

Finding Virtual *Fika*

An Exploration of Trust and Community in Partially Distributed Teams (PDTs)

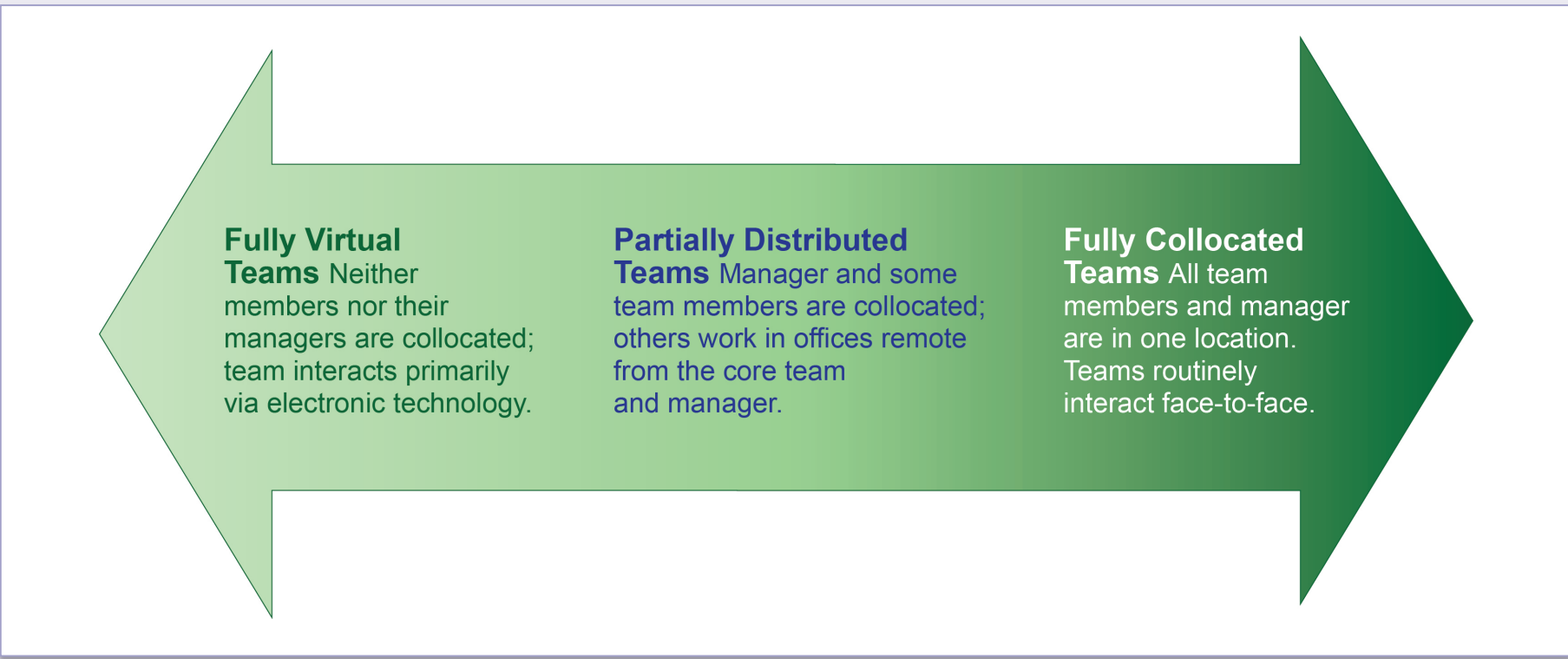
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Introduction

The Swedish word *fika* [fee:kah] translates to taking a coffee/snack break with members of your community for a few moments of collective restoration, for mental and psychic nourishment. But what if your community is thousands of miles away?

For partially distributed teams (PDT), where at least one team member sits in an office remote to the rest of the team and the manager, how might remote employees find *fika* and build trust with a community they never see?

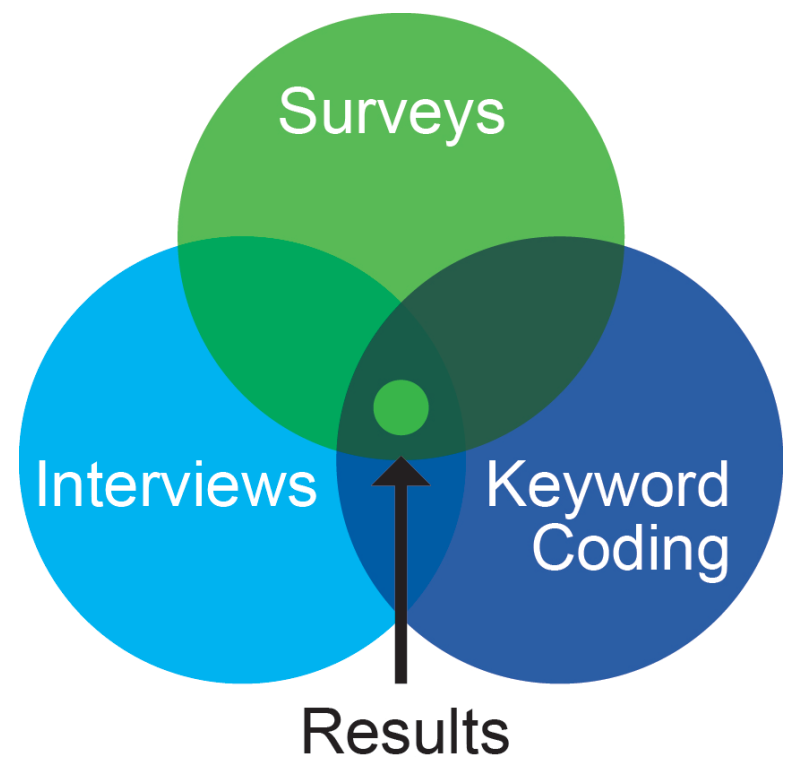


This research sought to explore:

- **What successful ways**, if any, exist to integrate remote and collocated employees and create trust among and between team members and their managers?
- **What agency and responsibility** does each team member and manager have to co-create the sense of team and community?
- **What ideas** does current research offer to help optimize the PDT structure for the benefit of both employees and firms?

Methods

The research was conducted through anonymous, online surveys and live, hour-long interviews. Keyword coding of surveys and interview transcripts was performed to obtain key themes.



Survey Participants

- 12 distributed employees
- 13 collocated employees
- 16 managers (various levels)

Interview Participants

- 12 distributed employees
- 6 collocated employees
- 10 managers (various levels)

Academic Research

- Research specifically on PDTs is rare and recent.
- Specific PDT research has found four core issues:
 1. Difficulties in communication
 2. Conflict management
 3. Lack of shared team identity/“us versus them” mentality (local versus remote)
 4. Difficulty building trust
- Strong leadership is critical to the success of PDTs, but has not been studied sufficiently to identify best practices per se.

Results

Primary themes are consistent with academic research; secondary themes offer another level of considerations.

Primary themes

Need for:

- Good communication, including more effective use of computer-mediated communication (CMC).
- More deliberate focus on team- and trust-building.
- Strong middle-management leadership, including efforts to empower employees.

Secondary themes

- Subgroup identification (conflict resulting from).
- Lack of spontaneous collaboration.
- Missed development opportunities.
- Need for good followership.

Structure of PDTs Studied



Conclusions and Recommendations

Traditional means of building trust and community—through daily, face-to-face interactions and shared experiences—must be rethought, and innovative, nontraditional methods pursued. Firms have an opportunity to use both long-term, strategic opportunities as well as short-term, tactical ones.

Strategic Opportunities

- Engineer opportunities for employees to collaborate.
- Crowd-source solutions.
- Enable self-organization (Morgan, 2006): agency, ownership, empowerment.
- Create a “why?”-safe culture (Berger, 2014) and promote Humble Inquiry (Schein, 2013): Teach and model methods of listening and thinking that lead to effective questioning (i.e., questioning that opens the door to innovative thinking, not just devil’s advocate challenges).

Tactical Opportunities

- Mandate the use of video-conferencing in place of conference calls.
- Budget for regular travel.
- Launch employee-owned wiki and internal social media channel.
- Crowd-source reputation ratings.

Key Literature Cited

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More Information

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