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Special Issue: Virtual Work, Teams and Organisations

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Over the last few years, we have organised minitracks at the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS) that focus on Virtual Work, Teams and Organisations. In this special issue, we draw together the best of these papers. Each paper was subjected to further rounds of revision and resubmission (typically two or three) after HICSS to ensure that it attained a suitable quality level for the journal.

The push and pull provided by information technology and rapidly changing business demands have led to virtual work becoming increasingly important in organizations. Virtual work can take various forms, from geographically distributed teams in supply chains to telecommuting to global project development teams. In virtual organizations and communities, individuals can become part of groups and/or organizations that have no physical co-location, and often do not meet each other face-to-face, except for virtual encounters. Increasing globalization, heightened security awareness, and tightening travelling budgets are all factors that will foster further growth for virtual environments.

Managing, working, and living in this information-rich and rapidly changing environment present major challenges. This Special Issue focuses on issues related to challenges presented by and the effectiveness of virtual work, teams and organizations. While the explosion of communication technologies has facilitated the growth of virtual environments, it has also resulted in confusion over choice of communication technologies that may be appropriate for a particular task, overload of information to be sorted through, and a sense of isolation from co-workers. In addition, teams must be formed and become productive quickly, e.g., competitive advantage for project development teams is frequently based on being able to bring a new product to market more quickly than competitors. Consequently, these teams must rapidly form and complete their tasks in response to customer needs and market opportunities. This environment is further complicated as individual members may simultaneously work in several virtual teams with multiple, often conflicting, priorities. These teams can be composed of members from different functional areas as well as different organizations. In virtual environments, managing these different relationships, loyalties, and priorities, in addition to developing new relationships, presents a considerable challenge.

In the first paper “Antecedents to Team Member Commitment from Near and Far: A Comparison Between Collocated and Virtual Teams”, Powell, Galvin and Piccoli seek first to identify the antecedents to commitment to a work team, and second to compare how antecedents to commitment differ between collocated and virtual teams. Their results indicate that team work processes and member effort have a significant, positive relationship with trust in collocated teams. However, in virtual teams the results show that member effort is not

a significant predictor of trust. Overall, collocated teams had stronger relationships between member effort and trust, and between trust and normative commitment. Virtual teams, on the other hand, had stronger relationships between work processes and trust, and between trust and affective commitment. The authors note that managers of work teams have a particular responsibility to establish a foundation of trust to ensure team member commitment. Virtual team managers should take the trouble to organize and communicate the work processes that should be followed by virtual team members.

In the second paper “Virtual Teams In and Out of Synchronicity”, DeLuca and Valacich use Media Synchronicity Theory to explore the influence of various communication media on the task performance perception of virtual teams from two organizations. Using observations and interviews from eight primarily virtual teams, they found support for Media Synchronicity Theory. Their findings further indicate that for complex problem solving tasks performed by newly formed teams, communications media with low synchronicity (e.g. listserv, e-mail, bulletin board) may be appropriate for “conveyance” of information; whereas media with high synchronicity (e.g. face-to-face, telephone) may be more desirable for “convergence” on shared meaning.

In the third paper, “Global Boundaries, Task Processes and IS Project Success: A Field Study”, Espinosa, DeLone and Lee find that as Information Systems (IS) projects become increasingly global given the current offshoring trend, researchers and managers alike tend to fumble with the ways in which they manage these teams and their inherent diversity. Such teams typically cross multiple boundaries such as time zones, geographic distance, and cultural differences. The authors address the effect of different types of boundaries crossed on global IS project success, developing a model from 22 semi-structured interviews with global IS project managers. This exploratory and qualitative study showed that time separation and cultural differences are the most significant barriers to project success. The results indicate that effective teams are able to overcome these barriers to achieve success, but this success is often achieved through the implementation of special coordination, communication and cognitive processes tailored to help teams overcome global barriers.

In the last paper “Durability of Online Teamworking: Patterns of Trust” Nandhakumar and Baskerville investigate the role of trust in virtual teamworking practices. The authors use an interpretive case study research approach carried out in a large petrochemical company. They collected detailed qualitative data on 10 virtual teams over a two-year period, including interviews and observations of teams members and senior management. Their findings indicate that while the durability of virtual teamworking depends largely on commitment and personal trust relationships, these relationships may gradually diminish over time without collocated social interactions. Technology-mediated interactions alone seemed to have a limited contribution to the durability of these relationships. The authors propose a theoretical conceptualization of the development of commitment and personal trust in the virtual team context.

Bios

Robert Davison is an Associate Professor of Information Systems at the City University of Hong Kong. His work has appeared in the *Information Systems Journal*, *Communications of the AIS*, *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *Information Technology & People*, *Information & Management*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Group Decision & Negotiation* and the *Communications of the*

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France Bélanger is Associate Professor and Alumni Research Fellow in the Department of Accounting and Information Systems at Virginia Tech. She is Associate Editor of the *Journal of Electronic Commerce in Organizations*. Her research focuses on the use of telecommunication technologies in organizations, in particular for distributed work and electronic commerce. She is widely published in information systems journals such as *Information Systems Research*, *MIS Quarterly*, *Communications of the ACM*, *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, *Information Systems Journal*, *Information & Management*, *Database*, and many others. Dr. Bélanger co-authored the books *E-Business Technologies* (John-Wiley & Sons, 2003), and *Evaluation and Implementation of Distance Learning: Technologies, Tools and Techniques* (Idea Group Publishing, 2000). Her work has been funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Education, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Boeing, and several Centers. She held a Fulbright Distinguished Chair in MIS position in 2006.

Manju Ahuja is an Assistant Professor of MIS at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. She obtained her Ph.D. in MIS from the University of Pittsburgh. Her publications have appeared in journals such as *MIS Quarterly*, *Management Science*, *Organization Science*, *Communications of the ACM*, *Journal of Management*, *European Journal of Information Systems*, *Small Group Research*, *Decision Support Systems*, *Database for Advances in Information Systems*, and the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communications*. A recent study (Gallivan and Benbunan-Fich, 2006) ranked her as the top 76th IS researcher for the period 1999-2003. She is an Associate Editor at *Information Systems Research* and also serves on the review boards of *Decision Sciences* and the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems*. She is actively involved in research on issues related to virtual communities, virtual teams, and management of human resources in IT professions. She and her colleagues recently received a \$700,000 research grant from the National Science Foundation. Her research has been cited by publications such as *Wall Street Journal*, *Strategy+Business*, and *Computerworld*.

Mary Beth Watson-Manheim is an Associate Professor in the Information Decision Sciences Department and Director of the Center for Research in Information Management in the College of Business Administration at the University of Illinois, Chicago. She obtained her Ph.D. in Information Technology Management from Georgia Institute of Technology. Her publications have appeared in journals such as *MIS Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Information Systems*, *IEEE Journal of Systems, Man and Cybernetics*, *Information Systems Journal*, *MIS Quarterly Executive*, *Information Technology and People*, and *Group Decision and Negotiation*. Prior to starting a Ph.D. program, she worked in the telecommunications industry. She is actively involved in research on issues related to the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) and organizational work, and ICT-enabled organizational change.