

# Global virtual teams for value creation and project success: a case study



Liz Lee-Kelley, Tim Sankey *International Journal of Project Management* 26 (2008) p51-62

## KEYWORDS

- Distributed working
- Global virtual teams
- Virtual projects
- Project success

## Article highlight:

The case study has found that as workers become more accustomed to virtual team-working, many of the anticipated difficulties become increasingly unimportant for their performance. However, actual use of communication technology lags behind technical developments and more could be done to encourage people to develop greater confidence on the suitability and dependability of the new technologies.

## What does the paper cover?

This qualitative study examines whether virtual projects present challenges that are different from conventional projects and how they might be more useful than face-to-face teams in delivering value. Using a post-implementation review and lessons-learned approach, the study examines two distributed information technology projects in a global banking corporation, exploring the structure, composition and communication and co-ordination methods used, as well as the elements underlining virtual project success. The authors also identify the issues and offer suggestions that might help actors overcome or lessen the impact of difficulties attributed to virtual cooperative working.

## **Methodology:**

The case studies chosen were two migration projects carried out by the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region of BankCo Inc, a large consumer bank with branches in 100 countries. As BankCo Inc. evolved from a number of multi-national companies, the move towards a single global brand led to a requirement for a standard IT system to reduce costs and improve software management.

The UK was selected as the first business to migrate to an enhanced application version of the Asia Pacific (AP) regional standard, with Greece to follow. These migration projects were especially complex as they were the first installations in Western Europe of the enhanced version of the AP regional standard software application. Eleven interviews were conducted with people close to the migration projects, all at project manager level.

## **Research findings:**

Findings indicate that time zone and cultural differences in particular, affected communication and team relations. Other barriers included more conventional issues such as management agenda and leadership style, requirements creep, asymmetry in processes, unclear roles and responsibilities, time zones, over-communication, cultural differences and trust.

## **Conclusions:**

The study concludes that virtual teams are useful for projects requiring cross-functional or cross-boundary skilled inputs, and the key to their value creation is to have a defined strategy to overcome problems associated with at-distance cooperation. For similar large-scale projects, personal project management competency, appropriate use of technology and networking ability, willingness for self-management, cultural and interpersonal awareness are fundamentals of a successful virtual team.

## **Significance of the research:**

The trend for virtual teaming has fuelled interest in associated structural, operational and human asset management problems. The question of 'How can I manage them if I can't see them?' is an ongoing challenge and members are still concerned about their career prospects with reduced opportunities for social networking.

## **Comments from the authors:**

Although virtual teams have become an accepted business practice, our continuing research has found that it is not always satisfactory or successful, especially for leading-edge innovation or conceptual projects under highly competitive and tight time-to-market conditions. We've observed companies returning to co-located working where a small core team is supported by secondment of suitably qualified and experienced personnel from different parts of the organisation.

## Complete article

The original version of this article was published in the *International Journal of Project Management*, Vol number 26, Issue 1, January 2008 Liz Lee-Kelley, Tim Sankey (2007), p51-62. It can be accessed via **[sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0263786307001305](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0263786307001305)**

For further information please visit **[apm.org.uk/research](https://apm.org.uk/research)**. Please contact us with your views and suggestions at **[research@apm.org.uk](mailto:research@apm.org.uk)**

## Association for Project Management

Ibis House, Regent Park  
Summerleys Road,  
Princes Risborough  
Buckinghamshire,  
HP27 9LE

**Tel (UK)** 0845 458 1944  
**Tel (Int)** +44 1844 271 640  
**Email** [research@apm.org.uk](mailto:research@apm.org.uk)  
**Web** [apm.org.uk](http://apm.org.uk)

---

## Glossary:

### Global Virtual Team:

A Global Virtual Team, or Geographically Dispersed Team (GDT), is a group of individuals working on a project who use electronic communication technology to collaborate from a variety of locations around the world.

### Requirements Creep:

The changes or continuous or uncontrolled growth in a project's scope that can occur when the scope of a project is not properly defined, documented, or controlled.

---



Copyright Elsevier Ltd, APM and IPMA  
and is reproduced with permission.

Association for Project Management is incorporated  
by Royal Charter RC000890 and a registered charity  
No: 1171112. Principal office as shown above.