizations
- The nature and severity of challenges facing virtual teams
- How team productivity is affected by multiple cultures and how companies capitalize on these differences
- How frequently team members meet face-to-face and the impact on communication and productivity
- The preparedness of global team leaders, especially for multicultural teams
- Leadership self-assessments of comfort leading multicultural vs. local and virtual vs. co-located teams
- Prevalence of formal leadership training vs. formal *global* leadership training
- Changing characteristics of teams within organizations

## RESPONDENT PROFILE

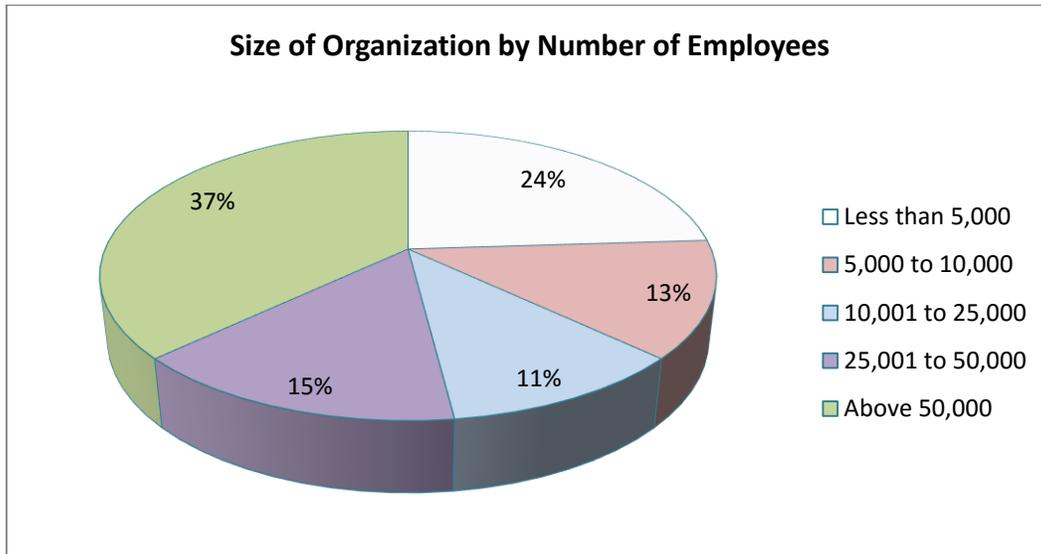
### LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS

The 1,372 survey respondents were based in 80 countries. In the left-hand column of the following table, we have identified the percentage—by nationality—of survey respondents from the locations identified on the right-hand side of the table, which are listed alphabetically to make them easier to locate.

Percent	Nationality (2014 percentages shown in parentheses)
43%	United States (42%)*
10%	United Kingdom (12%)
6%	India (8%)
3%	Japan (<1%), Germany (3%), France (2%)
2%	Brazil (2%), Australia (2%), Canada (3%), Mexico (2%),
1%	China (3%), Philippines (1%), Spain (1%), Italy (1%), New Zealand (1%), Malaysia (1%), Poland (1%), Singapore (1%), Russia (<1%), Belgium (1%), Finland (<1%), Netherlands (1%), Argentina (<1%), Ireland (1%)
Other countries represented (<1%)*	Algeria, Angola, Aruba, Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia, Cameroon, Cayman Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Jamaica, Kenya, Laos, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Mauritius, Namibia, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zimbabwe
	* The figures in parentheses indicate percentages from the 2014 survey. For countries with current survey-participation levels below 1%, no percentages showing previous participation rates are displayed in parentheses.

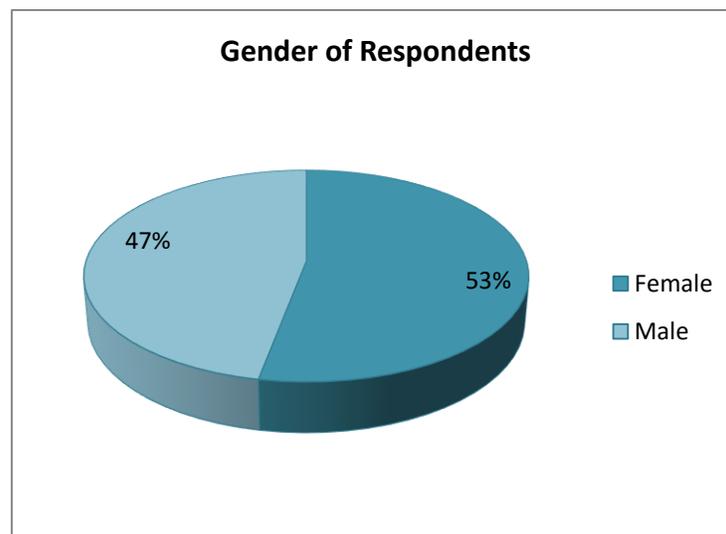
## SIZE OF RESPONDING ORGANIZATIONS

The largest group of respondents (37%) represented organizations with more than 50,000 employees. The next largest group (24%) was from organizations with less than 5,000 employees. Together, they constituted 61% of the survey participants. Representatives of companies with 5,000 to 50,000 employees comprised the remaining 39% of respondents.



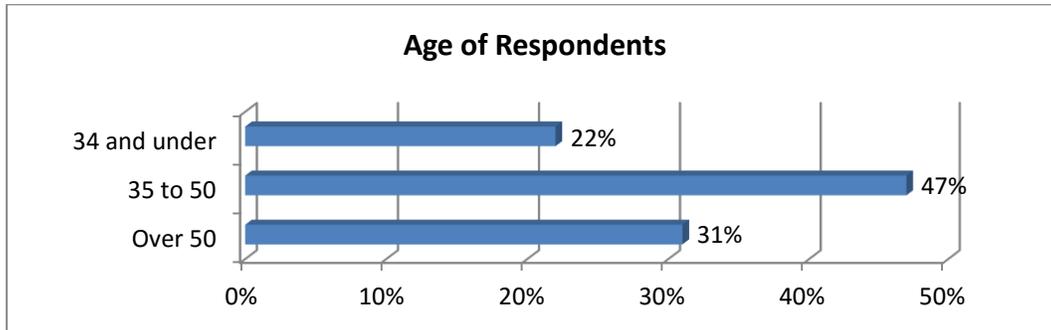
## GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

For this survey, 53% of respondents were female and 47% male (in 2014, the figures were 48% and 52% respectively; more women responded to the survey than men this year).



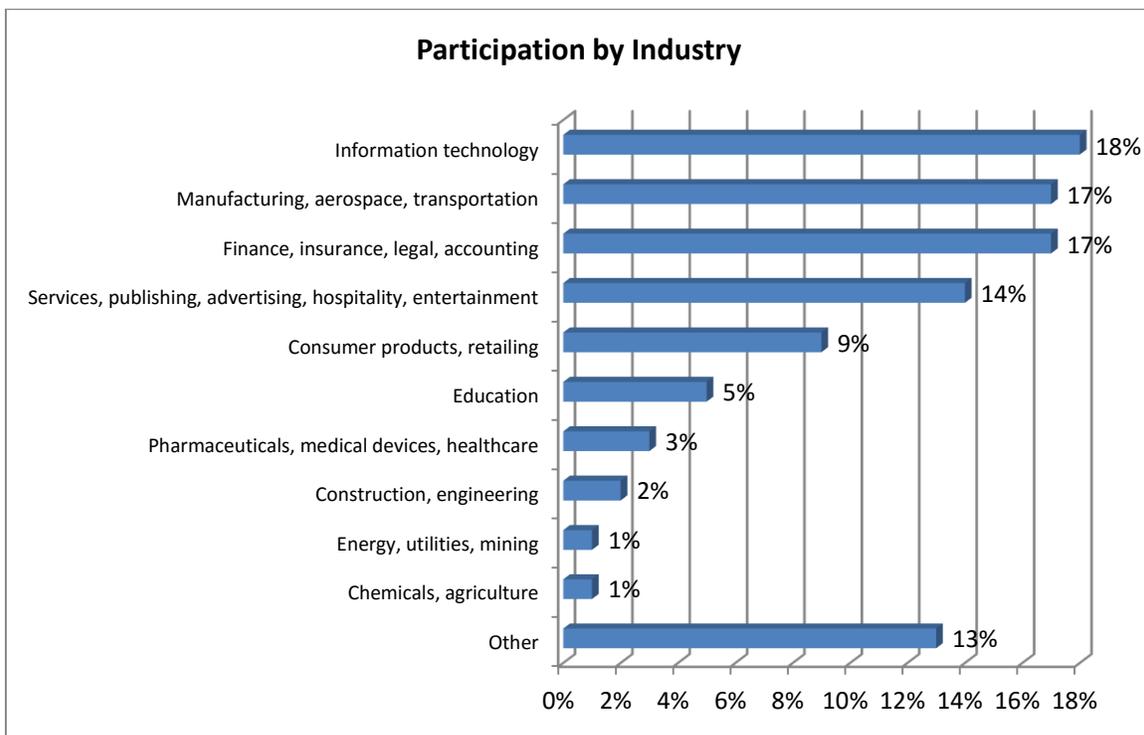
## AGE OF RESPONDENTS

The largest group of respondents was 35 to 50 years old (47%), followed by those who were over 50 years old (31%) and those who were age 34 and under (22%). This survey population, consequently, is primarily in mid-career (Generation X). According to the Pew Research Center (*Millennials Surpass Gen Xers as the Largest Generation in U.S. Labor Force*, May 11, 2015), 34% of the US workforce were under 35 years old in 2015 (Millennials); 34% were 35 to 50 years old in 2015 (Generation X), and 29% were over 50 years old. Non-responders (2%) and post-Millennials (1%) constituted the remaining portion of the Pew study survey population.



## SURVEY PARTICIPATION BY INDUSTRY SECTOR

The largest group of survey participants was from the information technology sector (18%). This was followed by participants from the manufacturing, aerospace, and transportation sector (17%) as well as the finance, insurance, legal, and accounting sector (17%). We also had high rates of participation from the services, publishing, advertising, hospitality, and entertainment sector (14%) and in the consumer products, retailing sector (9%).

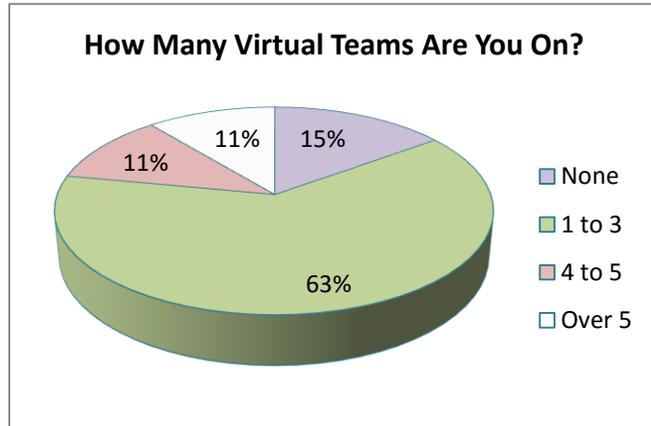


## SURVEY RESPONSE DATA

### YOUR VIRTUAL TEAM EXPERIENCE

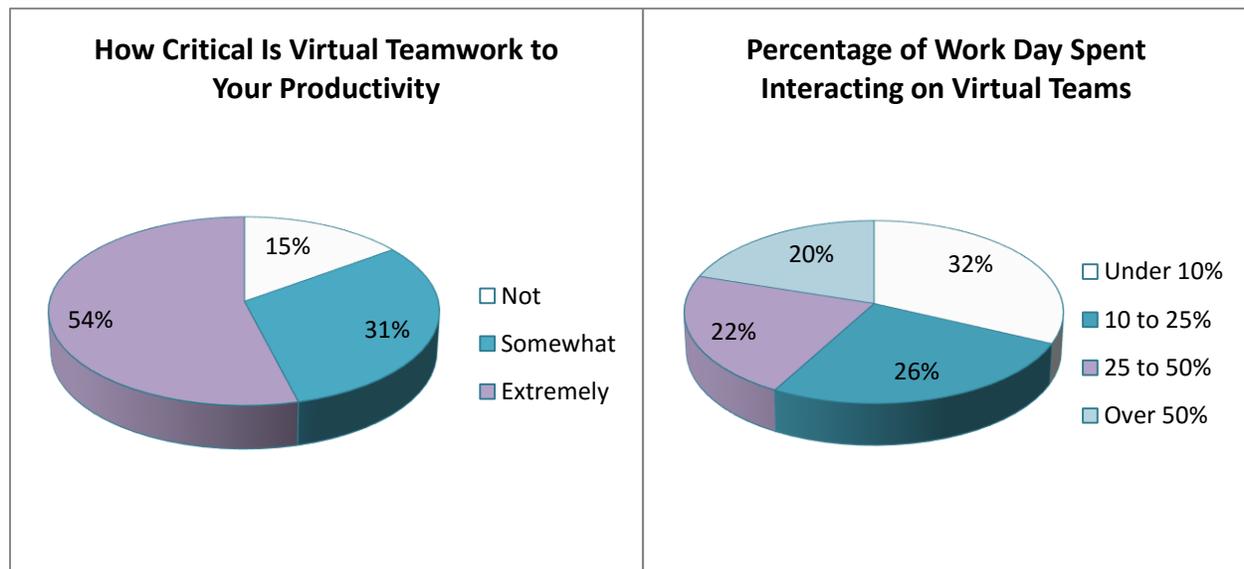
#### NUMBER OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

We asked respondents to state the number of virtual teams on which they work. While 63% of respondents work on one to three teams, 22% participate on at least four teams.



#### IMPORTANCE OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

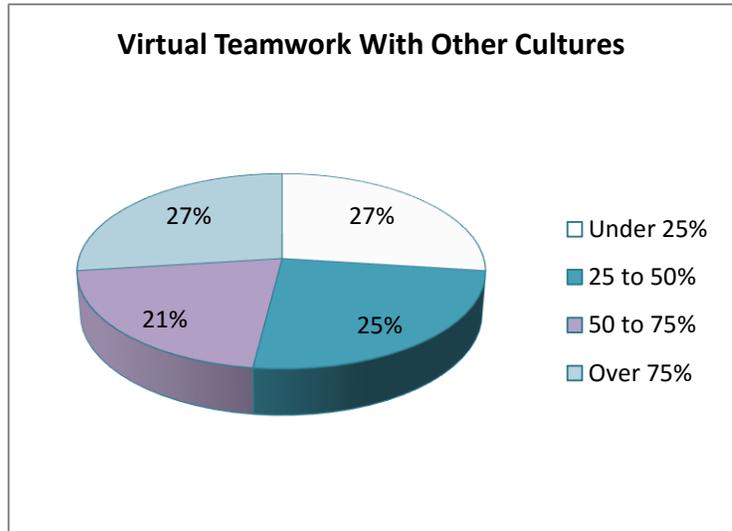
When asked how critical virtual teamwork is to their productivity, more than half (54%) of respondents reported that it is extremely critical (in 2014, only 27% said it contributed at least 50% to overall productivity). To better understand the intensity of the virtual team commitment, we asked what percentage of their work day is spent interacting on virtual teams. Fully 68% responded that they spent at least 10% of their day interacting on these teams; nearly one third (32%), however, spent less than 10% of their day interacting on virtual teams. These figures resemble those recorded in the 2014 survey.



## THE IMPACT OF CULTURE AND DIFFERENCES IN WORKSTYLES

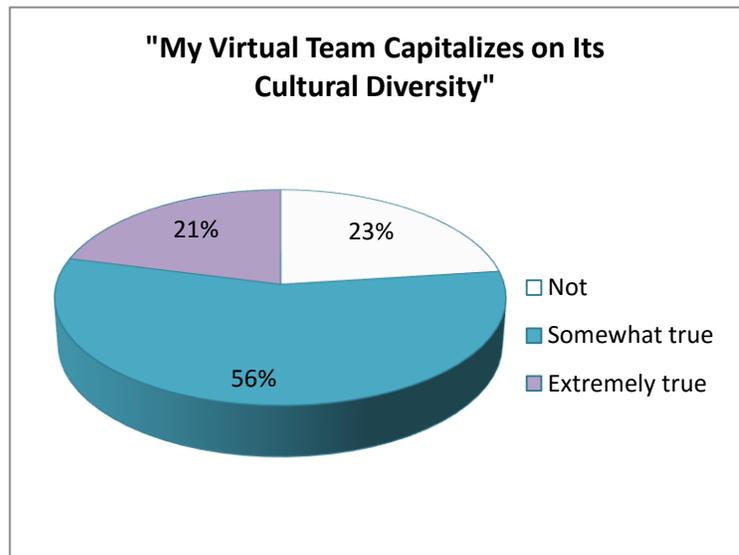
### VIRTUAL TEAMS AND OTHER CULTURES

Virtual teams increasingly include colleagues from more than one culture. In this survey, 48% (41% in 2014) said that over half of their teams include members from other cultures. In contrast, only 27% of respondents reported that less than one quarter of their teams have colleagues from another culture (40% in 2014).



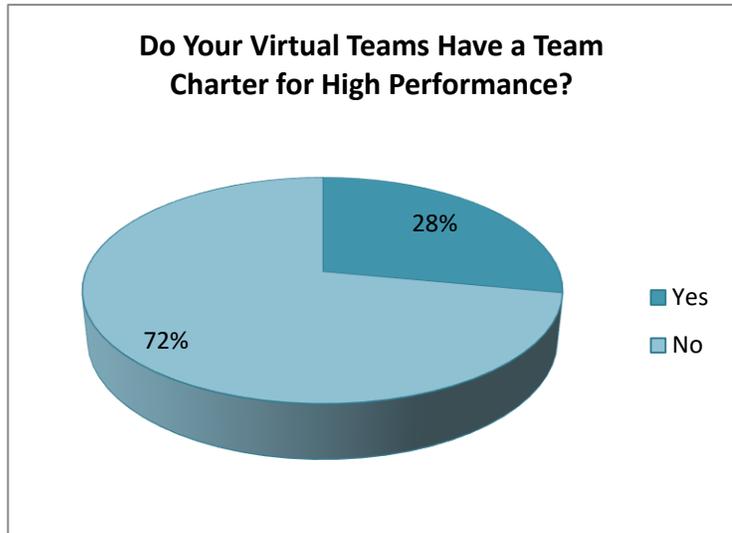
### CAPITALIZING ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In a new question, we asked about the degree of truth in the following statement: "My virtual team capitalizes on its cultural diversity." Although only 21% of respondents reported that the statement was extremely true, a large portion (56%) reported that it was somewhat true. This response was a bit anemic; we believe that it would not be unreasonable for companies to try to double the response for "extremely true."



### TEAM CHARTERS AND GUIDELINES FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

To determine whether companies were helping to define expectations in an attempt to boost virtual team productivity, we posed a new question by asking respondents if their virtual teams have any sort of “team charter” or used a set of guidelines for high performance. Only 28% of respondents used such guidelines to achieve high performance. By failing to use these kinds of guidelines, companies cannot establish expectations or assist employees in achieving measurable productivity improvements for their virtual teams.



### THE COST OF INTERCULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDING

For the first time, we asked if respondents were aware of situations when an intercultural misunderstanding cost the team or company an opportunity. Eighteen percent replied that they were. We wonder how many similar opportunities were lost simply because nobody was aware that such a misunderstanding played a role; consequently this number may only be the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, if we consider the costs of intercultural marketing initiatives and of geographically distributed technological development efforts, the impact of such lost opportunities may be staggering.

We asked two follow-up questions to enable respondents to elaborate on their responses and suggest ways to improve their ability to collaborate virtually (please refer to the section entitled “Open-Ended Comments”).

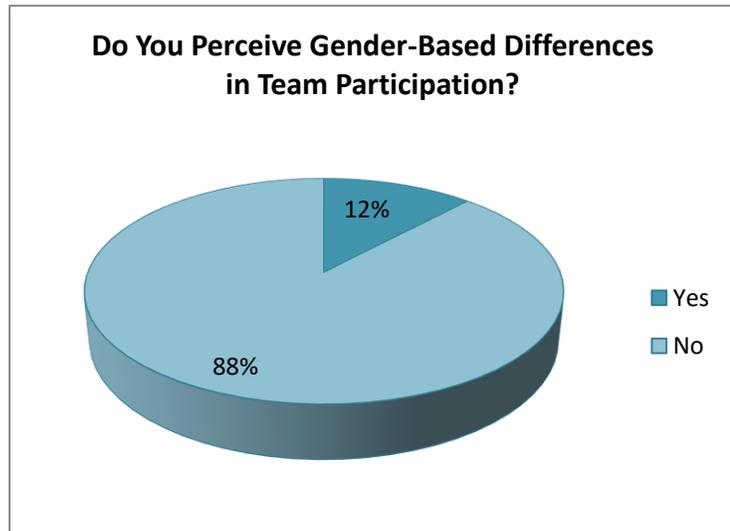


## GENDER DIFFERENCES AND TEAM PARTICIPATION

When we asked respondents if they perceive any gender-based differences in team participation and collaboration styles, only 12% indicated awareness of any differences (compared to 14% in 2014). We also asked a follow-up question to enable respondents to elaborate on their responses (please refer to the section entitled “Open-Ended Comments”).

We continue to be surprised by the low percentage of respondents who perceive gender-based differences on virtual teams. All of our experience—and much anecdotal evidence—points to the existence of gender-

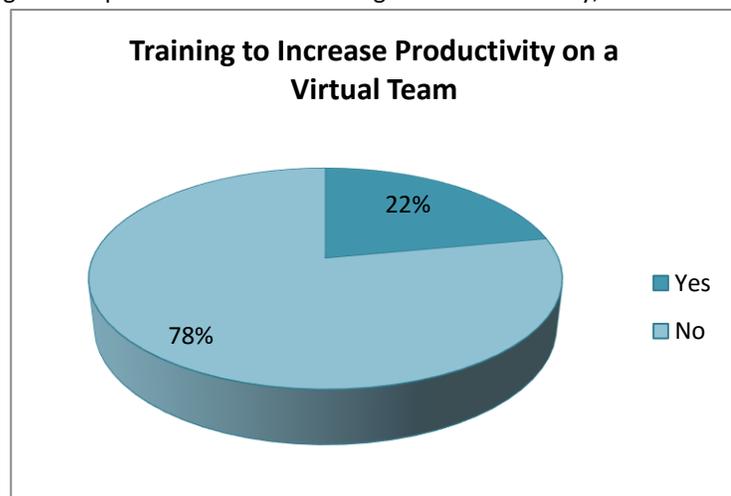
based differences and, in particular, to the role that they play in participation on virtual teams. There are gender-based differences in all cultures, and since virtual teamwork tends to magnify cultural differences, it has the same impact on existing gender differences. The open-ended comments explore many of these gender-based differences.



## TRAINING TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY ON VIRTUAL TEAMS

When we asked participants if they had received training to increase their productivity on virtual teams, only 22% reported that they had such training—a very slight improvement over the 2014 figure of 21% and much better than the 16% recorded in 2012. We continue to be surprised that so few team members are trained for working on virtual teams. With as many as 36% of respondents acting as team leaders, the low figures for training are surprising.

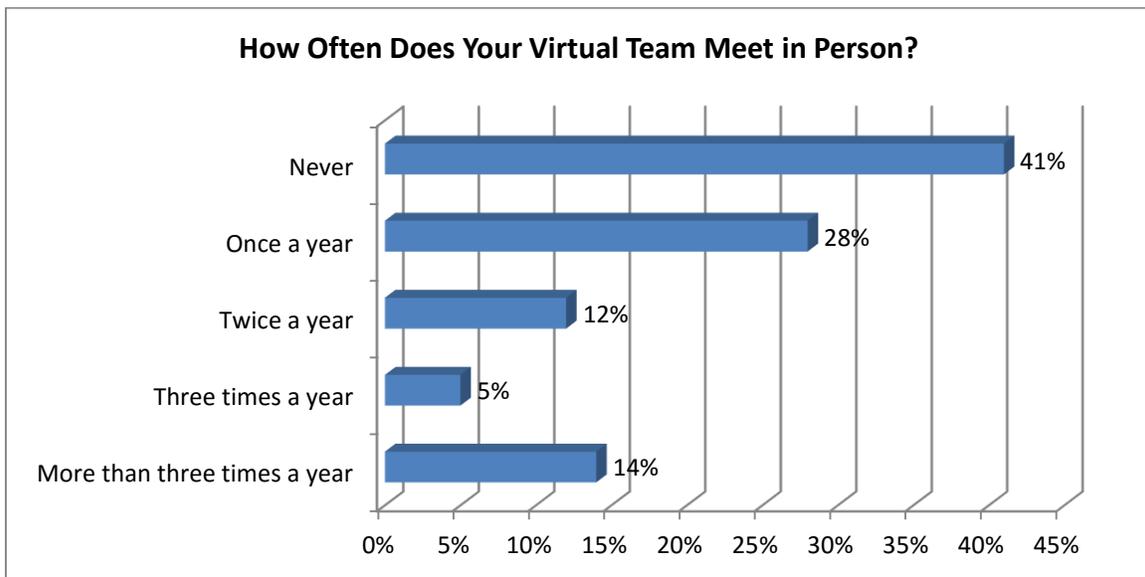
Many people automatically misconstrue virtual teamwork as a simple process because it uses tools that are commonplace and well understood—such things as telephones and email messages. To the contrary, virtual work magnifies both cultural and working-style differences—vastly increasing the scope and opportunity for misunderstandings between team members. Taken together with the incremental frustrations that are a result of the less-than-perfect technologies we use on virtual teams, participants are likely to encounter unexpected communication and trust challenges that can easily escalate and jeopardize the work of a virtual team. Appropriate training is one way to remediate this challenge.



## MEETING VIRTUAL TEAM MEMBERS IN PERSON

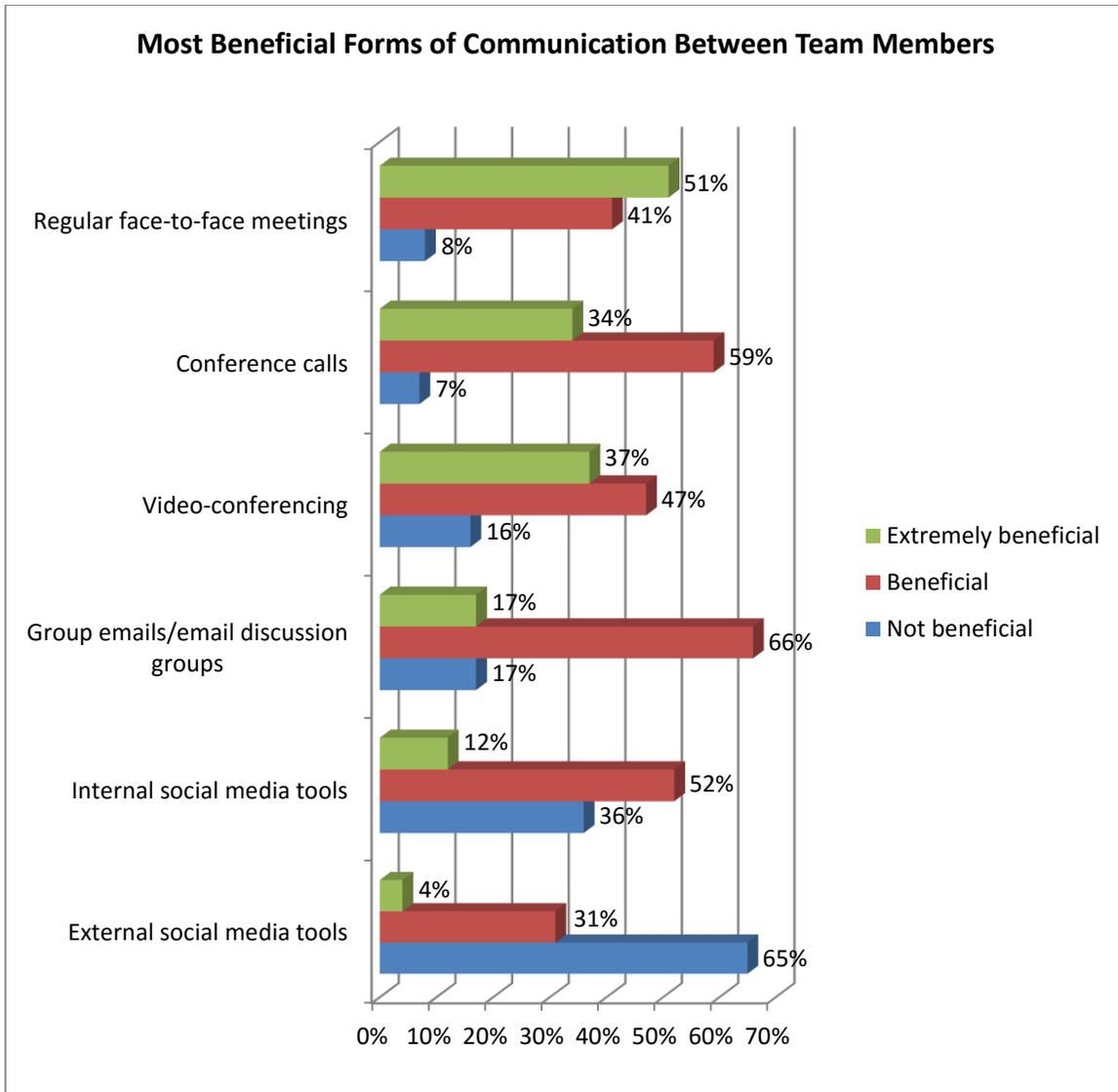
The infrequency of meetings among virtual team members underscores their “virtual” nature. For example, 41% of respondents never meet other virtual team members (34% in 2014), and 28% meet only once each year. Only 31% met with other team members at least twice each year. Comparison to the 2014 survey reveals that virtual teams are meeting less frequently across the board.

Some personal, face-to-face contact is valuable and enhances the productivity of global teams—even if the bulk of the work is completed in relative isolation. It is obvious that face-to-face meetings are not always possible for a variety of reasons. Consequently, we recommend—as a best practice—the frequent use of webcams. While these devices cannot replace genuine in-person contact, they do significantly enhance people’s ability to identify with each other, build trust, and create stronger relationships. An additional way to enhance the face-to-face value of webcams is to introduce opportunities for team members to chat within the context of a limited agenda.



## MOST BENEFICIAL FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

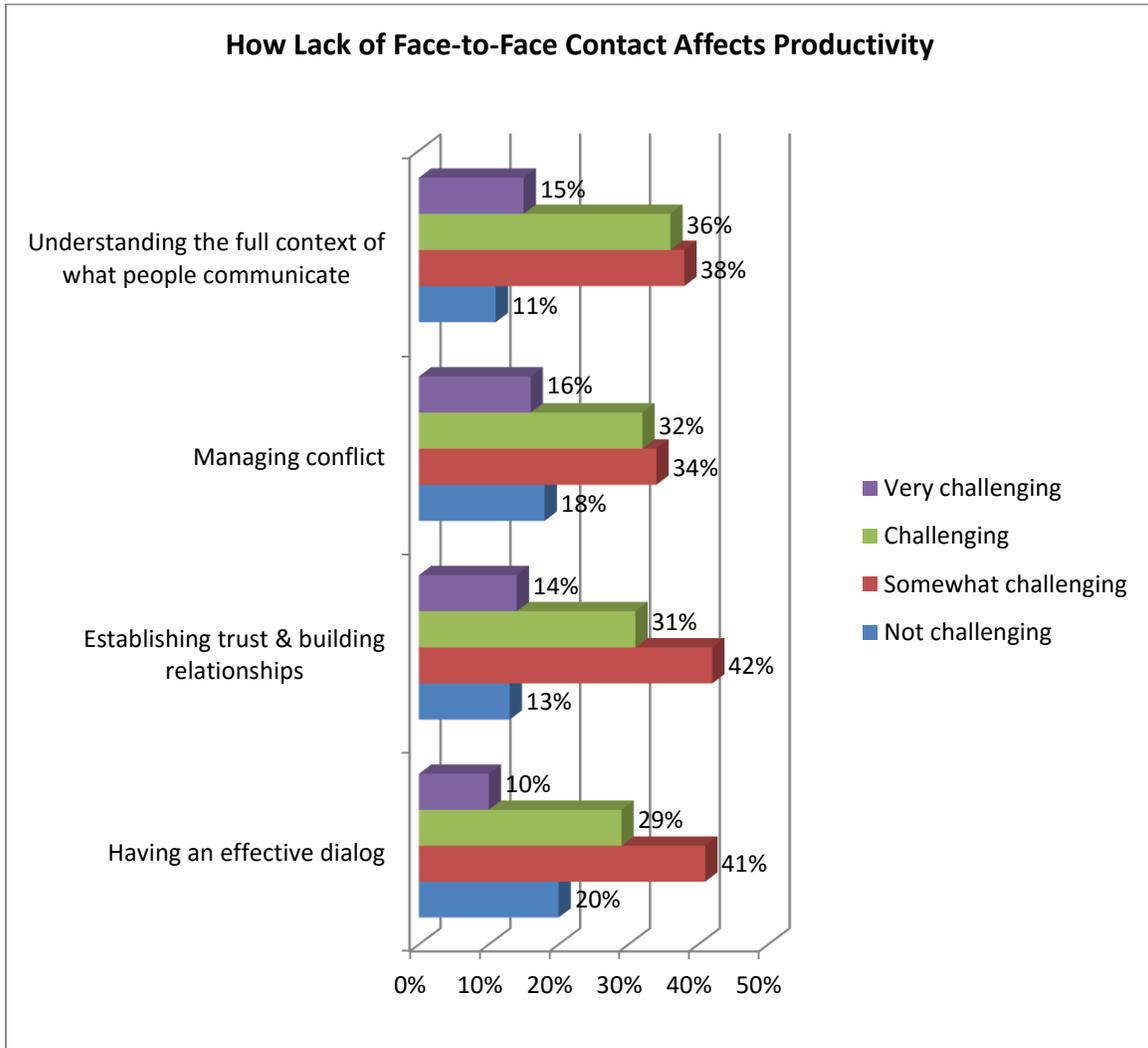
In a new question, we asked which forms of communication were most beneficial when team members interact. Regular face-to-face meetings were cited as the most beneficial by 92%\* of respondents, followed by conference calls (93%), video-conferencing (84%), and group emails/email discussion groups (83%).



\*The weight assigned to an "extremely beneficial" communication is higher than for a "beneficial" communication; consequently, the 92% score for face-to-face meetings is actually higher than the 93% score for conference calls; this weighting applies to all scores.

## THE IMPACT ON PRODUCTIVITY OF NO FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT

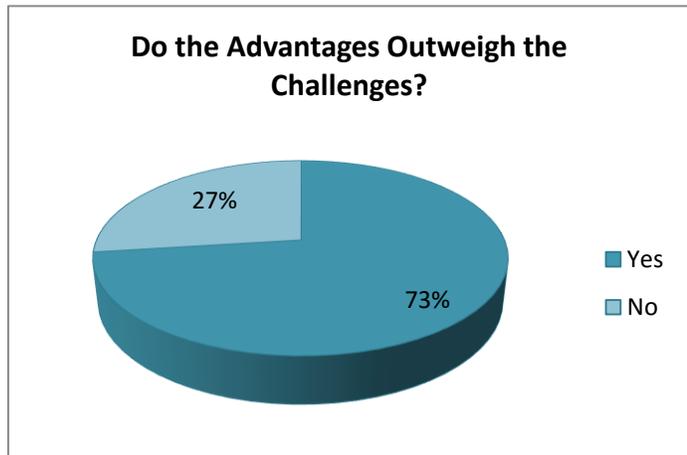
When asked about the impact on productivity posed by a lack of face-to-face contact, respondents indicated that the most severe impact was on understanding the full context of what people communicate (51%), managing conflict (48%), and establishing trust and building relationships (45%). A substantial percentage of respondents indicated that the impact on establishing trust and having an effective dialog was also important.



### DO THE ADVANTAGES OF VIRTUAL TEAMS OUTWEIGH THE CHALLENGES?

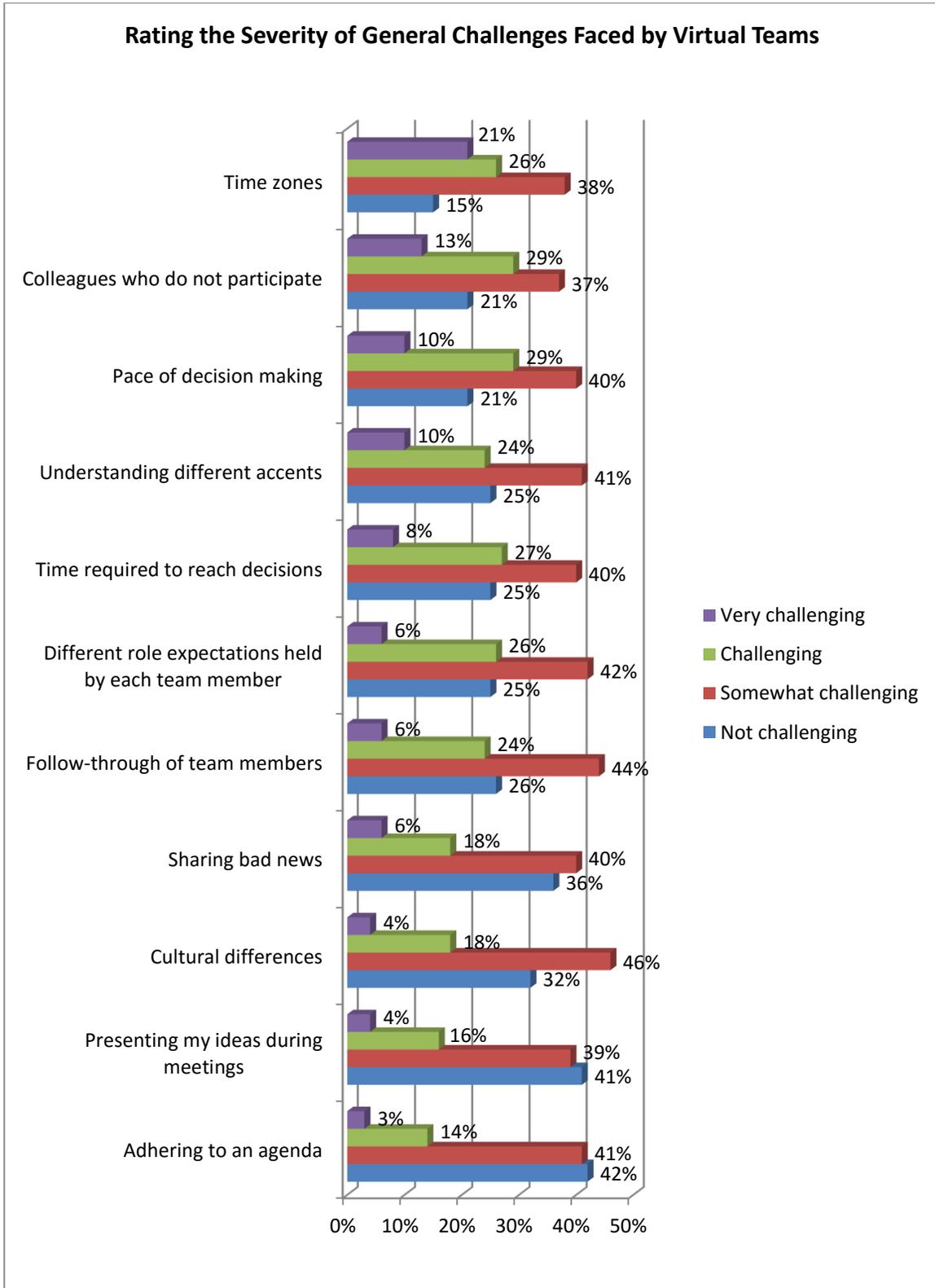
When we asked respondents if the advantages of their virtual teams outweigh the challenges, 73% reported that they did (81% in 2014).

We also asked respondents to elaborate on their responses. A sample of these explanations is provided in the section entitled “Open-Ended Comments.”



## SEVERITY OF VIRTUAL-TEAM CHALLENGES COMPARED TO CHALLENGES OF CO-LOCATED TEAMS

The figure illustrates the severity of challenges faced by virtual teams. The top challenges are time zones (85%)



colleagues who do not participate (79%), the pace of decision making (79%), understanding different accents (75%), time required to make decisions (75%), different role expectations held by each team member (74%), and follow-through of team members (74%). Although the remaining challenges are less severe, they still are obstacles for more than 50% of respondents.

This question encompasses two distinct areas of virtual teamwork: (1) those areas that you cannot change but need to manage, such as time zones and accents, and (2) those areas that reflect cultural behaviors that global team members must learn about and understand to improve their productivity on these teams. Both of these areas can be addressed effectively by establishing team structures and defined processes. *Introducing structures will not only enhance the comfort level of participants but will have a marked impact on performance.*

Regarding areas that reflect the vital role played by culture in teamwork, they underscore the notion that while technology makes virtual work possible, cultural understanding is necessary to make it productive. As we scrutinized the specific answers to these questions, we realized that in most cases, a majority of respondents were able to identify culturally based hurdles to effective virtual teamwork.

Not stated, but implicit in these answers, was the impact that these hurdles had on the level of trust between team members. All of the research on teamwork emphasizes the critical importance of trust and how visible signs of participant engagement can either reinforce or undermine it. Research also shows that trust builds and deteriorates incrementally. So participant engagement in virtual meetings can have a significant impact. Why? Our anecdotal experience seems to indicate that team members who do not participate become increasingly excluded and isolated, and their commitment is questioned. It takes a skillful team leader to create and structure a process that engages everyone and, consequently, builds trust within the group.

We also asked a follow-up question about any other virtual teamwork challenges that we did not include. Samples of the responses are provided in the section entitled "Open-Ended Comments."

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD VIRTUAL TEAMMATE

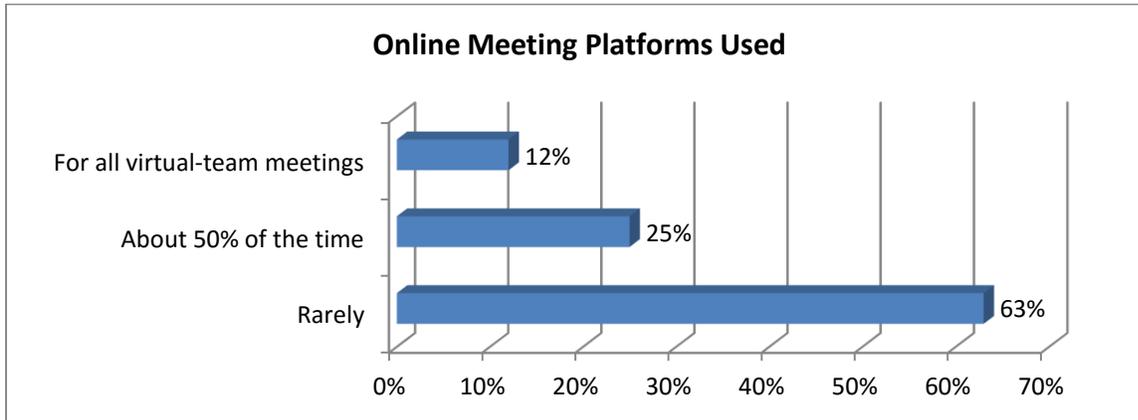
When we asked about the characteristics that made good virtual teammates, respondents indicated that the most important characteristic was being collaborative (19%), willingness to share information (19%), being proactively engaged (18%), being organized (15%), providing useful feedback (11%), having good social skills (10%), and offering assistance to teammates (8%). These results are nearly identical to those from 2014—varying by no more than 1% in any instance.

Perceptions about good teammates are culturally rooted. For example, in some cultures, sharing information is both a manifestation of power and a way of building relationships. Furthermore, in some cultures the bulk of information sharing takes place in off-line settings, which are hampered in the virtual environment. In addition, direct communicators (who are also low context) focus on sharing just the facts, which will leave high-context communicators feeling under-informed. Global team leaders would be well advised to develop plans to share this information with their team members. Likewise, they need to create team structures and rules of interaction for virtual team members. For example, after establishing appropriate expectations, it would be beneficial to set up a system that encourages and grants recognition for these top-three sought-after behaviors.



## USE OF WEBCAM VIDEO TECHNOLOGY

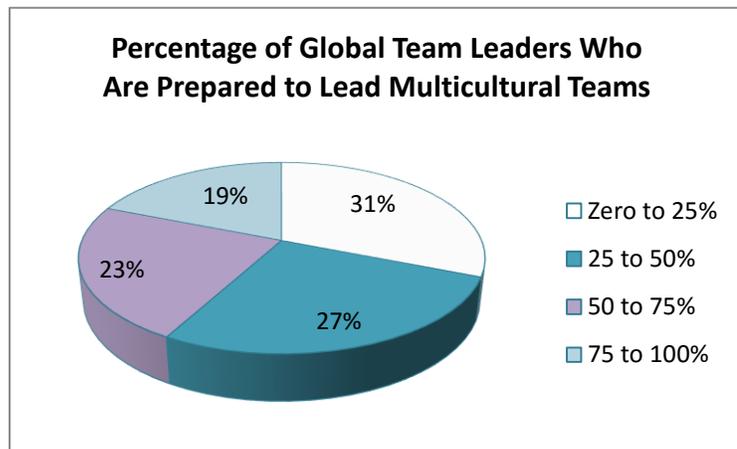
When we asked respondents how frequently they used webcam video technology for virtual meetings, 12% reported using it during all meetings (twice as many as in 2014), and 25% use it half of the time (20% in 2014). Most respondents (63%) rarely use it. We recommend the adoption of webcam technology whenever possible as a best practice.



## TEAM LEADERSHIP

### PREPAREDNESS OF GLOBAL TEAM LEADERS TO LEAD MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

For the first time, we asked what percentage of global team leaders are prepared to lead multicultural teams. In most organizations, respondents indicated that less than half of global team leaders are prepared to lead multicultural teams. For example, 31% report that zero to 25% are prepared, and another 27% say that only 25% to 50% are prepared—meaning that 58% of respondents believe that less than half of global team leaders are prepared to lead multicultural teams! Only 19% of respondents claim that 75% or more of these leaders are prepared to meet the challenges of leading multicultural teams. Another 23% say that 50% to 75% of them are prepared.



### VIRTUAL-TEAM LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS

Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents indicated they were leaders of a virtual team (38% in 2014). Over the past several years, RW<sup>3</sup> CultureWizard has completed significant work in the areas of global leadership and global team leadership.

Global teams are the method by which much of global work is accomplished, and global team leadership is required for the effective functioning of these teams. Consequently, it is crucial that team leaders be well-versed in all aspects of virtual team interaction. This includes understanding the different cultural backgrounds of team members, anticipating their work style preferences, and being competent in intercultural communication skills themselves.



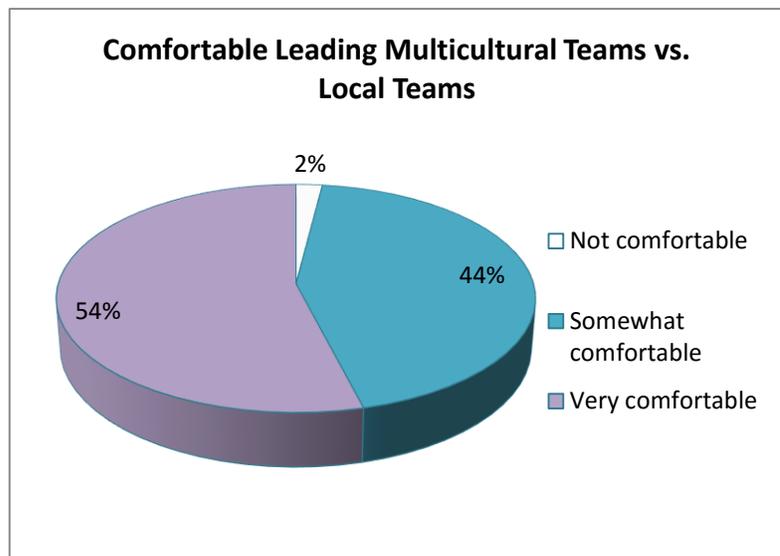
We have learned that serving on a global virtual team is where most future leaders get their preliminary introduction to leadership. It also is

where they recognize the need for global agility and intercultural competence. Organizations need to view global virtual teams as a developmental training ground, opportunity, and awareness-builder for their future leaders.

We also asked two follow-up questions to enable respondents—first, to identify the top two challenges that leaders face with their virtual teams and secondly, to identify practices they have adopted to generate high levels of effective collaboration among virtual team members. A sample of these comments is provided in the section entitled “Open-Ended Comments.”

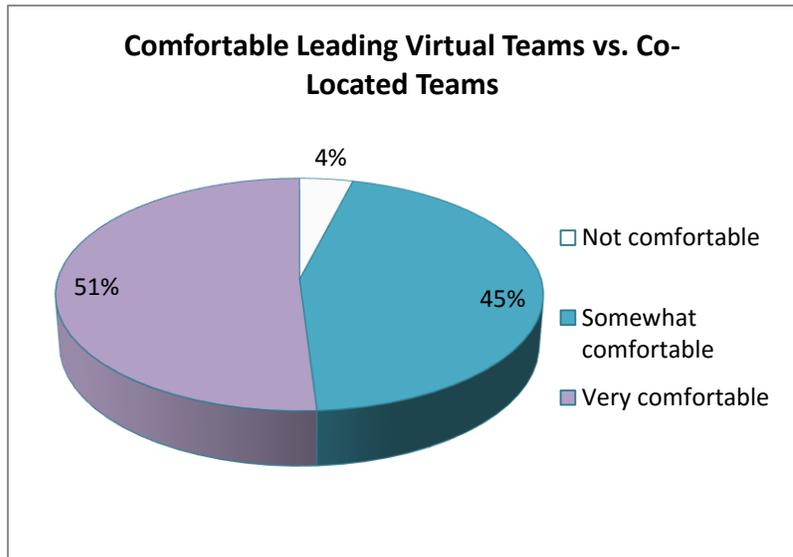
### COMFORT LEVEL LEADING *MULTICULTURAL* TEAMS VS. *LOCAL* TEAMS

In a new question, we asked respondents to compare how comfortable they are leading multicultural teams versus local teams. Most respondents are very comfortable (54%) leading multicultural teams and 44% somewhat comfortable. Only 2% were not.



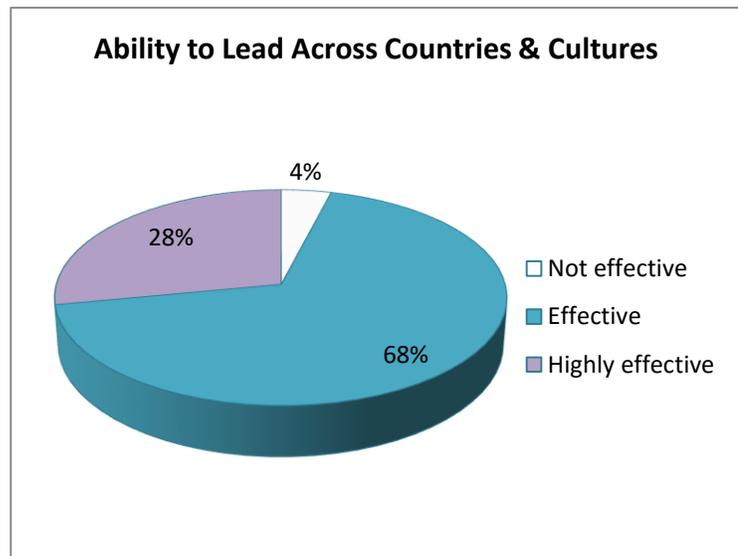
### COMFORT LEVEL LEADING *VIRTUAL* TEAMS VS. *CO-LOCATED* TEAMS

In another new question, we asked respondents to compare how comfortable they are leading virtual teams versus co-located teams. Most respondents are very comfortable (51%) leading multicultural teams and 45% somewhat comfortable. Only 4% were not, which seems to indicate that respondents are a bit less comfortable leading virtual teams than leading multicultural teams.



### ABILITY TO LEAD EFFECTIVELY ACROSS COUNTRIES AND CULTURES

For the first time, we asked respondents to rate their ability to lead effectively across countries and cultures. Nearly all respondents (96%) rated themselves as effective or highly effective.



### FORMAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING

With two new questions, we wanted to distinguish between preparation with formal leadership training versus formal *global* leadership training. Seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents reported that they had formal leadership training.



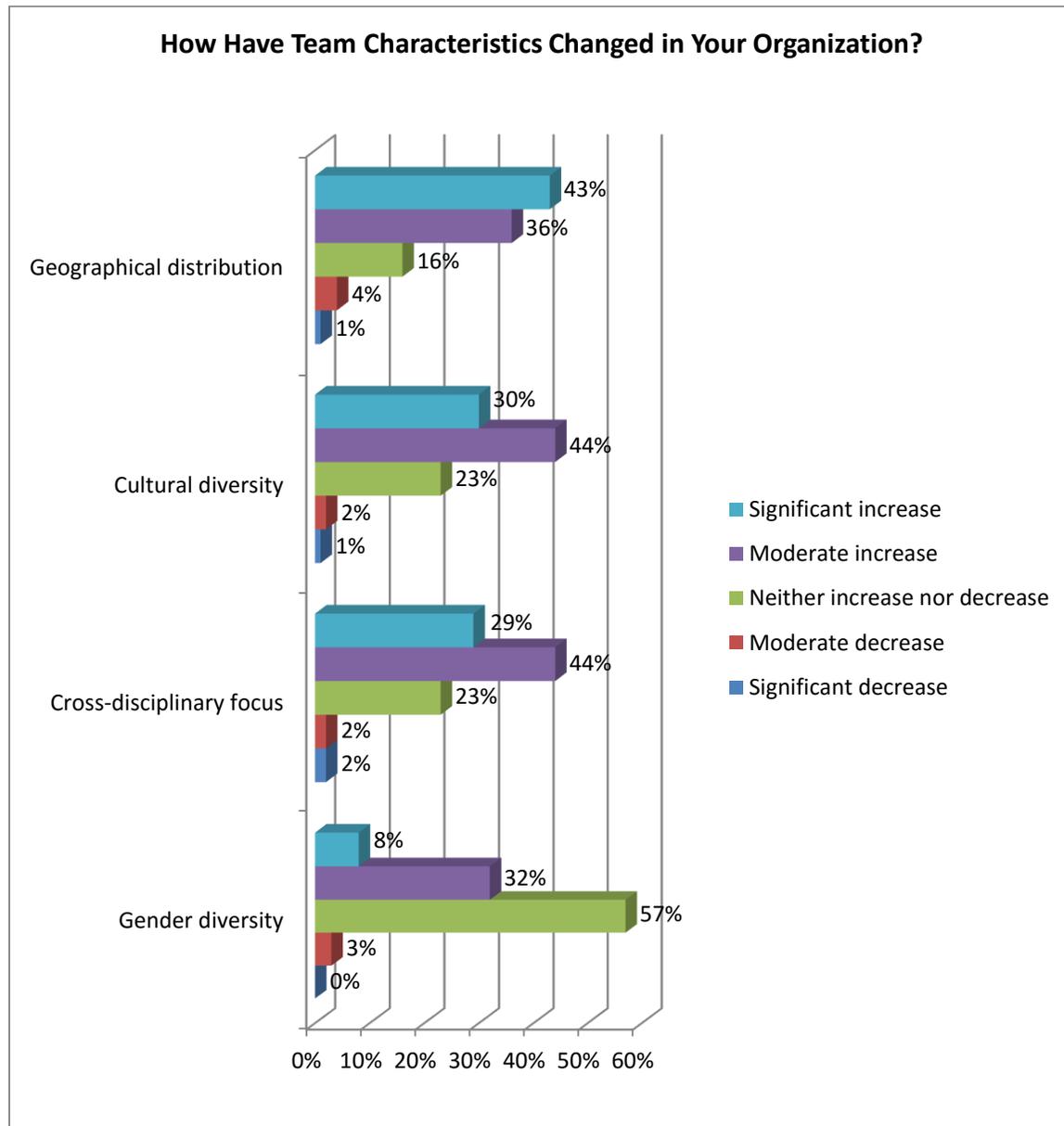
### FORMAL *GLOBAL* LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Thirty-four percent (34%) of respondents reported that they had formal *global* leadership training. This shows that global leadership training is much rarer than leadership training without a global emphasis. When you consider the additional challenges presented by the multicultural makeup of these teams and their operation in a virtual environment that is distributed across geographical distances, the comparatively smaller percentages of trained leaders is cautionary to say the least.



## CHANGING CHARACTERISTICS OF TEAMS WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION

In a new question, we asked how team characteristics have changed within organizations over the past few years. Respondents indicated that the most important change in team characteristics occurred in their geographical distribution (79%), followed by cultural diversity (74%), cross-disciplinary focus (73%), and gender diversity (40%). By confirming that teams are becoming (1) more “virtual” as their geographic distribution increases and (2) that they are becoming increasingly multicultural, respondents are tacitly exposing the growing need for properly focused training to effectively manage and participate in teams that must consistently function at high levels of productivity in this new, more complex environment.



## OPEN-ENDED COMMENTS

So that we can gain a deeper understanding of your answers, we asked a number of follow-up questions throughout this survey—enabling you to add your own open-ended comments. We received thousands of these individual statements and include here a representative sampling. It is our hope that we succeeded in capturing the range and flavor of your comments.

### DO THE ADVANTAGES OF YOUR VIRTUAL TEAMS OUTWEIGH THE CHALLENGES?

In addition to citing advantages and disadvantages, some of you expressed your ambivalence about these teams.

#### ADVANTAGES

*It is impossible to solve customer issues without input from local sales and the customers directly.*

*My role is in global role setting strategy and implementing improvements; therefore it's vital that I meet with people from around the globe on a regular basis.*

*We need talented people. Talented people are expensive, less-available, less-willing to relocate, and more-willing to sell their services to other clients. To be the best, we need to cope with these limitations.*

*We don't have to move to keep our jobs.*

*Having global stakeholders for a global product ensures we are in touch with global requirements rather than just our local perspectives.*

*Less water cooler.*

*Convenience, efficiency, time savings, and cost savings outweigh face-to-face rapport and some communication advantages.*

*We are so spread out, travelling would be impractical. We tend to meet more often than if we were closer physically.*

*We have a global network of customers, requiring round-the-clock support. We can't do that without having teams around the world.*

*Efficiencies that come from sharing best practices across regions.*

*It allows me to collaborate with people in other countries and of different disciplines.*

*In an international HR organization. There has to be a local HR team with local rules and regulations. These local views are important to inform strategic decisions of a group function. If you have met the local team members once in person, collaboration on a virtual basis is much easier, but still sometimes challenging, depending on different cultures. Video conferencing equipment helps to maintain a good working relationship.*

*There is no other choice.*

*HQ is located overseas so I need to be closer to them in order to understand HQ's directions.*

*Flexible working hours, better work life balance.*

## DISADVANTAGES

*“Virtuality” never can replace face-to-face work. It's a trend to save costs, while it prevents growth.*

*Managing the time zone differences is difficult. The language differences are frustrating for team members. Even though most speak English, it is very difficult to understand them over the phone/webex. It may be that our conference phones are not high enough quality.*

*Too many calls without any significant achievement.*

*I should be able to rely on leads/supervisors in other locations to make independent decisions, but I cannot. They lack confidence and need more guidance and direct, immediate leadership than I am able to provide because of time zones and shift work.*

*Communication does NOT happen. Our TLs have gone thru the training and it didn't make a difference. TLs assume you hear things from others, information is NOT passed along.*

*Managing development teams from a different time zone is also challenging as they are not in the same room experiencing the situation at the same time. There are several things happening that could be related, and having the developer offsite often times results in a miss of requirements.*

*It would be better if the team was collocated.*

*Cultural diversity is a hindrance to the virtual team...*

## AMBIVALENCE ABOUT VIRTUAL TEAMS

*I could answer yes because of diversity of perspectives, and no for the communications and trust/team identity aspects.*

*This only works because we have a team of high performers who take ownership and cooperate with other members. I have been on virtual teams that have a significant range of competency and character resulting in varied and often frustrating results.*

## HAVE YOU HAD TRAINING TO INCREASE YOUR PRODUCTIVITY ON VIRTUAL TEAMS?

When we asked if you had training to increase your productivity, you outlined several different approaches.

*Face-to-face workshops, conference sessions, and webinars.*

*Self-guided learning.*

*One-on-one session, group session.*

*Coaching [is] essential.*

*Training modules.*

*Group session facilitated in person, plus follow-on reading materials and reminders. Some team members do additional reading as well, but seems limited.*

*CultureWizard training.*

*Classroom training during my degree program as well as self-guided e-learning.*

## PLEASE LIST ANY OTHER VIRTUAL TEAMWORK CHALLENGES THAT WE HAVEN'T INCLUDED

Your responses to this question seemed to fall into the following categories: virtual work is assigned a low priority, local practices generate unforeseen complications, technology issues, management of the virtual environment, and communication challenges.

### VIRTUAL WORK IS ASSIGNED A LOW PRIORITY

*Competing with non-virtual demands. People have multiple projects, some of which are local. They have different line management.*

*Busy schedules leading to spotty participation.*

*Laziness.*

*Concentration, focus and attention is diluted by colleagues multi-tasking on other areas of their job during meetings*

## LOCAL PRACTICES CREATE COMPLICATIONS

*Different contract terms. Different work-life balance issues (like dates for local holidays).*

*Differing vacation schedules and holidays.*

*Inability to know if the offshore resources understand the work. Offshore resources taking inappropriate short cuts instead of raising questions and seeking solutions. Lack of accountability for offshore resources. The offshore leaders not holding the workers accountable. Onshore leadership not empowered to or not willing to hold the offshore team accountable. Differences in offshore work ethics: offshore teams leave at the end of their shift with little to no handoff, often leaving critical work in limbo and onshore teams unaware of work status. Offshore teams don't follow procedures consistently, such as calling an onshore team member's desk phone at midnight to report a critical issue instead of opening a ticket. The onshore resource is not aware of the issue until arriving at their desk 8-plus hours later. Meanwhile, the critical issue has not been addressed.*

## TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

*Bad internet connection, bad audio.*

*Technology that doesn't always work or is complicated to use. Differences in software standards.*

*[in]efficient use of conference tools (identifying caller on screen tools, muting phone, optimizing everyone's time).*

*Technical issues: sometimes even the best online tools can distort sound or have screens frozen. When lots of countries are involved and with some colleagues in home office joining in, the technical requirements of a clear session are not always met.*

## MANAGEMENT OF THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

*Too many people in virtual meetings without knowing the exact contribution of each members and/or making meetings too long or incomplete.*

*Decision maker not part of the team. Team member who want to take on assignment of others without completing their own*

*Availability.*

*Sometimes decisions are made by our counterparts in India without input from the US teams they support. We would like to see more proactive communication and dialogue to reach a decision, but the open sharing does not always happen. Also, we feel like they are not always transparent about challenges and status of items. We always seem to get the rosy picture even if we know it's not the case. The latter is a cultural consideration, but it's very challenging for us.*

*All the usual "head office" "field" issues, but much worse.*

*Fear of insubordination challenges members in the lower ranks from being candid with feedback. This is more pronounced in some cultures than others.*

## COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

*Unable to see body language to help understand more of what's behind words...non-verbal cues...*

*[No] opportunity to celebrate successes*

*[No] brainstorming.*

## DO YOU PERCEIVE GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES IN PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION STYLES?

In responding to this question, you cited negative and positive differences on both sides of the gender line, but some of you saw no differences, which is odd considering how they are observable across cultures around the globe.

### NOTED GENDER DIFFERENCES

*I find men are more 'braggy' about what they've done and some will exaggerate their accomplishments and/or time spent at work.*

*Culture is a stronger variable but women tend to be more collaborative and supportive on virtual teams*

*Sometimes its boys against girls.*

*We have gender-based insensitivities in all of our offices.*

*When men on my team interact with other team leads which are female, they can sometimes tend to not take the female leads direction as full proof. They sometimes do not trust or buy into the decisions and opinions of senior leader females.*

*During interactions with virtual team members in India, the females rarely speak and seem instead to defer to their male counterparts, regardless of role or title.*

*Who takes control of the meeting, and talks the most with the least amount of listening are men.*

*In some cultures men are not comfortable with assertive women who speak up, and in most cultures men often won't support women's ideas unless other men also propose them, and then they take credit for them.*

*Women usually share more information than men, and are more collaborative/proactive when it's for the common interest of the team.*

*Male offshore resources are unaccustomed to working for women. They are consistently polite, but they are reluctant to approach female leaders for questions, advice, issue resolution, etc.*

*Male coworkers like to chit chat a lot during a work related meeting. They would talk about sports and some other gender based topics that could be hard to understand sometimes. They seem to be able to speak in their own code. They like to joke around a lot during the call. Whereas female coworkers like to just get on with the topics and get things done.*

*I have experienced males talking over females, making it challenging for them to contribute*

*It can be difficult to work with male team members from male-dominant cultures, because they expect me (as a female) to have a secondary role on the team. It can be challenging to convince them to see me as a senior person on the team.*

*The dominant sex from a team perspective takes over and sets the collaboration style which sometimes alienates or overshadows the other sex participation and contributions.*

*Men tend to not ask for help when they are falling behind.*

*Women are so liberated these days that they talk a lot more than men, just because they like exercising their right to do so. Rarely do these talkative women contribute to meaningful discussion.*

#### NO DIFFERENCES

*Not really.*

*I'm a woman. Women are usually a minority in my company, I do not mind*

*Years ago this seemed to be true. But today the stereotypes seem to have broken down. It's more on an individual basis now. Each person's personality determines their style. Some of either sex are passive and some are aggressive.*

#### HAS AN INTERCULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDING COST THE TEAM OR COMPANY AN OPPORTUNITY?

To this question, your comments broke down into three areas: local practices and sensitivities; problems surrounding the meaning of *yes* and *no* as well as bad news and expressing disagreement; and the importance of sharing an understanding of deadlines and commitments among team members.

#### LOCAL PRACTICES AND SENSITIVITIES

*Customers did not read /understand our contract and had wrong expectations. Lost the account.*

*Dress code in dining. Protocol in meetings.*

*Differences in national cultures meant that a collaboratively-planned gathering we had worked on to take place in Toronto fell through and had to be re-planned at the last minute for a USA-based location.*

*...some cultures insist on negotiating and coming to consensus on every decision. This includes everyone, but due to compromises being made by everyone, the resulting plan tends to be disjointed and ineffective. There needs to be a final review by someone with sufficient knowledge, and power, to correct elements that were reached through compromise but which simply do not work together. This needs to be done with sensitivity, but it has to be done...*

*[The] approach to clients is sometimes too impersonal. Too much “process” based on western cultural norms, and not enough flexibility.*

*I have seen a project fall apart because in one culture it was commonplace to cc a manager into e-mails to keep them informed. In the other culture, cc-ing a manager on an e-mail meant you were escalating something. One side couldn't understand why the other team kept escalating everything, and until this was brought to light (a good year into the project), it caused real friction between the teams...*

*Feedback was immediately taken in a negative way, an insult was perceived.*

*One group not able to communicate their needs on a project to the other site, so the needs may not get taken into account on the project.*

*Complete documentation of issues for Spain is not enough information for us to fix an issue. We always have to ask additional questions before fixing issues, which usually costs a day in turnaround.*

*Willingness to please missed a compliance piece, which caused issues and lost time down the line.*

*In some situations when we have general announcements around emergency process, we have run into issues where the different regions translated the message and it came out differently from the original.*

*Some cultures are very black and white when it comes to detail instead of being able to use interpretation to determine if something makes sense. Clients have been turned away unnecessarily.*

*One person in the team stereotyped another person based on his cultural background and this tremendously demotivated and brought down the productivity of the person.*

*Over-pushy western cultures causing reticence from Asian members of the team, which then has to be resolved by other means.*

*People at corporate center rarely understand the exact local needs. And local teams cannot grasp the objectives of corporate center teams. Corporate center teams tend to produce tools or resources that are often useless, or they only [assign/charge] local activities with tasks that are not beneficial at the local level.*

*A British manager misunderstood the emotional style of an Italian engineer (the customer) and took offence at the literal meaning of a comment.*

*We've been tripped up by the differences in national holidays, which has cost the team valuable time and could have been scheduled better.*

*My previous employer allowed some employees from India to celebrate their Festival of Colors for several years. Last year one employee shared some paint (used on faces and arms) with others, and it got on the carpets, walls, and cube partitions. Facilities freaked out, and management slammed the door shut on future celebrations.*

*We had to reprint a whole large product update because my global teammates really didn't comprehend that when we said their work was off review by us, it was off review. They tend to sacrifice accuracy for making deadlines, and we absolutely cannot do that when publishing the law.*

*Perceived cultural slights have caused damaged relationships for some team members. In one case, resulting in a member leaving the company.*

*Offshore team said they could complete scheduled work as planned even though Agile points had never been met before. Team insisted they could [do the] work due to cultural "saving face," and [as a result,] a deadline was missed.*

*Issues and problems tend not to get fully solved with certain cultures. Certain cultures rush in to fix the symptoms of problems but lack the impulse to actually solve the problem, thus extending the life of the actual problem.*

## THE MEANING OF YES AND NO AND PROBLEMS EXPRESSING BAD NEWS AND DISAGREEMENT

*Asians (Korean/, Japanese, Vietnamese, etc.) do not say "No" in general, but Westerners easily say it, which makes for embarrassing situations sometimes.*

*Instead of saying no to a critical feature, [the] response was yes, but no work was being done and this situation persisted for more than half a year, during which time my part of the team spent time working on temporary fixes instead of [a] releasable feature. When the issue was finally pressed, we finally got the response that other part of the team did not consider this a needed feature. So*

*we gathered data to show that not implementing it would certainly cost [the] company [a] large amount of money. In the end it was understood that this feature is really essential, and it was done, but very late in the project and [it] didn't receive enough testing.*

*Offshore resources routinely answer "yes" to every question posed. In India, answering yes is an acknowledgement that he/she received the question, similar to saying "Yes, I heard your question." But it doesn't always mean the answer to the question is yes. The questioner is responsible to (1) know this and (2) ask additional probing questions to get the appropriate answer. This "always say yes" custom has caused costly delays, resulting in software that is useless and had to be written off, and it has caused entire teams to be replaced due to ineffectiveness.*

*"No problem" in discussions with Chinese persons was heard as "ok, I'll address that issue" by the US, when what was [actually] meant by the Chinese was "I don't see a problem so I am not going to take any action." Delays with associated costs occurred in the project.*

*We have a team who is extremely defensive. Their response to any issue or question is a testy explanation of why it's not their fault. Fault is irrelevant, frankly, but since this is the team that needs to fix these issues, [it] becomes an exhausting waste of time. And in some cases, they've even refused to do a fix, causing a variety of issues. My boss (Chinese) thinks this is a cross-cultural problem (British vs. American, with various other immigrated cultures sitting on both sides of our cross-Atlantic team).*

*Where different teams are not candid with each other, so that dates are missed or the solution provided does not meet the requirement due to miscommunication and lack of trust.*

*A reluctance to give advance warning of an issue that was likely to prevent the successful roll out of a new initiative (culturally not right to tell leader when there are problems, [so they] just try to solve them alone). [This] led to a significant delay, embarrassment at not being aware of the issue, and loss of trust.*

*Asking an Asian team to remove a tool. They removed the tool while they knew that it wasn't the thing to do. They were not able to tell us that it was a bad decision, or we were not able to understand their way [of saying' no.*

*It is difficult to practice continuous process improvement with team members who are not comfortable expressing criticism.*

*A local resource didn't raise an issue with the central team, and we had no idea that the project was not going as well as anticipated until we went out and met in person.*

*Western team thought that the Japan team had agreed, but later found out that they just didn't feel comfortable telling us that they didn't agree. Required a lot of re-work.*

## IMPORTANCE OF A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF DEADLINES AND COMMITMENTS

*The window to implement some new software was missed because some team member did not understand the deadline and did not complete their tasks.*

*Missing deadlines, meetings, or an appointment with [a] client from a highly direct and time-focused culture is now costing us a large client account. A meeting was missed due to technical scheduling error. Client is reluctant to meet at all now.*

*Team members agree in the meeting, but then do their own thing or go a different direction.*

*Agreement to idea by a team member doesn't necessary mean he will do it.*

*Making something is not always making the thing good in certain cultures (Chinese for example).*

*I wouldn't say opportunity but rather time. There are instances where we believe action items are agreed upon, but then no further action is taken based on lack of understanding.*

*Differences in time orientation prevented pilot projects from launching on time due to inability to identify the responsible (accountable) individual, and lack of urgency given the time constraints and pressure to deliver strategic objectives. Misalignment of goals, aims, and what is required.*

## WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO IMPROVE YOUR ABILITY TO COLLABORATE VIRTUALLY?

Your answers to this question emphasized solutions involving technology; time and time-zone management; more frequent and better-quality communication and feedback; fostering a clearer understanding of roles, commitment, and outcomes; cultural and team training; and language skills.

### TECHNOLOGY

*I think the use of technology such as virtual meetings and video conferencing would improve the interaction.*

*Improvement to phone connections would be very helpful. A poor phone connection makes any issue with understanding accents and speech variations much worse. Good Conference Call etiquette is very important.*

*Have tools that allow us to poll individuals to make sure that everyone agrees with an idea.*

## TIME AND TIME-ZONE MANAGEMENT

*Be more respectful of time zones. It is rare that I am offered alternative or convenient times for meetings, even where it is feasible.*

*Setting timeframes where you expect to be able to communicate online with the team member is fundamental. People will not be online 24/7, but they will gladly commit to be online at agreed times, often different from local work hours, but convenient for them. In this case, online means instantaneous communication by any media (email, sms, messaging, social, phone, face-to-face).*

## MORE FREQUENT, BETTER-QUALITY COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

*Ideally I would like to get some feedback from colleagues on how well they understand my communication style, but I can't easily get this as most of my colleagues feel uncomfortable giving direct criticisms. I have to do a lot of guesswork based on what is not being said.*

*So far, so good. Gathering and processing feedback was very useful in our early months of working with copy editors in India. Nearly all writers' complaints disappeared after refinements were implemented.*

*Staying in touch constantly and being open with them would really help a lot for a smooth day to day business.*

*Ensure to have good listening skills*

*People tend to default to email. Not everybody reads carefully nor comprehends fully emails, plus written English may lack nuance that is especially tricky cross-culturally. Two things: (a) best practices for emails - e.g. bullet point key items, with a short, bold, underlined topic leading off - also a*

*clear subject, a very brief lead paragraph on why the message is important, and very clear action items gathered at the end (or highlighted throughout).  
(b) Encourage telephonic conversations whenever possible. Picking up the phone can solve or prevent MANY issues.*

*Better preparation before meetings and giving more comments to team member's pre-work.*

*Include breathing room in conversations so phone participants can weigh in, opening group chat dialogues to virtual team members can "interrupt" via chat rather than feel like an outsider.*

*Increase travel in order to forge better interpersonal relations but companies like virtual teams so they can cut travel budgets but it costs the companies more in the long run in projects lasting longer than they should, longstanding problems never getting fixed, projects completed less well than they could have been due to lack of faith and understanding.*

*Always have at least one face to face gathering where leads/supervisors visit the remote site and work with the people for at least a week.*

## FOSTERING A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF ROLES, COMMITMENT, AND OUTCOME

*If I could start back over, I'd create a role description document that says what everyone's role is on the team. You can't force people to contribute to a conversation, but letting them know that their opinion matters and they will be listened to might help encourage them.*

*Set clear objectives, goals, communicate clearly what is expected*

*Stricter adherence to an agenda. Make time for socializing with virtual teammates either after the agenda has been completed or on a separate call. The socialization is very important to keep things connected and running smoothly. It establishes a dialogue for dealing with important issues and serves to build trust. It's also a forum to share and resolve small misunderstandings that would otherwise go unsaid. Small misunderstandings or perceived slights can build resentment over time, eventually degrading the relationship and team work product. Incidental interaction in the workplace affords opportunities to clear up small issues. Virtual team mates need to have regularly scheduled social calls to create the room necessary for a team to be well-integrated.*

*Set up "golden rules" and "principles," and have a clear adherence of audience to adhere to it. Like a "contract."*

*Develop a charter*

*Protocol for conflict situations*

*Limit your expectations in regards to timing and their availability.*

*I always have a one on one call with a new virtual team member. Set the expectations with them and here what they expect. That sets the stage for better work on the virtual team calls.*

*Build more time for norming, forming and storming before performing.*

*Enforce rules on conference calls. It will make some cultures unhappy but right now they are ineffective and some adaptations to the meeting over the phone VS in person must be made. Some level of discipline is needed.*

*All collaboration requires trust, and trust requires time spent together. Virtual teams operate most successfully when each team member knows what to expect from the others, i.e. when they know and trust each other. To me, one of the most important factors in collaboration is establishing exactly what my contribution to the team is, and communicating that clearly. That means I make sure that I know what is expected of me, and that the rest of the team understands and agrees. I also think that "kick-off" or "set up" meetings, in person, make a very big difference in getting a virtual team off to a good start.*

## CULTURAL AND TEAM TRAINING

*We are working on inculcating our organizational culture across all offices. We have and are using management consultants and are currently organizing a series of trainings to address gender and leadership skills gaps.*

*Know the codes and references people use to communicate in each cultural context. For instance the way they write their emails (is asking a question a way of being polite or is it an actual question?) AND the people they decide to copy in (are they relevant, are they not?).*

*I first, analyze the cultural dynamics of my team and communication styles. This is to help understand where all of my team members are originally from (ex. Do folks in Asia speak more between the lines versus in the US being more up front). Then, set ground rules, expectation on communications (ex. sending emails notes after each discussion, not being afraid to raise a hand and say something is not on track etc.).*

*We provide virtual team training to our clients and feel we collaborate virtually to a very high level.*

*Going forward I'd like to try and limit the number of cultural clashes we have in meetings: i.e., my male coworkers in India do not like being bossed around by females, and higher-ranking employees don't like having to talk to lower-ranking employees. Instead of having a low-level female try and train a higher-level male, I'd maybe try using a low-level male or a same-level female.*

*Ask advice from the team leader of what his opinions on how to improve collaboration with uncooperative intercultural team members.*

*Offer assistance to teammates.*

## LANGUAGE SKILLS

*Improve my English and learn other languages.*

*Oral speaking skills.*

## WHAT ARE THE TOP TWO CHALLENGES YOU FACE LEADING YOUR VIRTUAL TEAMS?

Responses to this question fell into the following areas: conflicting instructions; engagement and commitment issues; language and communication barriers; organization and efficiency; investing in staffing, training, and technology; and time zones and scheduling.

## CONFLICTING INSTRUCTIONS

*Team members get conflicting instructions from local line management. Administrative barriers like work contracts and intra-company work orders. These are painful to organize.*

*A clear project plan and constant communication are needed to ensure the team doesn't swirl in ambiguity.*

*Lack of knowledge about the local team's structure, physical location, and ways of working.*

*Understanding what really is being assumed and understood by my global teammates.*

## ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT ISSUES

*Participants from some cultures are hesitant to take tasks beyond instruction to the next logical step, which increases management time.*

*Sense of urgency is different although it is improving.*

*Folks in the Europe only work 7.5 hours a day, have several bank holidays, and are not likely to work overtime. Building a strong relationship with team members I've never met face to face. It's not the case for all, but for some it is.*

*Keeping everyone's attention and ensuring everyone has the opportunity to speak.*

*Missing the sense of commitment and trust of delivery, once something is agreed, without having to rigorously follow up.*

*Motivation among team members.*

*Making people attend the meeting. Make people prepare for the meeting.*

*Getting people to answer questions openly and honestly, even if they don't know the answer or are hesitant to speak up.*

*Getting feedback.*

## LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

*Finding time to connect one-on-one and understand the drivers and mind-set of everyone.*

*Lack of body language perception, difficult to know if all are engaged. Some people are good listeners and may not participate much in a discussion but really understand needs and do the work between meetings, so you cannot base yourself solely on participation. The other difficulty is technical: I like to draw on a board to explain concepts and that is harder. You can prepare diagrams in advance but they appear less spontaneous and do not allow same interactivity.*

*Finding out different needs of team members.*

*Harder to bond.*

*Understanding dialect and any differences in how they interpret/process the business. Team members that are consistently not on the calls.*

*Terminology differences that lead to misunderstanding of written and spoken communication*

*Getting everyone on the same page where there are differing levels of maturity and English is the second language.*

## ORGANIZATION AND EFFICIENCY

*Organization Efficient use of meetings.*

*Effectively tracking all the tasks of every team member.*

*Getting a sense of their level of development. Getting to know too late of problems.*

## INVESTING IN STAFFING, TRAINING, AND TECHNOLOGY

*Infrastructure - poor network connection in most countries in Asia.*

*Hiring new team members.*

*Access to data across multiple IT systems.*

*Having the company invest in cameras and hands-free phone and computer headsets.*

*Evaluating performance and remote training.*

## TIME ZONES AND SCHEDULING

*Time zones and agreement on deadlines*

*Finding time to get together.*

*Getting individuals from different time zones to attend global meetings.*

## WHAT PRACTICES DID YOU ADOPT TO GENERATE HIGH LEVELS OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION AMONG TEAM MEMBERS?

The practices you adopted to generate improved collaboration included the introduction of greater structure, more communication and encouragement, and adopting a stronger leadership style and personal contact.

### INTRODUCING MORE STRUCTURE

*Fixed time slots during the week for focusing on team activity. In some time zones, people can split their work day to participate. Someone on the team is ALWAYS unavailable. The rest of the team needs the ability to carry on without loss of continuity.*

*Clarity on roles and responsibilities. Preparation not just by the leader but by all team members is key documentation of the meeting is a must*

*Set agenda, recapping of discussion, follow-up with deadlines.*

*Meetings that are as short as possible -Send out discussion points in the meeting notice.*

*Each person is assigned a task and must contribute.*

*Regular meetings, setting clear expectations, and holding people accountable.*

*Consistent check-in calls and meetings where everyone provides feedback. Face to face opportunities whenever feasible to strengthen bonds and relationships.*

*We have created a team charter and expectations guide. We meet weekly, we are always on chat and we use GLIP project management tracking for our projects which allows anyone on the team to see another teammates' progress at a glance.*

### MORE COMMUNICATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

*Much more video conferencing vs. just group conference calls.*

*As stated earlier, I have a one on one conversation with virtual team first. We share information, establish a relationship and share expectations. Then when we are on the virtual team participation and interaction normally happens.*

*Include face to face and social opportunities for interaction. Set clear meeting agendas in advance and canvass team members on critical issues. Train for cultural competency and global mindsets*

*Enlighten people to look at the issue from another angle or explain why and what other team members are doing.*

*Always ensure that remote people are able to access the content presented (phone, camera, webex, storing the information centrally).*

*We have an internal site to share information.*

*Encouraging better documentation and collaboration via documents rather than relying on verbal/conference calls where sometimes not everyone understands each other very well due to bad phone connections, accents, and time zones i.e. late at night for some participants.*

*Open chat windows regularly with the team, more liberal use of webinar.*

## STRONGER LEADERSHIP STYLE AND PERSONAL CONTACT

*Lead with vision and charisma (not process...this comes with vision and a good team charter).*

*Lower my expectations of others' understanding or engagement. Over communicate to reduce silly mistakes. Always have a Plan B for (practical/technical) communicating.*

*Sending small gift, souvenir is delightful.*

*Work to develop a personal rapport. Avoid videoconferences - they're deadly, everybody staring at their screens. Work by telephone.*

*Use of webinars rather than just telephone conferencing. F2F meetings as often as practically possible. Understanding of MBTI and what type other team members are - this helps in understanding and also managing conflicts, i.e., if one person is a detail person and the other is big picture they may have to adapt their natural communication style.*

*Calling on individuals to participate. Asking good questions and expecting answers.*

*I try to crack a joke once in a while to lighten the mood. Talk to and/or email people one on one or in small groups to build the relationship and so they feel more comfortable to speak their mind, i.e. reduce the peer pressure.*

*Lead by example. Don't be afraid to admit mistakes or responsibility. It reduces others' fear of speaking up when something is wrong or falling behind.*

*Employ clever people who respect each other, and are not afraid to ask questions*

*Encourage high levels of autonomy - I don't need to be involved in the minutiae and expect the team to resolve issues and let me know when they get stuck or need strategic guidance. Regular calls/meetings etc. at alternating times so people don't feel they need to participate at 2am. We try to record all calls so they can listen the next day. Then encourage email feedback after listening. Use some great technology to support collaboration. Yammer for chatting, sharing articles, etc.; Confluence for significant project work with file-sharing, My Collaboration for group projects etc. Lync video is great for quick catch ups (or longer calls) - feels like popping down the hall to check on something with a colleague.*

*I always make it a priority to introduce everyone and try to get them to share some details when we kick-off a new team. When the team members can find commonalities, they become more collaborative, communicate more freely and ask questions more easily. They start to build relationships right away if they find common bonds and since humans tend to support those we like, we can get things done better and more quickly.*

## COMPARED TO YOUR COMFORT LEADING LOCAL TEAMS, HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU LEADING MULTICULTURAL TEAMS?

In general, your responses emphasized similarities between multicultural leadership challenges and those of virtual-team leadership, but many of you expressed additional concerns about multicultural teams.

### SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MULTICULTURAL AND VIRTUAL TEAM-LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

*People of other cultures can be just as competent as people of my culture. The trick is identifying the experts and the blowhards of each culture.*

*I am comfortable leading from a work-direction standpoint, however the virtual team members in different locations also have people managers in their locations, so I fear there may be differences in expectations, or that my expectations may not align with what their people manager expects of them.*

*It's more difficult to lead virtual teams. More difficulty = less comfort. By definition.*

*Most of my work the last 5+ years has been with multicultural teams. I have gotten very comfortable with it, believe that I have learned to adapt to what works for different cultures, and be flexible when dealing with multiple cultures.*

*I was in the military and lived outside of the US for a year. Also, within the US, I have lived in various regions.*

*Team building, whether in person or virtually, is about finding out about the individuals that make up your team, and how together they become high performers. While the techniques differ from local vs. virtual, if as a leader you take the time to learn your people and what motivates them, you can leverage that in developing the high performance team.*

*I love working with different people from various backgrounds. It allows me to learn more about different cultures and understand that impact to collaboration. It's more aligned to my personal interests, so makes me more comfortable with working in multicultural teams.*

*I have taken training on many cultures and am interested in anthropology and cultural differences anyway. So I try to understand where everyone is coming from. And I think I am pretty effective. However, some of the differences do not work well together even though they do work well in each individual culture. This tends to make the members of the teams feel that the other cultures are causing problems ... and not see that they are also doing the same*

*Culture is not a problem if there's understanding and trust. These take time to build. That time is never given when working virtually.*

*Diversity brings more solutions, more creative solutions and the learning curve is greater.*

*My challenge is less on leading multicultural teams, but more on virtual (physically located) teams*

*I've lived and worked in several foreign countries and speak three languages so I have skills to lead multicultural teams.*

*Have been doing this for 5 years and feel like have the keys ingredients to make it 'as successful as it can be.'*

## CONCERNS ABOUT MULTICULTURAL TEAMS

*I still find it difficult to know how engaged people are and how messages are landing.*

*The trick is that while our global teams are used to considering the US perspective, the US teams are not used to taking global needs into consideration. So, teaching them how to do that takes time.*

*My company is pretty dysfunctional. I have more success with virtual teams scattered around the world than I do with people in its historic manufacturing center.*

*Only hesitation is due to inability to understand some speech patterns*

*My only concern is not knowing the other cultures key business norms and languages.*

*It's more challenging.*

*Very comfortable with teams from cultures where I have more experience (NA, Western Europe, Australia, India). Somewhat comfortable with teams from cultures where I have less experience and I perceive more difference (China, Japan, Korea, Russia, Singapore).*

*I realize they are from a different culture but I don't know that they consider that I am also from a different culture.*

*The cultural differences are hard to factor into the situation*

*Find it's hard to build relationship/trust, which I believe it's the core base for high efficient working team.*

*Not as easy to pick up issues in remote teams.*

*It's a little bit harder to develop relationships when we're far away and takes longer to establish ties which are easier when face to face.*

*It was very challenging the first 10-20 times...Not anymore. Still learning to lead efficiently, there are lessons to be learnt in every interaction. There is no magic pill when people are involved. The best thing to do is to be flexible but focused, adaptable but assertive, deal with uncertainty in the most transparent manner*

*Combining the challenges of different time zones and different cultural expectations creates a double difficulty. It's not that it cannot be done, or is particularly uncomfortable; but it is definitely an additional burden that has to be managed.*

## HAVE YOU HAD ANY FORMAL GLOBAL LEADERSHIP TRAINING?

Despite the wide variety of leadership training experiences you identified, the training each of you possessed can be summarized in the brief category descriptions that follow.

*Webinars and workshops.*

*Harvard cross cultural negotiation training program. I am a corporate trainer and university lecturer myself on cultural competencies and global leadership.*

*Direct experience, shadowing, mentoring, workshops, conferences, coaching.*

*Other global organizations I have worked for have provided such training on an ongoing basis.*

*I have a Master of Organizational Leadership degree*

*I have attended webinars on Culture Wizard and taken the training available.*

*MBA*

*Role based trainings provided by the efficiency department.*

*E-learning.*

*I've taken an online course on global leadership, but it didn't teach me anything that I didn't already know.*

*Company proprietary training.*

*I am now doing the global leadership course in Culture Wizard.*

*Leadership development program for high potentials within my company - included working on consulting project with global / multi-cultural team.*

*I refuse to perpetuate the idea that talented leaders need to be formally trained in order to effectively lead "global" teams.*

*Not much. Most of it was trial by fire. But a few courses from a local university, a lot of reading on CultureWizard, and some meetings with other cultural sensitivity trainers.*

*I am an expert in change management and culture, I have studied extensively.*