The Effect of Personal Disclosure within Teams: Can Faultlines in Geographically-Dispersed Teams be Bridged?

Yi-Te Chiu
Queen’s University
ychiu@business.queensu.ca

Sandy Staples
Queen’s University
ss32@queensu.ca

1. Introduction

The Gartner Group predicts that by 2015, people will spend more than 80% of their time working collaboratively in dispersed teams [39]. Dispersed teams are defined as teams of geographically dispersed members that depend on information and communication technologies (ICT) since they rarely, if ever, all meet face-to-face to engage in collaborative work [53]. Dispersed teams enable flexible team composition and collaboration between team members traversing geographical boundaries and time constraints. Organizations can leverage these features of dispersed teams to reduce travel time and cost, enable the recruitment of talented employees, and build teams of diverse individuals. Despite the fact that diversity in dispersed team may encourage the consideration of multiple perspectives, increase creative problem solving, and allow organizations to more quickly harness employees’ knowledge at lower cost, how to manage dispersed teams has become a pressing management issue [59] requiring further research [46], and thus providing motivation for our study.

One type of dispersed team is a Global Virtual Team (GVT). GVT have many sources of diversity including people working at different locations (i.e., geographical dispersion potentially involving different time zones), people with different demographic characteristics, cultural and professional backgrounds, and people with possibly different organizational memberships (if the team is cross-organizational). As described below, our study focuses on one potential outcome of diversity – the combining of multiple types of diversity to create faultlines. This is highly likely to occur in some GVT’s making our research relevant to GVT researchers and practitioners. We do focus on only the combination of different locations and gender to create a potential faultline. Since we do not attempt to study the many facets that are likely present in complex GVT’s, we use the term dispersed teams below to recognize our focus is on that specific aspect.

Despite the growing body of research on dispersed teams, little is known about diversity in this specific context [11, 46]. Team diversity has drawn a great deal of attention in conventional team settings [23, 54]. Research suggests that team diversity is a double-edged sword [58]. On the one hand, teams with diverse members can share a wide range of knowledge, skills, and abilities, enabling complex problem-solving and innovation. On the other hand, people prefer to work with others who are similar to themselves, which engenders the formation of subgroups and the disruption of group processes [54]. A subgroup is a smaller part of a group that is formed when some team members share actual or perceived similarities (i.e., an in-group) and differentiate others as out-groups. In dispersed team settings, subgroups are more easily formed due to the fact that dispersed
teams are generally composed of members working at different locations as well as having varied demographic attributes. As location and other demographic attributes (e.g., nationality) covary together, a faultline between two subgroups could be created [34, 45].

This study will draw on faultline theory [34] to shed light on the diversity and subgroup issues within virtual teams. Faultlines have been defined as “hypothetical dividing lines that may split a group into subgroups based on one or more attributes” (p.328) [34]. Given the fact that subgroup faultlines can impair team performance outcomes [6, 35] and the dearth of research on the topic, there have been calls for further studies into how the negative effects of subgroup faultlines can be reduced [34]. This study also draws upon the common in-group identity model rooted in research on intergroup bias in the psychology area. The model maintains that in-group members change their perception of out-group members through personalized interaction [20, 34]. It has also been argued that personalized interaction can be facilitated by self-disclosure. Self-disclosure refers to “the process of making the self known to others” (p. 91) [31]. Prior research has demonstrated that people today increasingly disclose themselves [47] and build interpersonal relationships through social computing technologies (SCTs), such as weblogs, podcasting, photo sharing, video sharing, and social networking sites. Specifically, SCTs have been heavily used by younger generations. It is expected that SCTs will become more common in dispersed teams as the younger generation moves into the workforce [33] so study of these technologies in dispersed teams is warranted.

The purpose of this research is to explore whether personal disclosure and social interaction through SCTs can reduce the perceptions of faultlines in dispersed teams, and to understand how this happens (via a potential mediating mechanism). This study experimentally examines the effects of self-disclosure through the use of SCTs (weblogs, specifically) on perceived faultlines in dispersed team settings. This empirical study contributes to our understanding of how SCTs can help dispersed team members reduce perceived subgroup faultlines as well as how faultline theory and the common in-group identity model can be applied to dispersed team settings.

2. Theoretical background and hypothesis development

While prior research has widely discussed diversity in organizational studies, there are multiple definitions of diversity. One of the most common views is that diversity refers to “differences between individuals within a team that may lead to the perception that another person is different from self” (p. 517) [54]. Researchers generally classify diversity by its characteristics: demographic variables, such as ethnicity and gender, non-demographic variables, such as values, attitudes, and abilities [22, 27], and task-related variables, such as functional expertise, education, and tenure [58]. The research findings on diversity often show inconsistent effects of diversity on team processes and outcomes [43, 51].

Faultline theory. Faultline theory was developed by Lau and Murnighan (1998) to further explain the relationship between diversity and team performance [34]. Faultline theory suggests that multiple demographic attributes or other types of differences can combine to create a hypothetical line within a group and this increases the salience of subgroups [34]. Various empirical studies have shown that strong faultlines make individuals feel more satisfied, have better communication and cohesiveness within subgroups, but that there is more conflict between subgroups and overall team performance is decreased[6, 35]. For faultlines to have impact, they have to be turned from potential faultlines into active faultlines (where people perceive that differences exist between the subgroups – i.e., perceived faultlines) [11, 13].

Faultlines often exist in dispersed teams due to diversity of location, cultural and/or professional backgrounds, and possibly demographic variables. The purpose of this research is to investigate if disclosing personal information and learning about this information from fellow team members can lessen the perceptions of faultlines. We next explain why self-disclosure may reduce the creation of subgroups in teams.

Self-disclosure. Self-disclosure has been regarded as an important way to develop interpersonal relationships (i.e., socialize) and to maintain psychological health [12]. People feel positive when they disclose positive personal information because self-disclosure may satisfy expressive needs and may, in part, help them to remove strong or violent emotions [31]. Likewise, people who receive other’s disclosure feel trusted and generally have a positive impression of the discloser [12]. In organizational settings, self-disclosure can play a prominent role in the socialization process. Self-disclosure at the onset of a relationship can trigger informal interactions, which in turn,
reinforces more self-disclosure and information sharing. In effect, as members are willing to bring their personal lives into the work settings, they feel closer with each other, thereby enhancing cohesion. Therefore, self-disclosure may have the potential to reduce sub-group formation that could occur due to faultlines.

Self-disclosure also has the potential to reduce intergroup bias, which may also help reduce the negative effect of faultlines. The common in-group identity model proposes two ways to reduce intergroup bias [20]. First, when in-group and out-group members have intensive cooperation and share a common fate required by a task, the perception of a superordinate in-group can be formed. This process is known as recategorization. Second, in contrast to recategorization that creates a new in-group at a higher level, decategorization aims to reduce or eliminate categorization by establishing personalized relationships with out-group members. Out-group members then are regarded as individuals rather than prototypical members of an out-group. Self-disclosure is a potential approach to develop personalized relationships. Intimate interaction will increase tolerance of out-group differences [1]. Therefore, when self-disclosure occurs between subgroups, interpersonal trust may develop and the negative bias toward out-groups may be reduced. We now discuss self-disclosure possibilities in dispersed teams and possible outcomes.

**Socialization via ICT.** Given that dispersed teams communicate to a large extent via ICT and that the disclosure of personal information, thoughts, and feelings has been seen as necessary to successful dispersed team development, it is crucial to understand how effective social interaction happens through computer-mediated communication.

Our study focuses on one type of ICT – Social Computing Technologies (SCT) and one specific SCT – weblogs. SCTs refer to any type of computing application in which software serves as an intermediary or a focus for a social relation [50]. SCTs, compared to earlier ICTs, have richer and more interactive user interfaces, provide an architecture of participation, and can be easily accessed ubiquitously by mobile devices [42]. From the sociological perspective, SCTs provide content and community support. Moreover, some SCTs, such as social networking sites and weblogs, provide mechanisms that encourage people to share personal matters on the SCT platform [47], such as impression management, profile management, visibility management and identity management [15]. It is expected that due to limited social interaction typical among dispersed team members, SCTs used by dispersed teams can both establish and maintain social relationships [47].

A weblog is one of most popular SCTs [2]. A weblog enables bloggers to: update others on activities and whereabouts, express opinions to influence others, seek others’ opinions and feedback, “think by writing”, and release emotional tension [40]. Weblogs have often been used to disclose more personal thoughts and have been demonstrated to be a preferred platform to present oneself [41] in comparison to social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) and microblogging (e.g., Twitter). Additionally, weblogs are more commonly adopted in organizations [9]. Some case studies have shown successful implementation of employee blogging [16]. Therefore, this study focuses on weblogs as a personal disclosure media to explore potential impacts of weblogs in dispersed teams. Prior research suggests that due to anonymity through computer-mediated communication, individuals are more willing to present themselves through online media because they have less concern about being ridiculed, rejected, or condemned [29]. In weblog settings, inconsistent empirical results show that under the context of lower anonymity, some bloggers self-disclose less due to concerns about negative consequences whereas others disclose more personal information in order to maintain self-identity and shape others’ understanding of themselves [47]. In this paper, we therefore differentiate self-disclosure via weblogs into two types based on the weblog’s publicness. At one end of continuum, all team members can access each other’s weblog while at the other end of continuum, all team members regard weblogs as a personal diary and do not share their weblogs. The former is called public self-disclosure; the later is called private self-disclosure. Public self-disclosure should have a more significant impact on perceptions of faultlines due to decategorization by team members who learn about their other team members.

In dispersed teams, location is a salient difference between two subgroups. Other demographic attributes, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, and tenure, also could be salient for subgroup members in dispersed teams depending upon tasks. Therefore, potential faultlines are common. We postulate that public self-disclosure via weblogs can reduce perceived faultlines in dispersed teams. That is, when team members share personal information with their other team members through weblogs, intergroup bias and perceived faultlines are thereby reduced. Thus:
**Hypothesis 1:** When dispersed team members share common goals and fate, public self-disclosure via weblogs leads to weaker perceived faultlines in a dispersed team that has a potential faultline.

The hypothesis above suggests that learning more about others has a positive impact, regardless of what is learned. It is possible to imagine a situation where gaining personal information about another actually highlights or reinforces differences between the two parties. In this case, public self-disclosure may not reduce perceived faultlines; it could actually activate a faultline. Consistent with this logic, Carte and Chidambaram (2004) suggested that teams that have high observable diversity use lean media early in their life to “hide” the diversity so it did not get in the way of team processes [11]. Before a team develops a sense of team identity, the observable differences may contribute to categorization and sub-group formation. Therefore, there may be mediating mechanisms between self-disclosure and its effect on faultline perceptions. Below we explore this further and suggest one possible mediator.

Face-to-face self-disclosure generally occurs between the actors of dyads. As one is willing to disclose personal information, relationships could be developed and such relationships between two actors potentially embody interpersonal attraction and liking. However, if one is not attracted to another subgroup members’ self-disclosure due to interpersonal differences in values, beliefs, and preferences [10], personalized interaction is not easily established, which subsequently decreases the potential for reducing perceived faultlines. Social attraction, a desire to socialize with someone [37], is particularly related to building interpersonal relationships. Therefore, we suggest that social attraction between members of subgroups could be an important mediator between self-disclosure and perceive faultlines. Although there is no research on mediating effects of social attraction in reducing faultlines per se, prior study indicates a positive association with self-disclosure [55] and we speculate that social attraction also contributes to ensuing personalized interaction. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2:** When dispersed team members share common goals and fate, social attraction mediates the relationship between public self-disclosure via weblogs and perceived faultlines in a dispersed team that has a potential faultline.

3. **Method**

In order to examine how public self-disclosure via weblogs impacts perceived faultlines as hypothesized above, controlled experiments were adopted. Controlled experiments are appropriate for this study since we needed to control for other factors (to eliminate potential confounding), while being able to vary potential faultline existence. Experiments have external validity limitations; however, trading these off for the benefits of internal validity is necessary for this study. Finding existing organizational teams with the desired faultline variance and being able to introduce socialization and isolate the effect of this on the perceived faultline was not possible for our study.

Prior to the experiments, we conducted six pretests to ensure accurate wording of questionnaires and experimental protocols. Then, eighteen pilot tests were administered. Participants’ feedback and nonparametric statistical tests were used to make changes to the procedures and questionnaires.

3.1. **Participants**

Initially, undergraduate university students were assigned into 45 four-person teams. Each team consisted of two male students and two female students. Five teams did not complete all tasks because of an insufficient number of participants in their teams. Consequently, our working sample size was 160 students and 40 four-person teams. The average age was 20 years old. Participants earned class credit for their participation. The three best performing teams additionally received prizes ($80, $40, and $20 per team for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place accordingly). Participants were assigned to teams by a random stratified approach (stratified on gender and year of study). Since participants were recruited from the same school, it was possible that some participants could know each other. In order to exclude rival explanations, we mixed participants from different years of study. In addition, a manipulation check asked “Did you know anyone in your team before the study began?” and asked them to indicate how many people they knew in the collocation or remote group. T-test analysis of perceived faultlines and social attraction did not show statistically significant differences between teams that consisted of members knowing other members and teams that didn’t.

3.2. **Research design**

In order to create a potential faultline, each team
had two subgroups who worked in different locations; members in each subgroup were the same gender and different from that of the other subgroup in their team. Therefore, we created a potential faultline with gender and location aligning together. Additionally, according to Pearsall (2008), gender differences can be further made salient by a group task [28]. We chose the fallout shelter task in which Savicki et al. (1996) indicated that there are gender differences [49]. The task asked participants to imagine that a nuclear war has been announced and that his/her team has access to a small basement fallout shelter. Each team member was asked to choose and rank the ten most useful items for survival during and after attack. Then, each team was asked to work together to come up with a finalized ranking list. Based on the above team composition and gender biased task, salient potential faultlines were thus created for each condition. Both a manipulation check (i.e., whether participants perceived the existence of subgroups within their team during their collaboration) and above average mean perceived faultlines (mean=3.97) indicate that in-group and out-group perceptions existed in our study.

This study involved two treatment conditions: public self-disclosure (n=22) and private self-disclosure (n=18). Participants in both conditions were asked to pick one topic from a list of three self-disclosure topics developed by Jourard and Jaffe (1970) [30]. A sample topic was “discuss and explain the types of play and recreation I enjoy”. Then, each member posted his/her answers on an individual weblog (i.e., IBM Quickr was used as the platform – screen shots of the system are available from the authors). For the public self-disclosure condition, each team member reviewed all other members’ weblogs and left comments; for the private self-disclosure condition, team members did not access other members’ weblogs.

3.3. Procedures

For the purpose of decreasing public self-awareness during the self-disclosure task, participants arrived at separate rooms at prearranged times. Before the tasks began, participants completed a paper pre-questionnaire, measuring personality.

On average, individuals took 1 hour and 30 minutes for all activities, with everyone taking approximately 10 minutes to conduct the self-disclosure task. Then, for the public self-disclosure condition, team members reviewed other team members’ self-disclosures and left comments on others’ weblogs for 15 minutes (participants in the private self-disclosure skipped this section and proceeded to do the second task). In the second task, the fallout shelter task, each team member first spent five minutes individually ranking the ten most useful items for survival. Afterwards, two subgroups were created by separating male and female team members into two physically-separate rooms. Teams had 25 minutes to discuss and achieve consensus using a text-based online meeting system (i.e., IBM Sametime). Each group submitted a final solution of the task as well as the decision reasons that justified the ranking at the end of the discussion. Lastly, participants were given a post-questionnaire, measuring perceived faultlines and social attraction.

3.4. Measures

Perceived faultlines. The perceived faultline scale measured the extent to which team members perceived that the team split, using six items modified from Bezrukova and Jehn (2003) [5] (e.g., “during our discussion, our team broke into two or more subgroups, instead of working as one cohesive group”) (Cronbach $\alpha=.91$). Our unit of analysis was the team, since the potential faultline was created at this level. To justify aggregation of individual data, we assessed within-unit agreement via $R_{wg}$ [32]. We dropped six teams that had very low agreement ($R_{wg}=0$). The rest of the teams had solid team member agreement (mean $R_{wg}=.74$) Therefore, we aggregated this construct and analysis, reported below, was done at the team level.

Social attraction. Participants were asked to consider the interaction during public self-disclosure via weblogs and during team discussion and whether they were willing to socialize with other subgroup members. Social attraction was measured with eight items modified from McCroskey et al. (2005) [38] (e.g., “my remote team members are easy to get along with”) (Cronbach $\alpha=.88$). High within group agreement was found, justifying aggregation to the team level ($R_{wg}=.93$) [8, 32].

Control variables. Three control variables were examined: personality, diversity of language within the team, and diversity of ethnicity within the team. Blau indexes [7] were created to assess language and ethnicity diversity. Personality was measured with Saucier’s (1994) version of Goldberg’s measures of the Big Five Traits. Analysis found similar results with and without these control variables in the analysis; therefore, they are not discussed further.
3.5. Analytical technique

With a mediated research model, structural equation modeling (SEM) was warranted. Partial Least Squares (PLS) was chosen as the SEM tool for this analysis due to its ability to work with relatively small sample sizes (compared to covariance-based SEM). PLS uses a combination of principal components analysis, path analysis, and regression to simultaneously evaluate theory and data [44, 60]. The path coefficients are standardized regression coefficients, while the loadings can be interpreted as factor loadings. For more information on PLS, see Barclay et al. [3]; Hulland [26]; or Gefen et al., [21].

4. Results

In SEM, the reliability and validity of the measurement model is assessed first, followed by the structural model. Fornell and Larker internal consistency values [18] of the items assessing social attraction and perceived faultlines was found to be 0.90 and 0.93, respectively. Discriminant validity was demonstrated in two ways. First, a cross loading matrix analysis found that all the items loaded highest on their target construct. Second, the square root of the average variance extracted was significantly higher than any correlations between the constructs [3]. Overall, the results demonstrate that the measurement model is adequate, allowing for the examination of the structural model.

The findings of the structural model are summarized in Figure 1. Approximately 29% of the variance in the Perceived Faultline construct is explained by the model. Self-disclosure does not have a statistically significant direct effect on Perceived Faultlines, but it has an indirect effect through social attraction. Self-disclosure is positively associated with Social Attraction, which in turn is negatively associated with Perceived Faultline.

![Figure 1. The Research Model](image)

5. Discussion

Research on geographically-dispersed teams is becoming common. Yet, there is still a gap in our understanding of how to reduce the negative effects of team diversity. Team diversity is a particularly challenging issue for globally dispersed teams in that globally dispersed teams cut across not only different demographic characteristics but also various national, organizational, and group cultures. Team members working in the same location are more likely to have similar personal characteristics and share similar value systems. Such potential subgroups easily lead to intergroup bias and disrupt team processes. This paper proposes that this central problem can be ameliorated by self-disclosure. Specifically, public self-disclosure via weblogs alleviates issues of intergroup bias in geographically-dispersed teams. Our empirical findings support this proposition. However, public self-disclosure does not directly reduce perception of intergroup differences. Instead, social attraction plays a critical mediating role between public self-disclosure and perceived faultlines. As team members disclose their personal information and out-group team members are attracted to such disclosure, perceived in-group and out-group differences are diminished.

Interestingly, there is a relatively strong positive relationship between public self-disclosure and social attraction in comparison to prior research in face-to-face settings [55]. While not studied in our research, we expect that weblogs have several distinct features that may potentially make disclosure via this medium more effective than face-to-face self-disclosure. Weblog is an asynchronous media and bloggers can decide whether to maintain strong or weak ties with other team members through different appropriation of weblogs. To help future work, we propose three technology characteristics that may explain why self-disclosure via weblogs is potentially more effective than face-to-face self-disclosure: rehearsability, reprocessability, and controllability. These three characteristics can potentially foster one’s understanding of another’s mental models. Rehearsability is “the extent to which the media enables the sender to rehearse or fine tune a message during encoding, before sending” (p.587)[13]. Visitors of weblogs are able to review and reflect discloser’s messages carefully and assess a discloser’s mental models, which in turn potentially enables more thoughtful comments and feedback.
Controllability means that weblogs allow disclosers to control what personal information they are able and willing to share, such as profiles, post, photo, and video. These three technology characteristics help one carefully present a self, deeply reflect on another’s self-disclosure, and provide a wider range of personal information in various formats. Both disclosers and audience are potentially able to more fully engage in self-disclosure activities. Future research would be valuable to explore these ideas.

5.1. Theoretical implications

The common in-group identity model suggests a decategorization mechanism via personalized relationships to reduce intergroup bias. This study extends the theory to geographically-dispersed teams and weblog settings. While the theory has been tested before in face-to-face settings, the extension of the theory’s validity to a weblog setting is new. Our findings suggest that self-disclosure through weblogs can help team members develop interpersonal relationships and increase social attraction. Through this, perceived faultlines and the ensuing intergroup bias can be reduced.

These findings also imply that social relationships can be developed even at the early stage of team collaboration. Prior research indicates that computer-mediated communication operates at different rates of social information exchange and requires more time to develop interpersonal relationships in comparison to face-to-face communication [56]. Less social-related information is often exchanged when team members communicate through ICTs when a team is just formed [57]. Contrary to prior findings, we find that a substantial amount of social information is exchanged through weblogs even though team members do not have collaboration history. This inconsistency can be attributed to task-technology fit. Multiple functionalities of SCTs for supporting relationship development as well as users’ rich experience of using SCTs to develop relationships provide a comfortable zone for participants in this study exchanging social-related information. Therefore, high task-technology fit is achieved (i.e., social-purpose technology fits into relaxed social activity). However, our results show that social information by itself does not directly lead to beneficial effects for a team. Only when self-disclosure stimulates liking of other team members, self-disclosure is of value. Otherwise, self-disclosure may induce potential differences and engender stereotypes of members of out-groups.

5.2. Practical implications

Although managers can try to compose a team that consists of team members with cross-cutting dimensions to avoid potential faultlines, such practice may not always be feasible in the real-world settings because a team is often formed due to the need for specific knowledge, skills, and abilities as well as availability of potential candidates. Also, due to the complexity of team projects and makeup of GVT membership, we expect managers may not be able to identify which kind of diversity dimensions will invoke perceived faultlines. We suggest that managers of GVT’s should encourage self-disclosure within a team. This suggestion is consistent with prior conceptual pieces [17]. However, Dumas et al. (2008) express concern about potential negative impacts of self-disclosure in a diverse team because dissimilar personal information may not be understood or appreciated by other colleagues [14]. We recognize the potential risks raised by self-disclosure among diverse team members; yet, it has also been argued that team cohesion can be achieved and team effectiveness can be improved by increasing cross-understanding even when team members do not hold similar mental models [25]. We believe that weblogs, when appropriated as primary relationship building media, can be a preferred platform for people who have diverse personal characteristics to build relationships and foster cross-understanding in geographically-dispersed teams. We encourage managers to consider using weblogs for team disclosure so that team members can learn about each other beyond a task focus.

In order to get the suggested benefits from weblog use in organizations, we suggest managers provide freedom to users, as well as create a climate where people are comfortable sharing personal information about themselves. If organizations want to leverage benefits of public self-disclosure via weblogs, organizations should decrease the level of monitoring and regulation and allow team member to easily control the extent of personal information to reveal. Otherwise, employees may tend to avoid using weblogs with their colleagues or cautiously manage their weblog content. McAfee’s (2009) interview with employees who use SCTs within organizations also supports this suggestion [36].

5.3. Limitations and future directions

Despite several contributions to the literature and practice, our study has several limitations. First, our study asked participants to disclose positive personal information. One may argue that individuals express
positive and negative affect during self-disclosure in natural settings. We have little knowledge about whether negative self-disclosure reduces perceived faultlines. Some research has found that negative self-disclosure damages personalized relationships and leads to less liking [4] while other research shows that negative self-disclosure increase liking and foster personalized relationships because negative self-disclosure involves a more intimate part of a self and imply deeper level of trust [24]. We may be less likely to observe negative public self-disclosure in organizations because individuals tend to create positive public image. Nevertheless, we leave it for future research to explore whether dispersed team members are willing to disclose negative affect via weblogs and what impacts negative self-disclosure have on perceived faultlines in geographically-dispersed teams.

Second, this study was conducted in experimental environment with undergraduate students. We can think of no reason why using students to test the theoretical mechanism that self-disclosure may reduce perceptions of faultlines via social attraction would give different results than testing the same theoretical mechanism with employees. Research also shows that users, irrespective of employees or students, are prone to share relatively credible information via weblogs [48]. Regardless, external validity is always a concern with any study so future research on self-disclosure in employee teams is needed to confirm the generalizability of the results.

Third, this study was a cross-sectional research on temporal geographically-dispersed teams. Self-disclosure may have stronger effects at the team formation stage due to initial trust. With task collaboration proceeding, subgroups may be formed as a result of diverse working attitudes and styles. Although we believe that continuous self-disclosure can increase understanding of other’s mental models, there is no empirical evidence. A longitudinal research design offers an opportunity to investigate if team members can maintain high level of self-disclosure through weblogs across different stages of team development and if continuous self-disclosure can keep reducing formation of subgroups.

Fourth, the results are based on a modest sample size of 34 teams. Social attraction and perceived faultlines were assessed via subjective reports. Future studies of larger samples using multiple methods, such as observation or communication analysis would help validate the results and avoid common method bias.

Fifth, weblogs have been broadly adopted by the Internet generation, those aged between 21 and 35 (53.3% according to an analysis of more than 100 million weblogs [52]). In this study, we examined self-disclosure among people who are around 20. We believe that these participants can represent active bloggers. However, there may be a relationship between the tendency or readiness to self-disclose and age that is not explored by this study; future research could be valuable here. Also, individuals may behave differently in terms of self-disclosure as they age [31] and that interaction effects between age and gender affect self-disclosure [19]. Therefore, it may be of interest for future research to examine whether there are different self-disclosure behaviours via weblogs in organizational settings as the Internet generation is aging. The result may shed light on the management of weblogs in organizations, specifically for GVTs, whether weblogs can support all age groups to reduce perceived faultlines.

More generally, future research that examines other types of diversity and the effect of this on team effectiveness would be valuable. We are planning on expanding our focus to different types of team diversity with the objective of identifying which combinations of diversity seem to have the strongest effects.

Although theoretically faultlines should be fairly common in GVT’s, given the typical high diversity, there is no empirical research we are aware of that investigates the frequency of faultlines in existing GVT’s and when and where they occur. Field research is needed to examine this and confirm application of this theory from academia to practice. Also, we have studied one small piece of what could potentially influence the effectiveness of a GVT. There is a need for more research into other factors.

We have shown that self-disclosure is helpful so that GVT’s should try to encourage self-disclosure early on. We have also shown that weblogs can facilitate self-disclosure but we don’t know what other media can do this. There is not much logic to suggest other media would not work. Future research can examine whether other media can exert the similar effects. If interaction is fully virtual, self-disclosure would have to be done via ICTs. Also, given broader adoption of social networking sites (SNS) and configurable privacy settings, SNS such as Facebook may work for disclosing and enhance relationships. However, it must be noted that the adoption and usage of particular method of self-disclosure depends upon individual differences, socialization processes, and organizational culture. Future research should be considered to disentangle such sophisticated processes. A bundle of methods for facilitating employees’ self-disclosure may be needed to maximize benefits of self-disclosure in different GVT culture or stages of GVT’s [11]. We
believe that the role of weblogs among a bundle of methods for facilitating self-disclosure in different contexts can be better understood via further explorative case studies.

6. Conclusion

This study draws on the common in-group identity model and faultline theory to investigate intergroup bias and diversity in geographically-dispersed teams, an issue that has received little attention. The concept of self-disclosure was used to examine whether public self-disclosure can blur perceived faultlines. The empirical results inform both academia and practitioners’ nuanced understanding of geographically-dispersed teams. First, self-disclosure can help geographically-dispersed teams reduce perceived faultlines through increasing social attraction and building personalized relationships. Second, weblogs were found to be an effective platform for self-disclosure in dispersed teams. Our findings suggest managers of dispersed global virtual teams should encourage self-disclosure through weblogs to enhance team effectiveness.

7. References

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