**Managing Virtual Teams: A Qualitative Study at Universitas Triatma Mulya Stenden Bali**

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**Abstract**

The Covid-19 pandemic and the social distancing policy forced Universitas Triatma Mulya Stenden Bali (UTMS) to switch from the conventional team to a virtual team. The stakeholders were not ready, and references as guidance were nowhere to be found as virtual team was still new in Indonesia. Once conducted, however, students’ assignments were surprisingly high quality. Students’ evaluations of their education have been higher and more positive. This study was conducted to explore aspects, factors, benefits, challenges, and human resource management), and to provide recommendations to higher education institutions on how to run a virtual team. This qualitative research is descriptive-explorative in nature. Interviews were conducted with the Module Coordinators of UTMS, who have experience in conducting conventional team and virtual team. Findings show that 1) students are stakeholders, 2) due to its flexibility, efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability, a hybrid team is considered to be the most ideal and best option for the future, 3) the aspects, the factors and the challenges can be classified into the technology, the people, and the process, aside from leadership, trust, company culture and cultural intelligence, 4) The key success factors of human resource management are the sophistication of the technology, class management and virtual presentation skills. To ensure the success of hybrid team, it is recommended that higher education institutions should 1) recruit only experts in the industry, 2) create clear SOPs, 3) provide the right infrastructure and technology, 4) provide training and development programs, 5) give regular 3600 feedback and feedforward, and 6) provide non-financial rewards.

**Keywords:** Managing, Virtual Team, Higher Education Institution, HRM

# 1. Introduction

Non-essential companies and those in service-based businesses such as hotels, spas, airlines and most educational institutions including Universitas Triatma Mulya Stenden Bali (UTMS) have to switch from offline or face-to-face operations into the virtual environment due to the Coronavirus pandemic (Agarwal, Ferdousi, Stahl, John, & Nalven, 2020). UTMS (currently is UNTRIM International) is one of the global campuses of NHL-Stenden University of Applied Sciences, of which the headquarter is in Leeuwarden, the Netherlands (Hogeschool, 2021). Other global campuses are in Thailand, South Africa, China, Italy, and Aruba. Aside from Leeuwarden, other campus sites are in Groningen, Assen, Emmen, Terschelling, Meppel, Zwolle, and Amsterdam. Of over 24,000 students, 15% are international students from 90 different citizenships.

Founded in 1845, NHL-Stenden is committed to focusing on “internationalisation”, in all aspects – students, teachers, campuses, apprenticeship, staff, international institution participation in various countries and applied research activities (Hogeschool, 2021). The educational activities were delivered via Problem Based Learning (PBL) and Case Based Learning (CBL), however, currently Design Based Education (DBE) is mostly used. NHL-Stenden curriculum states that it takes four years for students to obtain a bachelor's degree (Stenden Hogeschool, 2011). In one academic year, there are four 10-week modules, in which students can obtain 12 to 15 European Credits. In addition to the major module, there are minors.

UTMS, an international program of Universitas Triatma Mulya, currently offers various minors namely Event Management 1, Entrepreneurship in Action, Marketing and Management in Asia, and Spa Business Strategy, Mindful Leadership, The Inspirational Coach and Leader and Business Consultant. On average, UTMS receives 100-125 students per module. Students also join field trips/company visits designed to support the module. To ensure high quality, mid- and end-module evaluation – to evaluate the education delivery, the lecturers’ professionalism and the effectiveness of the facilities are conducted.

When switching to VT, two platforms i.e., Blackboard Collaborative and Microsoft Teams were decided to be used. Training and trials for module coordinators (MoCos) were conducted by NHL-Stenden. As if “learning by doing”, the MoCos did their best to manage their teams virtually. Mistakes occurred, and challenges appeared but improvements and innovations went along side by side with the VT implementation. Surprisingly, the students expressed their satisfaction with how the educational activities were carried out. The module assignments have been of high quality. This raises questions about what strategies have been done at UTMS in managing the VTs that generate success. To discover the answer, this research was conducted with the purpose to seek insights into the aspects, the life cycle, the benefits, the factors determining success and failure, and how the human resource has been managed. Findings are expected to be able to recommend higher education institutions on how to run VTs effectively and efficiently and to contribute to the knowledge about VTs.

# 2. Literature review

VT is defined as “teams whose members use technology to varying degrees in working across locational, temporal and relational boundaries to accomplish an interdependent task.” (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004: 808). Synthesizing various definitions, Hertel, Geister, and Konradt (2005: 71) present a minimal consensus of VTs i.e., “...consist of 1) two or more persons who 2) collaborate interactively to achieve common goals, while 3) at least one of the team members works at a different location, organization, or at a different time so that 4) communication and coordination are predominantly based on electronic communication media (email, fax, phone, video conference, etc.)”. Emphasising on the goal sharing and the accomplishment, Zofi (2012:1) defined VT as “... a work arrangement in which a group of members share responsibility for goals that must be accomplished in the total, or near-total, absence of face-to-face contact.”. Adding the necessity of technology Jarvis (2018: 7) defined VT as “cross time, space, and cultural boundaries and do so effectively with the use of technology.”. It can be said that a VT is a group of individuals across locational, temporal, relational, structural, and cultural boundaries, interacting adaptively, interdependently, and dynamically towards a common and valued goal, using technology to coordinate and execute team processes with the end purpose of accomplishing an interdependent task.

A VT is not necessarily an open university. An open university is stated to be not having traditional classrooms as the teaching-learning activities are carried out at a distance using various means such as the internet, television and radio, occasionally some printed material and tutor centres (Reynolds, 2009). A VT is merely a team which can be in both open and conventional universities.

According to Jarvis (2018) managing a VT comprises seven essentials, which are as follows.

1. Building and sustaining trust – how virtual trust can be achieved and maintained for the long term.

2. Stimulating a culture of excellence – the effort to understand and how to make the absolute best of the culture to ensure the best VT management.

3. Establishing and executing purposeful goals, which are feasible to be achieved.

4. Accelerating peak performance – ensuring accountability in the collaborative mindset.

5. Proactively engaging employees – how each member interacts with one another to accelerate their full potential.

6. Embracing dynamic change which will influence the goal achievement.

7. Maximizing technology to ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

One of the aspects of VT is members, who are geographically dispersed, driven by common purposes, enabled by the use of communication technology, involved in cross-boundary collaborations, non-permanent, in a small size team, are knowledge workers, and might be from different companies (Ebrahim, Ahmed, & Taha, 2009). A model created by Bal and Gundry (1999), shows that VT comprises three factors, i.e., people – team selection, reward structure, training on meetings, clear and specific objectives are crucial, process – the alignment, structure of the meetings, performance measurement or appraisals, team facilitation, and technology – the selection or the type, the location, the training, and the security. Communication, understanding role clarity and leadership attitude are also deemed important.

The lifecycle of a VT is the same as CT (Hertel et al., 2005 as cited by Nydegger & Nydegger, 2010).

1. Preparation: Establishing the mission statement, team composition and membership, the fundamental task design, the reward systems, the relevant technology, and organizational integration.

2. Launch: A phase when the initial workshop or introductory session, which allows members to meet one another takes place, goals are clarified, and the intra-team rules are established.

3. Performance Management: The phase when leadership patterns are established, rules and regulations of communication are developed, motivational and emotional issues are relevant, and knowledge management methods are introduced and agreed upon.

4. Team Development: The phase when the team assesses its needs and deficits, utilizes additional individual, or team training, and evaluates the effectiveness of the training.

5. Disbanding: The final phase is when the achievements are recognized, and the team members are re-integrated into their home organizations.

The advantages of setting up a VT are reduced real estate expense, increased productivity, higher profits, improved customer service, access to global markets, and environmental benefits (Cascio, 2001 as cited by Sangrà, Vlachopoulos, and Cabrera 2012). According to Bergiel, Bergiel, and Balsmeier (2008), a VT reduces the travel cost and travel time drastically. The place and time flexibility make it easy to recruit top-notch talents from different expertise, organizations and locations, who are impossible to be obtained in CT (Serrat, 2009), make it possible to hire members with disabilities (Nydegger & Nydegger, 2010), utilize time zones by working 24/7, and allow members not only to be able to maintain work-life balance but also work-life-integration (Törmänen, 2017).

Bergiel, Bergiel, and Balsmeier (2008) reiterated that as VTs are heterogeneous and diverse, they can engender the members’ creativity and originality, hence, making the team more powerful, effective, and efficient. VTs allow their members to have equal opportunity and accessibility to the virtual workplace. VTs do not encourage age, race, and any other types of discrimination but equality and equity as success is determined by performance and productivity. Nydegger and Nydegger (2010) believed that a VT is a very powerful and appropriate means to accomplish the work. The use of Computer-Mediated Communication makes all information easily accessed (delivered fast and efficiently spread), makes “the islands of knowledge” much simpler to be connected into self-organizing, knowledge-sharing networks, and can foster cross-functional and divisional collaborations.

 Despite the advantages, there are also disadvantages (Bergiel et al., 2008). VTs require complex technology. Personal/face-to-face collaborations, which are proven to develop a conceptual understanding of a problem better, do not happen in VTs. There are fewer monitored and controlled activities, less structured and formal processes, increasing mistrust, more communication breakdowns, more conflicts, more power struggles, more challenges in project management and in determining the right fit technology, increasing technophobia, challenging conflict management, less satisfying performance due to cultural and process diversity as a well as mobility, increasing needs of specific training and less encouragement. The success and failure of VTs are determined by various factors.

Five factors are discovered to be impacting the sustainability of VTs (Isaac Mustapha, 2017). The first is leadership and management styles. Effective leadership is mandatory as it will facilitate smooth and easier workflows. A leader should be focused, determined and trustworthy. The second is multiculturalism. Understanding the members’ cultural diversity, especially in their beliefs, norms, perception, and connectedness creates respect not only between the management and the team members but also among members. The third is communication. Good communication will create awareness and build perceived interdependence among members and management. The fourth is conflict resolution, which, in this case, means the leader’s ability to effectively manage disagreements arising from the diversities. The fifth is trust and awareness. Better communication and greater team awareness among the members and each member’s values shared in common, interdependence can build trust among each other.

The key success factors are a high level of trust, clear communication, strong leadership and an appropriate level of technology (Bergiel, Bergiel, & Balsmeier, 2008: 100), HR policies, training and development, standard organizational and team processes, appropriate organizational culture, effective leadership, leader/member’s competency (Duarte & Snyder, 2000 as cited by Nydegger & Nydegger, 2010), and cohesiveness (Nydegger & Nydegger, 2010). Taking the key success factor into consideration will ensure a situation, whereby group members have a greater liking for and acceptance of other members, negate any impacts of social anxiety, decrease feelings of loneliness and isolation, increase the members’ social network and build a sense of belonging (Mckenna, 2008).

Managing VTs in the educational sphere is much more complex and complicated as not only does it involve the stakeholders i.e., staff (academic and administrative) and students but also the means (technology) and teaching material. Gordon (2018) presents several issues in managing a VT in the educational environment such as poor team cohesion, inability to achieve goals and dissatisfaction (Avolio, Sosik, Kahai, & Baker, 2014); technology, distance, structure and the lack of visual cues (Ziek & Smulowitz, 2014); less classroom time spent (Gilson, Maynard, & Bergiel, 2013); leadership due to poor participation (Avolio et al., 2014); trust and empathy (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998); and lack of consistent theoretical model especially related to virtual team leadership (Avolio et al., 2014). Synthesizing various research findings, Alberth, Mursalim, Siam, Suardika, and Ino (2018) stated that the challenges among others are quality issues due to the lack of teacher training, psychological issues due to the lack of social interaction among students or teachers and students, which very often hampers the students’ development, and the incompatibility of the access or the technological means to run smooth teaching-learning process.

VTs, however, are proven to be beneficial, especially in online learning. The US Department of Education stated that at least there are nine benefits (Gordon, 2018). The system broadens access to quality education, increases the students’ engagement, increases efficiency, builds students’ interest, enables teachers to focus on high-value activities, increases the students learning rate, and reduces cost.

The fact that VTs in the educational environment will likely become a future norm and lifestyle, the fact that there are still issues, and the fact that VTs have a lot of benefits, it is significant that research is conducted in this field since not much research has been done. Aside from understanding the general VT in the educational sector this research focused on the human resource management of VT, and thus was based on a model of the performance management process for the individual employee created by Foot, Hook, and Jenkins (2016).

A brief overview of the HRM model is as follows (Foot et al., 2016). Based on the ‘Big Idea’, starting from the company’s strategic objectives (the ambitions, goals, and plans) understood uniformly by the staff and the management, the company sets targets. The following steps are conducting the recruitment, selection (internally or externally recruited talents), and induction in which the recruits are provided with knowledge about the company, the system, the policy, the organizational culture, the leadership style, what is expected and many others. The next step is giving the staff information on the target of performance and what is expected from them, per project or on a time basis e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, or annually. Once the assignment starts reviews on the staff performance are conducted. Feedback and feedforward on how the staff perform are given. It is expected that 3600 feedback is conducted to maintain its objectivity and fairness. Formal and informal learning and talent development (in-house training or sending staff to training centres) are imperative to maintain the staff desired performance.

Reviews need to be conducted in between the learning and talent developments before the staff performance appraisal. An appraisal generated two different actions. Should a staff member show good achievements (meeting the target/objectives), a new target needs to be set. A reward should be given. As the process is cyclical, upon setting the new target, personal development needs to be done, personal development should follow, new targets should be set and so forth. In the case when a staff member does not perform as expected nor achieve the target/meet the objectives, counselling should be given, in the absence of the management. The main idea is to give a picture of the staff’s well-being. When counselling has been given, yet the staff still cannot perform as expected, a disciplinary procedure, which can be financial such as salary adjustment, no salary increases, et cetera, or non-financial such as being given a warning letter, suspension, or forced transfer, will be imposed. Upon having been given disciplinary action, staff needs to be highly supervised and monitored. The process is then repeated.

# 3. Research Method

Conducted at UTMS, this study was qualitative, an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem (Clark & Creswell, 2015; Creswell, 2012). In qualitative research, a researcher builds a complex holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting. The nature of this research was exploratory, conducted when “enough is not known about a phenomenon and a problem has not been clearly defined, with the purpose to discover what is happening, defining, gaining insights about a topic of interest, and clarifying the understanding of an issue, problem or phenomenon.” (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019: 187).

The instrument was an in-depth interview, “a purposeful conversation between two or more members, during which the interviewer asks concise and unambiguous questions and listens attentively to the interviewee talking.” (Saunders et al., 2019: 434). The purpose was to obtain valid, reliable, and factual data, which were relevant to answering the problem statement and research questions. Questions were focused on the definition of VT, what managing VTs entails, the benefits of managing VTs, the aspects of managing VTs, factors determining the success of VT management, and the challenges in managing VTs. Specific questions will be focused on the aspects of the Human Resource Management model by Foot et al. (2016).

The population was all module coordinators; hence, no sampling was conducted, and no specific requirements were needed. This decision was made as module coordinators are the management members who have the most experience in managing virtual teams and have been to be successful, have worked for over 3 years, most hold master’s, and doctoral degrees and four of them have coordinated more than one module.

The approved analysis scheme was piloted, and no revision was deemed necessary due to the question's clarity. The interviews were then conducted. The recording was transcribed verbatim and analysed. The data was analysed by using thematic coding with the help of MAXQDA.

To protect all respondents from being harmed for their participation, the ethical issues were taken seriously into consideration by ensuring voluntary participation, freedom to withdraw from involvement, and anonymity. Data will be reported in aggregate and the recording was destroyed once transcribed.

# 4. Result and Discussion

A VT in a higher degree education can be defined as “A group of people comprising a team of stakeholders – academic and administrative team, and students of various backgrounds – different projects, companies, languages, nationalities, economic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, organizational backgrounds and reside in different parts of the world, who work remotely on a part-time or full-time basis, virtually on an online platform and teaching environment, using technology and coordinate and collaborate to deliver a program to accomplish a set of goals.” This definition is in line with those of Ebrahim, Ahmed, and Taha (2009); Hertel, Geister, and Konradt (2005); Serrat (2009). The differences lay in 1) the composition of the members, who are the academic team – MoCos, the lecturers, the administrative team – Education Support Officers, IT, student affairs officer, librarian, and the students, 2) the teaching environment, and 3) the purpose – to deliver a program.



Figure 1. The definition of a Virtual Team in the Higher Education

**Aspects**

Aspects discovered i.e., technology, people and process are in line with those of Bal and Gundry (1999). The technology includes the infrastructure, the security, the training, and the location. The infrastructure consists of 1) the hardware such as the selection of the devices used – the computers, the tablets, the camera, and the internet connection, 2) the software, 3) the platform – Teams, and 4) the online environment. In line with Bal and Gundry's (1999) findings, security related to technology is deemed mandatory to protect privacy rights and data breaches, as hacking has been rampant lately. At UTMS all stakeholders have been trained on technology security issues, and strict rules have been imposed on sharing stakeholders’ confidential data.

The second aspect is the people or “brain-ware”. In higher education institutions, the brain-ware comprises the management, the academic and administrative staff, and the students. To ensure the smooth running of the operation, this brain-ware has to own big dedication, understanding of their own and management’s expectations, understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as well as good skills in time management. Most important is the existence of a leader whose tasks are to ensure that the team works toward the end goals. The third aspect is the process, i.e., how the team is created, run, and disband.

Other than the aforementioned aspects there are general aspects, which are 1) the virtual team itself, 2) the organizational and team culture, 3) the structure, 4) the rules and regulations including clear guidelines, 5) the goals – team, shared and any other smaller goals such as the goals in the units, the goals in each lecture, workshop, masterclass and any other educational activities and 6) the virtual ecosystem – an ecosystem which allows collaborations, a space to organize the operation of the team, a space to conduct meetings, and a space to store files.

Figure 2. The Aspects of a Virtual Team in the Higher Education

**Life Cycle**

UTMS follows the model designed by Tuckman (1965); Tuckman and Jensen (2010). The forming stage comprises two steps, 1) planning – projecting the experts involved by designing a teacher’s allocation, and 2) preparation – checking the module book, the supporting documents, and all teaching materials to ensure they are in line with the curriculum, contain clear information, and are free of grammar and spelling mistakes. The next step is contacting the experts to ensure their availability and commitment. Once the commitment is received, a schedule is created. Information about the module as well as all documents are delivered to all stakeholders, ground rules are set and communicated.

It is claimed that the storming stage rarely happens. This can be because the module is merely eight weeks and most experts only have one session in a module, thus the team is always dynamic. Issues may happen to students due to psychological issues; however, they can request counselling at the Study Advice Centre. Financial issues are normally taken care of by the management.

The norming stage is when the module has run. To ensure all stakeholders deliver correctly as expected, performance management – a process which contributes to the effective management of individuals and teams to achieve high levels of organizational performance (Foot et al., 2016) is conducted. MoCos sit in class doing observations or taking an active role in the session by encouraging students to participate. This is claimed to be increasing the students’ and the experts’ motivation and engagement.

During the performing stage, MoCos do all the administrative work such as keeping track of attendance, organizing meetings, and recording grades. MoCos also conduct evaluation programs informally by having 1) casual conversations with students and experts regarding the education delivery and 2) formally by conducting mid- and end-module evaluations in a form of surveys or focus group discussions. The development program is conducted based on the results of the evaluation.

During the adjourning stage, MoCos analyse the module evaluation, compose an evaluation report, create improvement plans and communicate the evaluation as well as the improvement plans to experts and the management, sending gratitude cards to all stakeholders before disbanding the team.

Benefits

Despite the claim delivered by MoCos that there are financial consequences to working remotely, e.g., spending extra money on water, electricity for the increasing use of air conditioners and devices, stationery and water, there are benefits for the institution, the management, the employees, and the students. A VT opens bigger opportunities for new programs, creates a diverse market, and creates innovations such as new minor creations, and service and technology innovations.

A VT is claimed to be very convenient. International collaborations and expert pooling are more efficient. Virtual collaborations mean more opportunities for knowledge sharing and more intense interactions with co-workers. A VT allows flexibility in terms of time, place, workflow, and personal life. Flexibility in scheduling and location means the students can study and work from wherever they are. A VT is efficient, which means time-saving – no need to commute, financial-saving – no transportation expenses, and stakeholders can multitask. VTs increase staff productivity, adaptability, and autonomy. Staff productivity increases because they keep on being challenged to be creative to ensure lecturers conduct classes as expected, i.e., maintain students’ engagement and motivation, maintain the attractiveness of the educational delivery, and create fun exercises. It is claimed that MoCos have become adaptable to the new system, new program, and new way of delivery. Timewise MoCos are also adaptable. Bigger autonomy in running the module and in delivering the knowledge means work management becomes more structured. A VT also increases the profit as it is cost-efficient, allowing UTMS to be able to do salary adjustments even during the pandemic, which means guaranteeing employee well-being, hence, staff turnover is much lower. With this, VT is expected to guarantee the sustainability of the overall institution.

A VT is proven to be fit for students. Generation-wise most students are millennials or gen Z who are into technology and love being in a virtual world. This allows them to multi-task, a blessing for those whose families are affected by the pandemic financially. Physical place-free VTs allow students to join sessions while working. With the growing number of countries opening their borders, students can travel while studying. One other benefit is efficiency. There is no need to travel to the campus, which means fewer expenses and more time to do homework. The findings regarding the benefits for the institution and the management are in line with those of Morley et al. (2015b), whereas benefits for the students are in line with those of Klonek et al. (2021).

Additionally, MoCos emphasized the necessity to create highly tech-sophisticated teaching materials to grab students’ interest, maintain their attention span and ensure their active and proactive involvement in class activities by using various means such as animations in the presentations (PPT, Canva, and Prezi), unique icebreakers, interactive educational games using Kahoot or Mentimeter, and designing educational activities which encourage students to work in groups virtually for instance by giving case studies to the students to be discussed and analysed. DBE makes VT more appealing for the students.

**Challenges**

The challenges can be classified into technology, people, and process. Despite its development, Microsoft Teams still cannot meet the needs for a smooth teaching-learning process for instance not allowing externals to share their screen. The poor internet connection very often disrupts PBL, CBL, EMBL and masterclass as these sessions require interaction among the class members. For lecturers, good quality devices are mandatory as the clarity of the knowledge delivered, the attractiveness of the presentation, etc. is determined by the devise sophistication.

The challenges related to the people are the less human (lecturer-student) interactions making it a bit difficult to create a bond. Students are in a relaxed mode thinking that virtual sessions are merely alternatives to CT. Students’ personal, family, and financial issues have been proven to be impacting the students’ motivation and engagement, hence the quality of their assignments.

In terms of the process, only issues related to hybrid sessions happen at UTMS. Confirming Pearlson and Saunders (2016), it is more into issues related to the technology and technicality of the session arrangement such as the loudspeaker which cannot receive and transmit the students’ voices during the PBL, CBL, and EMBL sessions. There are no trust issues among the stakeholders, as all understand the necessity of seriously joining the module and doing all assignments. There are no frictions caused by cultural misappropriation or misunderstanding. The pandemic subconsciously strengthens the bond among MoCos. Vision uniformity “to deliver the education in the most professional way to ensure students’ well-being” has made MoCos support and increase understanding among each other.

Psychological challenges such as lack of motivation, engagement, trust, stress, and denial of having issues exist among students. Among MoCos, these happened at the beginning of the pandemic but in the very mildest state and did not impact educational activities. MoCos are more motivated and engaged since. Trust issues are mostly directed towards students in the group work as some are suspected to be “free-riders” – do not work as much as their peers but get the same grades. Issues related to feelings of loneliness and isolation and cultural misunderstanding (Serrat, 2009) and miscommunication (Törmänen, 2017) do not happen.

**The Key Success Factors**

Three big factors influence the running of a VT, i.e., the technology, the people, and the process. In terms of technology, this includes the stakeholder’s knowledge, competency, and creativity in using the technology. The people factor involves the leaders or management, the staff, and the students. To ensure the team runs as expected, leaders (MoCos) have to emphasise the “how” – how to deliver the knowledge in a professional but fun way, how to create interactive sessions, how the motivation and engagement can be preserved, how issues can be tackled in a win-win solution way.

Leaders need to have and maintain cultural understanding and sensitivity which ensures smooth communication. This is in line with Ledwith and Ludden (2016). MoCos agree that the role of a leader is essential, which is in line with Garro-Abarca et al. (2021); Isaac Mustapha (2017). As leaders, MoCos have to provide support, build motivation, and set examples. This is congruent with Ki Hajar Dewantara’s educational philosophy “Ing ngarso sung tulodho – at the front, a leader including a teacher should be setting examples, Ing madyo mangun karsa – in the middle a leader should motivate and 3) Tut wuri handayani – at the back a leader should be supportive.” (Ferary, 2021). The process involves these aspects below.

1. The HR policy – the setting up and implementation of the rules and regulations.

2. The organizational cultures – the shared values, attitudes and practices that characterise an organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2011), be it, clan – prioritising mentorship and teamwork, adhocracy – prioritising risk-taking and innovation, hierarchy – prioritising structure and stability or market – prioritising competition or growth.

3. Collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

4. Training and development.

5. Clear communications among stakeholders.

6. Psychological assistance.

7. The courtesy and respect.

8. The situation.

9. The duration of the VT.

Other factors which may influence a VT are clear learning objectives, clear expectations not only about the VT but also from the stakeholders, a good relationship among stakeholders, and shared vision and roles and responsibilities.

Unlike the previous findings related to cultural awareness, cultural adaptiveness (Garro-Abarca et al., 2021; Ludden & Ledwith, 2016) and multiculturalism (Isaac Mustapha, 2017), which can be serious issues on VT are not mentioned as ones by the MoCos. NHL Stenden and its other international campuses including UTMS are very firm in adhering to its slogan “internationalization” – “The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society.” (de Wit, 2020: iii; Knight, 2008). With that in mind, stakeholders have been trained about the necessity of being culturally intelligent hence having cultural awareness, adaptiveness and understanding. In other words, cultural intelligence has been the life of and exists in the stakeholders’ daily life; the stakeholders have been accustomed to living in a multicultural society.

**The Human Resource Policy**

Following (Foot et al., 2016), HR comprises planning, recruitment and selection, induction, training and development, performance and appraisal, and reward and punishment.

**Planning, Recruitment, and Induction**

At UTMS, in the planning stage, the MoCos’ administrative tasks can be divided into three i.e., documents, students and experts. Documents needed are the blueprint, teachers’ allocation, module book, teachers’ instructions, and tender document – module assignment, which is created or altered based on a client’s request.

There are two types of experts, internal – full-time MoCos and lecturers, and external. The recruitment is conducted merely for the external. External experts are recruited following these approaches 1) referrals from colleagues, 2) (virtual) networking or LinkedIn, and 3) recruiting experts from previous modules who have been graded excellently by the students. The recruitment process goes through four stages i.e., background checking (expertise, capability and competency, the level of English and experience), interviews, micro-teaching, and meetings for (policy and technical) information sharing. The induction is focused on how to optimise the knowledge delivery, the detailed content of the module, and the information about the students’ characteristics and behaviour in class.

**Training and Development**

Training (on teaching development such as PBL, DBE, Basic Didactical Skills Qualification Basic Examiner Qualification, Test Designing, Feedback and Feedforward) is given on an annual basis; other training (Microsoft Teams, Blackboard Collaboration, privacy rights,) is incidentally done when there is a need. Training on the knowledge is not conducted as the experts recruited come with the right and enough knowledge and experience in applying the knowledge.

Development is conducted by class observations, feedback and feedforward, and communication. Post-observation reviews are focused on how to find ways to make sessions interactive, incite students’ motivation and participation in class and maintain students’ engagement. Throughout the module, written and verbal feedback – looking back, evaluating the success and the falls, and feedforward – looking ahead at the expectation and strategies to perfect performances are also given to the experts and students. Normative feedback – a tool to support a student’s sense of competence, by showing that the student’s performance is aligned with the social expectations and relatedness, by showing that there are other students with similar circumstances and states (Neighbors et al., 2015) is conducted. Communication is maintained to ensure arising issues are tackled in a timely manner to avoid the snowball effect. At the end of the module, the MoCo communicate the results of the students’ evaluation to the management and experts.

UTMS allocates a big budget for development programs e.g., scholarships to pursue higher education (Master’s and doctorate degrees) for the employees, employees’ networking, sending MoCos to international conferences and seminars, inviting experts to provide training with topics other than the educational-related ones, having collaborations with UNTRIM to organize international seminars and symposiums, and conducting training for external parties, allowing staff to showcase their various management skills (Personal communication, the Executive Dean; 24 May 2022).

**Performance Appraisal**

Performance appraisals are conducted by giving 3600 feedback and feedforward involving all stakeholders. It is believed that this system provides a full perspective of all stakeholders’ strengths and weaknesses, hence, increasing their awareness and boosting their confidence, morale, and accountability. The method has also been proven to empower leaders, especially MoCos, thus, reducing the percentage of the turnover. When done continuously, this method will create a “culture of openness”, ongoing consistent improvements, and professional development. All and all 3600 feedback and feedforward may shape the institution’s ideal company culture. Most importantly, this appraisal is also used as the basis for a 5% annual salary increase upon high achievement.

Aside from the salary and fee, non-financial rewards to the external experts are in the form of praising, promising more employment, and providing contracts for more sessions guarantee. For the internal employees, non-financial rewards are in the form of regular team lunches/dinners, daily free coffee and fruit juices/fruit platters, end-of-year and Christmas celebrations in which vouchers or gifts are distributed, annual Team (building) Day, and birthday celebrations. This has been proven to have increased the MoCos’ and employees’ self- and work satisfaction, well-being, and happiness (Personal communication, the Executive Dean; 24 May 2022).

The disciplinary procedure for low performance is in the form of discussions or mild warnings or being replaced after a lecturer is graded low by the students twice or three times consecutively. MoCo claimed there is no financial consequence in finding replacements, however, it is energy-exhausting.

**Absence policy**

For the students, the attendance/absence attendance is stipulated in the module books as adhering to the Indonesian government regulation with a minimum of 75% attendance to be allowed to join an exam. In case a student exceeds the maximum percentage of absence, s/he may apply for replacement assignments. Absences among the experts very rarely happen and are normally related to force majeure issues. When that happens, the MoCo simply reschedules the session.

**The Future of VT.**

All MoCos agreed that VT is the future of higher education institutions, and a Hybrid Team (HT) is much preferred as it allows the institution to run either CT, VT alternately or CT and VT at the same time.

# 5. Conclusion

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit the world back in April 2019, most higher education institutions have to turn from CT to VT. Despite the challenges, most MoCos could manage the VTs successfully and lecturers could impressively deliver the knowledge as a lot of assistance was provided by the management of NHL Stenden as well as UTMS. This positive development is partly because of the solid understanding of a VT among the MoCos, who unanimously defined VT as “A group of people comprising a team of stakeholders – academic team, lecturers and students of various backgrounds – different projects, companies, languages, nationalities, economic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, organizational backgrounds and reside in different parts of the world, who work remotely on a part-time or full-time basis, virtually on an online platform and teaching environment, using technology and coordinate as well as collaborate to deliver a program to accomplish a set of goals.”. The details of the findings are as follows.

1. The best and ideal team for the future in UTMS is the HT.
2. The most effective and efficient model of VT applied in UTMS is that of 1) comprising the technology, people – including the students as part of the stakeholders, process, and general aspects such as the VT itself and the ecosystem, the rules and regulations, the goals, the organizational culture, the structure; and 2) the HR management specific for VT.
3. The three main aspects of the VT are the technology, the people, and additionally the organizational culture, the structure, the rules and regulations, and the goals.
4. Factors influencing the success and the failure of a VT are the technology, the people and the process, additionally clear objectives and expectations, shared vision, relationships and roles and responsibilities. The key success factors include leadership, infrastructure, and time management. Ki Hajar Dewantara’s educational philosophy about leaders/teachers i.e., setting samples, motivating and assisting/motivating/accommodating is perceived to be the ideal one.
5. The benefits for the institution, the management, the employees, and the students are similar. A VT allows bigger opportunities, innovation, profitability, flexibility, efficiency, and easier collaborations among all stakeholders and hence guarantees the chance to win the competition and the institution’s success and sustainability. None is stated regarding the disadvantages of running VT except that some MoCos have to work very long hours and allocate a budget for internet connection and stationery.
6. Out of the challenges stated by previous researchers, only issues related to the technicality of running HT happen in UTMS. The inexistence of other issues in UTMS is presumed to be because of the constant support from NHL Stenden and UTMS management given since the very beginning. Psychological issues among students are handled by coaches and counsellors.
7. The MoCo and the employees also experienced mild psychological challenges at the beginning of the pandemic. The ability to recover and achieve better results is partly because of the moral support from the management by providing financial and non-financial rewards.
8. Strategies needed to ensure success and to win the competition is by prioritizing and ensuring that the HR policy is implemented in the most ideal manner for all stakeholders. There should be careful planning – all positions needed should be well-defined. Recruitment and selection should target only the experts in the industry who have the right competency and expertise. Induction should be focused on the clarity of the goals, expectations, and the students’ background to ensure the right knowledge delivery. Regular training should be more on how to deliver the knowledge in a professional but attractive way. Staff development should cater to the staff’s needs and be continuously done sporadically among staff. 3600 feedback and feedforward should be kept constant. Appraisals are done professionally allowing both who gives the appraisal and the appraisees to discuss in a two-way manner to improve the performance. Financial and non-financial rewards are proven to increase the sense of belonging and well-being and will eventually improve their commitment, motivation, engagement, and performance. As dismissal is not financially affecting, and to ensure that the experts trusted to deliver the knowledge have the right expertise and competence, MoCos would rather find a replacement when an expert cannot deliver what is expected.
9. All MoCos are confident that VT and HT are the future of higher education institutions, especially UTMS. They concluded that all stakeholders are accustomed to the system by now and that VT and HT will bring big benefits and can be used to win the competition.

# Recommendations

VT and HT are the future as they will open the door to new opportunities, programs, minors, markets, and an ideal means to win the competition. Clear Standard Operating Procedure for running a VT or HT should be created. The infrastructure and the technology need to be regularly upgraded. Training and development on technology usage, delivering the knowledge virtually attractively and professionally, and leadership should be conducted. The HR policy should be the right fit for all stakeholders. Constant, consistent and regular 3600 feedback and feedforward should be organized. Employees’ well-being should be kept by among others providing non-financial rewards.

Future research should be using a mixed method and involve external experts and students as the respondents. UNTRIM Magister Manajemen should include VT and HT in their curriculum i.e., human resource management.

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