THE GLOBALIZED COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

by

CAROL ANN STAX BROWN

(Under the direction of John Schell)

ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, the pace of globalization has increased exponentially due to information and communication technology (ICT), more specifically to the Internet. While access to the Internet is not universal, it is spreading, providing connectivity among people who, even a decade ago, would have never had the opportunity to participate in such far-reaching virtual conversations. The convergence of these changes that is creating a new realm of learning organizations: global virtual communities of practice. The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine the impact of globalization on a virtual community of practice using Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice model (1991). The specific case for this study is the InterCultural Training Experience (ICTE) of the Melton Foundation, a U.S. based foundation that is devoted to cross cultural understanding and the development of social capital. Each year approximately thirty participants are selected from five member universities on different continents to participate in a three-month online orientation program. This training period is the first step in becoming a Melton Fellow, which is a life-long commitment to membership in a global network that supports projects that promote the values of the foundation.

KEYWORDS: Community of Practice, Globalization, Virtual Community, Information and Community Technology

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DEDICATION

To the Staxes and Herrmanns, who bravely left their homeland while the world was still a big place. Their sacrifices and integrity keep my obstacles, triumphs, and mission in perspective. To my husband, Charlie, for his love and patience while we put our life on hold. And, to my mother. Though she was my guide, I missed her every step of the way

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

Globalization is a complex phenomenon. Its onset is debated, its expansion difficult to

measure, and its impact seemingly endless. Generally there is a favorable view of what

globalization is doing for world-wide economic development. However, others see it as a search

for cheap labor and a threat to century-long traditions, religious identities, political systems, and

worldviews (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; Arnett, 2002). Still others suggest that

globalization is an unattainable ideology (Burbules & Torres, 2000). Most can agree that

decisions made in one part of the world are having increasingly significant impacts on people in

other parts of the world. Consequently, more attention is being given to international

communication, cooperation, and education.

Since the 1990s, the pace of globalization has increased exponentially due to information

and communication technology, more specifically to the Internet (Burbules & Torres, 2000).

While access to the Internet is not universal, it is spreading, providing connectivity among

people who, even a decade ago, would have never had the opportunity to participate in such far-

reaching virtual conversations. Implications of this connectedness are infinite, and research in

this area spans many disciplines.

In education, the value of globalization is evidenced by the increase in the number

international partnerships and initiatives (Latchem, 2005). Online collaboration is found in

primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as in corporate, civil, and social organizations.

Creating these programs has never been easier, as the Internet permits and encourages

participation that is no longer bound by time or space. Transnational organizations can, with

ease, conduct business with teams comprised of participants in countries around the world. They can readily attract and retain members based on shared interests and common goals and unlimited by geography.

Online and global programs have led to an evolution of the concept of *community*. Throughout history, community has been central to human existence and persistence around the globe. The phrase *communities of practice*, coined by Lave and Wenger (1991), describes a group that shares history and values and works toward a common goal. Such groups promote social learning and function on the assumption that collective knowledge is greater than individual knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991). While there is much research on the topic of communities of practice, there is little to explore the phenomenon of participation in a virtual community of practice. There are also few studies that explain how such communities of practice are affected by members from multiple cultures who, among other things, are communicating in their second, or possibly even their third language (Daniel, Schwier, & McCalla, 2003).

Global Culture

Burbules and Torres (2000) claim there is "no clear date or even era agreed upon for when globalization actually began" (p. 12); consequently there are as many start dates for globalization as there are writers and theorists on the topic. The concept of the *global village*, first introduced by Marshall McLuhan in 1962 (Watson, 2004), conjures visions of people from all nations sharing and participating equally in an advanced cultural, economic, and political arena. Some have described a positive impact on economic development (Dhanarajan, 2001; Warschauer, 2003). Others have observed globalization to be a threat to century-long traditions, religious identities, political systems, values, and worldviews (Suarez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004; Arnett, 2002). Stromquist (2002) classifies globalization as multidisciplinary, with

literature emphasizing four main areas: economical, technological, political, and cultural, with the cultural aspect receiving the least attention.

World culture theory attempts to explain the complexities of globalization, contending that systems worldwide are converging toward one homogenous model rather than diverging and diversifying based on local and national differences (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). With respect to education, world culture theorists (including John Meyer, Francisco Ramirez, George Thomas, John Boli and others, as cited in Anderson-Levitt, 2003) argue that standardization, professionalization, and corporatist views have created more similarities in education among various cultures and nation states than one would expect, considering the diversity in cultures across the globe (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Suarez-Orozco (2004) adds that the far-reaching effects of globalization necessitate a new paradigm for learning and teaching that incorporates more cognitive flexibility, interpersonal skills, and the ability to substantiate claims. "Globalization is de-territorializing the skills and competencies it rewards, thereby generating powerful centripetal forces on what students the world over need to know" (Suarez-Orozco, 2004, p. 6).

The discussions and debates on the globalization movement have brought to the forefront the term *social capital*, which has existed in our vocabulary since L. Judson Hanifan first used it over a century ago (Putnam, 2002). As a well-traveled progressive educator and social reformer, Hanifan returned to his native West Virginia to find it had succumbed to poverty and social disintegration. His observations led him to conclude that the cause of the problems was the lack of neighborly and community connectedness. He noted that meeting the social needs of individuals improves the living conditions and thus increases the social capital of the entire community. Putnam's (2002) compilation of studies examines the status of social capital in

modernized democracies such as Sweden, Australia, Japan, France, Germany, Spain, and the United States. While each country is uniquely impacted by its political and economic history, there are some common trends. For example, all countries have seen a decrease over the last century, and sharper decrease since the 1990s, in participation in church, voting, political parties, and unions. In contrast, however, there has been an increase in the number of people participating in social activist groups, self-help circles, and education. There has also been in increase in the number of associations available for people to join. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were only a handful of large, recognizable civic organizations; today there are new ones being formed all the time (Putnam 2002). While there are very few studies on the Internet's impact on social capital, Putnam (2002) sees it as a major reason for this upsurge in participation. Another major trend, both in online and face-to-face networks, is that more groups are less formal and exist for a shorter period of time. They are created out of immediate and personal or communal needs and dissipate when a solution is found or when participants lose interest (Putnam, 2002).

Information and Communication Technology

The proliferation of information and communication technology (ICT) is one of the major driving forces behind the advancement of globalization (Warschauer, 2003). ICT has the ability to increase multicultural awareness and bring opportunity for education, work, and social inclusion to developing or deprived nations, and it permits communication that relies on connectedness rather than geography.

Many countries are integrating online education programs to enhance current offerings and improve access by liberating education from time and space restrictions (Gursoy, 2005). Governments, universities, and other organizations tend to favor online education as a viable

alternative to conventional systems (Gursoy, 2005). The UK launched its first online education programs in the late 1980s, with the US participating immediately thereafter. Both countries continue to be the leaders in online learning, at least with respect to the number of programs and the number of institutions that make online courses and programs available (Dhanarajan, 2001). In educational settings, policymakers throughout the world consider web-based education as having potential, particularly to create better educational materials and provide more technology training for teachers. Carr-Chellman (2005) found that developing nations must introduce technology in their education systems or they will fall even further behind in the global economy. Many developing nations are doing so, and some are investing heavily in incorporating the Web into their schools. In 2000, for example, two-thirds of all schools in Chile had web access (Stromquist, 2002). Burbules (2000) states that "the Internet is becoming the primary medium for the transmission of communication, information, culture, and goods and services around the world that it is becoming a kind of 'global community'" (p. 327). By alleviating the barriers of time and space, ICT has been crucial to promoting the development of online communities.

Communities of Practice

The term *community* within the field of education was first theorized by John Dewey, who discussed *The Great Community* and examined how learning and community are closely intertwined (Dewey, 1916). Dewey wrote about capturing the sense of community once evident in small home towns and schoolhouses even as the landscape was becoming urban and modernized. Building on this idea, Arendt (1958) identified space and place as conditions of community, adding that the process of turning a space into a place involves participants deciding how to adapt the space to accommodate daily use. Both Dewey's (1916) and Arendt's (1958)

perspectives were given in the context of communities that exist in the same place geographically.

The terms *community* and *practice* together refer to a special type of social structure with a special purpose (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). The concept *community of practice* (CoP) was first defined by Lave and Wenger (1991) as "an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their community. Thus, they are united in both action and in the meaning that the action has, both for themselves and for the larger collective" (p. 98). *Community of practice* is now an accepted and commonly used framework for studies across disciplines (Daniel et al., 2003).

Brown and Duguid (1991) built on the practice-based theory of Lave and Wenger (1991). They view communities of practice as non-canonical and not necessarily recognized by the organization. Communities of Practice often cross the boundaries of an organization and involve people from outside. Brown and Duguid (1991) argue there are significant differences between the way the work is documented and the way it is actually performed. When facing problems, people rely on solutions that are not provided by the formal structure. Informal mechanisms and systems, such as conversation with others, mentoring, and storytelling are then used. Wenger (1998) developed the concept further, incorporating the social theory of learning, theories of social structure, theories of situated experience, theories of practice, and theories of identity.

Lave and Wenger's (1998) CoP model shows how learning is impacted by the relationship among community, identity, meaning, and practice. Presenting a break from the belief that learning is an individual cognitive process, they focused on the social engagements that permit learning to occur, and they emphasized the action and practice that the learners engage in (Hanks, 1998). A major component of a community of practice is legitimate peripheral

participation (LPP). This process involves how newcomers become experts and masters within their fields or communities. One of the major forces that helped create LPP as a framework was the advent of technology in the areas of computational media, video, and presentation devices, which all helped facilitate new modes of communication and collaboration (Lave & Wenger, 1998). According to Pea and Brown (1991):

> These technologies are dramatically transforming the basic patterns of communication and knowledge interchange in societies, and automating the component processes of thinking and problem solving. In changing situations of knowledge acquisition and use, the new interactive technologies redefine—in ways yet to be determined—what it means to know and understand, and what it means to become "literate" or an "educated citizen." (p. 12)

The three dimensions of practice that comprise Wenger's (1998) properties of a community include a) mutual engagement, b) joint enterprise, and c) shared repertoire. Mutual engagement is more than a group of people in the same organization or in the same place; it requires a commitment to community maintenance. An interesting and often overlooked aspect of such communities is that they focus as much on diversity as they do on homogeneity. The differences that people bring into the practice are what contribute to that practice being unique. Joint enterprise occurs as a result of collective practice and negotiation. Even when outside rules and constraints impact the community of practice, the manner in which the participants work within these constraints defines their specific enterprise. Wenger (1998) explains:

> Collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. Such

communities allow people to work out common sense through mutual engagement. We all have our own theories and ways of understanding the world, and communities of practice are where we develop, negotiate, and share them. (p. 48)

Wenger (1998) also emphasizes the role of shared repertoire in learning. Communities of practice are often the result of generations that have passed down the ritual and practice within that community through what Wenger terms *memory*. History in this sense is not completely an individual or collective history; rather, it is a "combination of participation and reification intertwined over time" (Wenger, 1998, p. 86).

Virtual Communities of Practice

With the onset of globalization, many organizations have increasingly found themselves dealing with a culturally diverse and geographically distant workforce. The need to synchronize a transnational organization's different parts while overcoming the cultural differences and geographical distances, together with the advancement of virtual technology, has led to the creation of global virtual teams. Two important characteristics defining global virtual teams are their reliance on technology-mediated communication, used much more than face-to face communication, and team members working and living in different countries (Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000).

Interaction may also take place in a virtual world instead of real space and time (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). Rheingold (1993) defined virtual communities as social aggregations that emerge from the Internet when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.

Virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) have been referred to as groups that use networked technologies to communicate and collaborate; they are designed, while communities

of practice are emergent (Johnson, 2001). Wenger et al. (2002) prefer to call them *distributed communities*, as these communities generally connect in many ways, including face-to-face, although they may rely primarily on *virtual* communication. The term *distributed* is used to describe any community of practice that may not rely on face-to-face meetings and interactions as its primary vehicle for connecting its members (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

An online community is different from the typical place-based notion of community. The Internet has sometimes been described as a highway or a network, but Palloff and Pratt (1999) argue that these metaphors can be replaced with one that depicts the internet as collection of electronic communities. Such communities can be consciously established by negotiating aims, ethics, and norms in much the same way that face-to-face communities establish themselves. One particular benefit of online learning for building community may be that it provides a means of treating status differences that can arise in groups. Palloff and Pratt (1999) claim:

> The availability and number of personal interactions using computers is limited only by time and access, not by distance or social class. We can create, cultivate, and maintain social relationships with anyone who has access to a computer. Connections are made through the sharing of ideas and thoughts. How people look or what their cultural, ethnic, or social background is have become irrelevant factors in this medium, which has been referred to as the great equalizer. (p. 15)

Another benefit of online participation in a group is that students can be more thoughtful because they have an opportunity to think for a while before responding online.

Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) identify the benefits, barriers, and success factors in VCoPs. They primarily examined European VCoPs created at higher education institutions for the purpose of sharing research. The major benefit, they found, was the ability of experts in a

particular field of study to link with others to further research and understanding. The barriers

fell into two categories: technology and trust. People must have access to technology and must

be able to use if effectively. The second category has to do with the ability to build trust and

establish a sense of community without the face-to-face contact. The success factors included

items such as an increase in ICT skills, expanded cultural awareness, and good coordination and

management of the interactions that lead to achieving the community's goals (Gannon-Leary &

Fontainha, 2007). However, these studies represent only one of the potentially endless forms of

VCoPs that can enhance not only education settings but also economic, political, and social

organizations.

Statement of the Problem

Much literature is available on globalization, particularly with respect to global

commerce and transnational corporations (Stromquist, 2002). Likewise, there is an abundance of

new research on how ICT is altering practices in business, education, and learning organizations

(Warschauer, 2003). Studies on communities of practice are also increasing as organizations seek

to develop best practices, produce information, and manage and advance knowledge and social

capital (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). However, it is the convergence of these changes that

is creating a new realm of learning organizations: global virtual communities of practice. Such

communities involve members from multiple nations and employ ICT as their major

communication tool. Increasingly, online communities are more and more involving participants

from around the world drawn together by common goals or interests rather than by place of

employment, educational institution, or country of origin. The majority of international learning

organizations have the goal of accommodating participants from diverse backgrounds, cultures,

and education levels, and the number of international communities is growing in what is now

frequently referred to as a global knowledge-based society. However, the research on this developing sector of communities is limited. Further studies are needed to identify the role of international online communities in exploring and negotiating meaning and for challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions behind a single-culture community. A closer examination needs to be made of the processes at play in the critical framing of both local and international online communities, knowledge sharing, and the roles of communities and technologies in these processes.

The specific case for this study is the InterCultural Training Experience (ICTE) of the Melton Foundation, a U.S.-based foundation that is devoted to cross cultural understanding and the development of social capital. Each year approximately thirty participants are selected from five member universities on different continents to participate in a three-month online orientation program. This training period is the first step in becoming a Melton Fellow, which is a life-long commitment to membership in a global network that supports projects that promote the values of the foundation (The Melton Foundation, 2008).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study is to examine the impact of globalization on a global virtual community of practice (Kimble, Hildreth, & Wright, 2000) using Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice model (1991). A qualitative research design was selected for this study, as it is phenomenological in nature and bound by a purposely selected case study (Creswell, 1994). The following research questions will guide this study:

1. What factors impact full participation in a global virtual community of practice?

2. What shared practices comprise and sustain a global virtual community of practice?

3. In what ways does culture impact participation in a global virtual community of practice?

4. In what ways does the use of information and communication technology affect

participation in a global virtual community of practice?

Significance of the Study

This study has both practical and theoretical significance. Multinational organizations, faced with the challenge of disseminating organizational knowledge that resides with individuals and teams spread around the world, are opting for exchanges through online collaborative communication technologies. Virtual communities of practice, which make use of such technologies, are becoming an increasingly popular way to conduct knowledge sharing activities among geographically dispersed employees (Kimble, Hildreth, & Wright, 2000). This study will address these processes and provide insight as to how they are impacted by technology and by the collaboration of participants from diverse cultures.

The study will also impact theoretical literature on communities of practice that began with Lave and Wenger (1991), as it will also contribute to the new and growing focus on virtual communities of practice. International literature on communities of practice tends to focus on learning organizations dedicated to international development and on transnational corporations dealing with multicultural communication processes. The Internet has provided access to mass quantities of information to learning organizations all over the world, creating an entirely new system of communities of practice that are not hindered by geography, nationality, or politics. This study will provide insight as to how individuals experience participation in a community of practice that is both culturally and geographically diverse and that relies on information and communication technology. It may also expose some of the obstacles that hinder equitable participation.

Summary

This chapter has provided a description of the major factors that have contributed to the formation of global virtual communities of practice: the proliferation of globalization, the increasing value of social capital, and the advancements of information and communication technology. These communities are comprised of members from various countries and cultures, and the majority, if not all, of the interaction is conducted electronically. As this practice is growing, it is important to understand the process that a participant undergoes while becoming an active member in the community. Hongladarom (2000) writes:

> As the universes of cultures are fusing, it has become increasingly difficult for a decision made by one culture not to affect others. What is truly global or universal can only be something that can be shared by different localities. The global, by itself, cannot contain any narratives or myths that sustain them and maintain their identities. Unless the global is accorded with myths or narratives peculiar to the locality in which it is adopted, it remains forever fleeting and unintegrated into the actual lives and hopes of the members of the community. (Philosophical Reflections Section)

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this case study is to examine the impact of globalization on a community

of practice (Kimble, Hildreth, Wright, 2000) using Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice

model. A qualitative research design was selected for this study, as it is phenomenological in

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practice?

4. In what ways does the use of information and communication technology affect

participation in a global virtual community of practice?

This chapter synthesizes the literature available in four major areas that impact this study.

The first section of this literature review offers a broad description of *globalization*, which is

then narrowed to focus on the concept and increasing value of social capital in a global world.

The second section covers information and communication technology (ICT), as it is both

catalyst for and a product of globalization, providing new modes of learning and new definitions

for learning communities. The third section contains an overview of the purposes and functions

of major learning organizations that value multicultural collaboration, highlighting how recent

technology has impacted operations and expanded opportunities. This section includes a

description of the Melton Foundation and its mission of global communication and cultural

understanding through the use of technology. The final section covers Communities of Practice,

the theoretical framework for this study. Included here are recent studies on global virtual communities of practice.

While much literature exists on each of these areas independently, much less is available on their intercept (Burbules & Torres, 2000). Yet, the convergence of all of these forces has resulted in an entirely new realm of learning organizations. Based on recent trends, it is clear that the forces of globalization will only strengthen and expand, and that the Internet will continue to emerge as the vehicle of choice and convenience for higher education, workforce education, and social awareness. As an increasing number of adults will engage in global communication and collaboration through a range of learning organizations that are driven by information and communication technology, it seems only vital that more research in this arena be conducted and contributed to the current body of knowledge.

Globalization's Impact on Learning

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of globalization, including some of the definitions and ideologies surrounding globalization, and to examine the impact globalization has on learning communities.

Burbules & Torres (2000) claim there is "no clear date or even era agreed upon for when globalization actually began" (p. 12); consequently there are as many start-dates for globalization as there are writers and theorists on the topic. Marshall McLuhan introduced the concept, *global village*, in 1962 (Watson, 2004), using the term to refer to people from all nations sharing and participating equally in an advanced cultural, economic, and political arena. The scholarly literature, however, suggests a narrower definition of globalization as solely an economic and corporate movement (Stromquist, 2002). Further, the literature tends to emphasize the limitations and obstacles of globalization. Some scholars have observed globalization as a threat to century-

long traditions, religious identities, political systems, values, and worldviews (Burbules and Torres, 2000; Arnett, 2002).

Some equate globalization with free markets and a neoliberal agenda. According to Stromquist (2002), "Neoliberalism is an economic doctrine that sees the market as the most effective way of determining production and satisfying people's needs" (p. 25). It emphasizes deregulation, privatization, and liberalization. One of the key frameworks of neoliberalism is education, because it is the means for attaining social mobility. Neoliberalism operates under the assumption that the market does not discriminate, and that the best and brightest will surface (Stromquist, 2002). However, Stromquist (2002) also points out that the gap between rich and poor is widening, and globalization may be an accelerator of this process. At one extreme, the global elite are involved in prospering international commerce while at the other extreme, unskilled, poorly paid laborers fall prey to exploitation.

The term *globalization* is sometimes used interchangeably with such concepts as *globalism* or *postnationalism*, indicating an allegiance to a multitude of cultures and nations (Warschauer, 2003). Others see the term as another word for Americanization (Suarez-Orozco, 2004), suggesting a deliberate push toward a more westernized, democratic, and capitalistic society (Burbules & Torres, 2000). Some see the lack of globalization in certain places as the reason for poverty and inequality in the world (Stromquist, 2002). Some question whether *globalization* can be a reality and consider it only an unattainable ideology (Burbules & Torres, 2000).

Regardless of the array of possible motives for globalization, the major force driving its proliferation is technology (Warschauer, 2003). Information technology has the ability to increase multicultural awareness and bring opportunity for education, work, and social inclusion

to developing or deprived nations, and it permits communication that relies on connectedness rather than geography. The regions that are leading the world in taking advantage of technology to increase commerce, provide global education, and promote multicultural understanding include China, Canada, the US, Western Europe, the UK, Africa, and Australia (Dhanarajan, 2001).

One theory that attempts to explain the complexities of globalization is world culture theory. It contends that systems worldwide are converging toward one homogenous model rather than diverging and diversifying based on local and national differences (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). With respect to education, world culture theorists (including John Meyer, Francisco Ramirez, George Thomas, John Boli and others, as cited in Anderson-Levitt, 2003) argue that standardization, professionalization, and corporatist views have created more similarities in education among various cultures and nation states than one would expect, considering the diversity in cultures across the globe (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Additionally, some are convinced that quality education will give way to providing workers to fit the needs of transnational corporations (TNCs). "Globalization transforms every activity and every resource into a commodity, including education" (Latchem, 2005, p. 185). Education has recently emerged as a business target as it is providing returns of 15% (Stromquist, 2002) for privatized providers. Investors are the catalyst for more privatized educational outlets that can customize training and not be bound by state regulations (Stromquist, 2002).

Suarez-Orozco (2004) adds that the far-reaching effects of globalization necessitate a new paradigm for learning and teaching that incorporates more cognitive flexibility, interpersonal skills, and the ability to substantiate claims. "Globalization is de-territorializing the skills and competencies it rewards, thereby generating powerful centripetal forces on what

students the world over need to know" (Suarez-Orozco, 2004, p. 6). Some of the strongest

influences on shaping education have come from TNCs. As they establish themselves in major

cities, they face the challenge of staffing at two levels. First, they must find or cultivate a

workforce in the existing population. Second, they must be able to attract professionals to high-

level management and executive positions (Stromquist, 2002). This process has created a pattern

of transient professional migration (Beaver and Boardwell, 2001 as cited in Stromquist, 2002),

which is impacting educational systems worldwide. Stromquist (2002) adds:

> Through their presence in world cities, TNCs make demand of large urban schools on
>
> issues of accountability, testing, parental participation, and community involvement that
>
> are then imitated by smaller districts. Given their access to policymakers, it is easy today
>
> for large corporations to exercise their influence. (p. 96)

In the past, school systems, governed by state, regional, or national entities, were most

responsible for establishing cultural norms and values; now corporations are playing a greater

role in determining and contributing to the homogenization of curriculum and policy.

In considering the impact of globalization on education, Burbules & Torres (2000)

determined that the major purpose of any educational system is to create a loyal and competent

citizenry. The teaching of language, history, and culture exist as important functions. The

dichotomy facing all educators is maintaining a national identity without getting left out of

emerging global markets and trade agreements. This poses a crucial question to anyone

designing an online global learning organization. Some see that the resulting and inevitable

homogeneity and hegemony favors western cultures and will diminish identities on both the

national and personal level (Burbules & Torres, 2000). This trend is seen as positive by some;

Suarez-Orozco (2004) noted that a global culture, one that encompasses multiple cultures, isn't a

problem, but a solution. Developing a sense of belonging to global culture has benefits. It is not dogmatic, not exclusionary, it doesn't suppress those different from the majority, and it promotes tolerance (Suarez-Orozco, 2004). Maira (2004) adds that the concept of citizenship should be expanded to go beyond ethnic, political, and economic boundaries.

A new term that emerges in globalization literature is "glocalization." Although used in the Japanese business arena in the 1980s (Glocal Forum, 2007), the term was popularized and coined in the late '90s by Roland Robertson (Featherstone, Lash, and Robertson, 1997). It describes the interplay between both local histories and broad global trends, supporting the coexistence of centralizing and decentralizing forces acting simultaneously (Jungck, 2003). Currently there exists a public *Glocal Forum* which, among other initiatives, began conducting an annual Glocal Conference in 2002. This conference involves a coalition of mayors, directors and executives from major cities around the world to discuss global issues, exchange experiences and practices, lobby and establish lasting partnerships (Glocal Forum, 2007). The Forum also makes available on the Internet the *Glocalization Manifesto*, which provides an outline for a vision of global peace and understanding (Glocal Forum, 2007).

In *The World is Flat*, Friedman (2004) explains that globalization is perceived by many as a form of Americanization, creating a backlash by those who felt that they would be homogenized into being Americanized. But as new forms of communication and innovation create a global platform for the sharing of work, entertainment and opinion, Friedman (2004) believes that globalization serves more to enrich and preserve culture than to destroy it, as each person is given more opportunities to express his or her own voice through a variety of portals. Friedman also believes that education, not geography, will determine who gets the best jobs in the new economy. He presents this concept as a warning to Americans who have enjoyed

privilege based on nothing more than being born inside U.S. borders. Opportunity now presents itself in remote areas, and due to information and communication technology, the possibilities are endless.

Influencing educational systems to react to globalization trends is a grand and tedious undertaking. Gardner (2004) proposed a seven-point plan for global education. It includes (a) understanding of the global system; (b) capacity to think analytically and creatively within and among disciplines; (c) ability to tackle problems and issues that do not respect disciplinary boundaries; (d) knowledge of an ability to interact civilly and productively with individuals from quite different cultural backgrounds—both within one's own society and across the planet; (e) knowledge of and respect for one's own cultural tradition(s); (f) fostering of hybrid or blended identities; and (g) fostering of tolerance. Gardner omits technology as an essential basis for global education, while Friedman (2004) emphasizes technology as the key to surviving in a flattened world.

The discussions and debates on the globalization movement have brought to the forefront the term *social capital*, which has existed in our vocabulary since L. Judson Hanifan first used it over a century ago (Putnam, 2002). As a well-traveled progressive educator and social reformer, Hanifan returned to his native West Virginia to find it had succumbed to poverty and social disintegration. His observations led him to conclude that the cause of the problems was the lack of neighborly and community connectedness. He noted that meeting the social needs of individuals—that is, increasing the social capital—improves the living conditions of the entire community.

Putnam's (2002) compilation of studies examines the status of social capital in modernized democracies such as Sweden, Australia, Japan, France, Germany, Spain, and the

United States. While each country is uniquely impacted by its political and economic history, there are some common trends. For example, all countries have seen a decrease over the last century and a sharper decrease since the 1990s in participation in church, voting, political parties, and unions. In contrast, there has been an increase in the number of people participating in social activist groups, self-help circles, and education. There has also been in increase in the number of associations available for people to join. While at the beginning of the twentieth century there were only a handful of large, recognizable civic organizations, today there are new ones continually being formed (Putnam 2002).

While there are very few studies on the Internet's impact on social capital, Putnam sees it as a major reason for this upsurge in group participation. *Cyberinteraction* provides access to greater numbers of potential participants, but it may also create a culture of exclusivity rather inclusion (Putnam, 2002). However, Putnam (2002) points out that the increase of time spent on the Internet may be one of the causes of the decline in face-to-face interaction in local communities. Another major trend, both in online and face-to-face networks, is that more groups are less formal and exist for a shorter period of time. They are created out of immediate and personal or communal needs and dissipate when a solution is found or when participants lose interest. This is in sharp contrast to organizations such as the Free Masons, Knights of Labor, or the National Teachers Association, which have all existed well over 200 years. Newer associations tend to form around sports, environmental issues, and social movements, and they disproportionately attract younger, middle-class, college educated members.

In summary, it is clear that the globalization is considered, above all, an economic movement. However, as TNCs and world cities continue to emerge as the major global players, they undoubtedly affect culture and politics. Glocalization, the interplay between the local and

the global, is the consciousness with which individuals, cities, and corporations are wise to conduct themselves. World culture theorists believe that globalization means homogenization. However, local reactions to global practices are in fact producing new and unique cultures and issues. New international organizations and learning communities are reacting to the changes taking place throughout the world. Time and more studies are needed to determine how these new systems and ideologies will impact individual and cultural identity, particularly for those who participate in global learning organizations.

Information and Communication Technology

The purpose of this section is to describe information and communication technology (ICT) as it relates to international online learning communities. ICT is the term recognized internationally and used commonly (Toprak, 2006) to represent the use of computers and computer software to facilitate communication (Warschauer, 2003). Since the focus of this study is the social and educational implications for online communities, descriptions of the types of online technology used, including specific platforms, hardware, or software are outside the scope of this study. Included is how ICT is impacting learning environments, fueling global debates, and affecting identity formation in members of various online learning communities. Many countries are integrating online education programs as a means to enhance current offerings and improve access by liberating education from time and space restrictions (Gursoy, 2005). Governments, universities, and other organizations tend to favor online education as a viable alternative to conventional systems (Gursoy, 2005). The UK launched its first online education programs in the late 1980s, with the US participating immediately thereafter (Dhanarajan, 2001). The UK and the US continue to be the leaders in online learning, at least with respect to the number of programs and the number of institutions that make online courses and programs

available (Dhanarajan, 2001). In educational settings, policymakers throughout the world consider web based education as having potential, particularly as can be used to create better educational materials and provide more technology training for teachers. Carr-Chellman (2005) cautioned that developing nations must introduce technology in their education systems or they will fall even further behind in the global economy, and many developing nations are doing so. Some are investing heavily in incorporating the Web into their schools. In 2000, for example, two-thirds of all schools in Chile had web access (Stromquist, 2002). Burbules (2000) states that "the Internet is becoming the primary medium for the transmission of communication, information, culture, and goods and services around the world; it is becoming a kind of 'global community'" (p. 327).

Yet despite its prevalence in industrialized nations, the Internet has not spread globally (Warschauer, 2003). The concept of the *digital divide*, popularized in the late 1990s under the Clinton administration during the dot-com boom, was used to describe the gap between the traditional face-to-face method of conducting social and business interactions and the alternate plane of existence that connected people through the Internet (Warschauer, 2003). The belief at the time was that it was necessary for people to make the leap from the old reality to the new, or they would be left behind (Warschauer, 2003). This ideology is even stronger today, and it applies to the use of ICT at the individual, national, and global level.

Open Source Software (OSS) is aiding in the movement to bring ICT to developing nations. In contrast to conventional software, OSS is non-restrictive, non-discriminating software that permits free distribution and provides source codes to users, thus enabling more users to perform adjustments or updates without incurring additional or repetitive costs (The Development Gateway Foundation, 2007). OSS has been received well in the international

public sector, as each country can adapt the software to fit its own regulations and needs. The Development Gateway Foundation, for example, uses OSS to assist the governments of developing nations, particularly in the area of procurement (The Development Gateway Foundation, 2007). The existence of OSS suggests that there are and will be opportunities for all nations to have access to computer instruction.

While online education provides the ability to reach more students at a lower cost, the type of online education proving to be most effective is that which includes a high degree of student-professor interaction (Feenberg 1991)—which is precisely what costs so much. Marginalized populations in the regular classroom are proving to be marginalized online as well, due to access and support for group issues (Warschauer, 2003).

Two of the major concerns when launching an online education program include technology and content. The first involves having the proper systems in place to support the hardware, software, and networking necessary to communicate, as well as making sure that the participants know how to use the technology. Warschauer (2003) emphasizes how important this aspect is, claiming that effective online learning environments require several levels of literacy: computer literacy, information literacy, multimedia literacy, and communication literacy. While these components are not major obstacles in industrialized nations, they are proving to be an issue in developing nations. One approach that has been in use since the 1950's includes International Study Circles (ISCs), which have been impacted by advances in technology by the use of websites and electronic communication. International study circle works by organizing groups of workers based in several countries. Each group meets together for an education program on international issues using the same education materials, and following the same curriculum and methodology. The education program usually lasts for about 6 weeks and

consists of two hour sessions which are run on a weekly basis. Each group has a coordinator who writes up a report after every session. The report is then put onto the international study circle web-site for all other groups to read and discuss in their next session. In this way, workers from different countries are sharing experiences and ideas on the same issues, so that they can understand better the effects of globalization in their own countries. An international study circle also aims for common activities and long-term links and solidarity between workers in participating countries (Salt, 2005).

Results of one six-year study on international study circles (ISCs) used by the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA) showed that of the twelve countries that joined, only three remained active. The countries that remained were the ones for which English was the dominant language and for which access to necessary technology was not an issue (Salt, 2005). Language is a major barrier, with non-English speaking members to an early disadvantage. Only 6% of the world's population is native English speakers while 96% of the sites on dot-com are in English (Warschauer, 2003). Local servers show that languages other than English are used for local communication, but servers used for e-commerce are in English (Warschauer, 2003).

The second major concern is the actual content and how the content is delivered. According to Warschauer (2003), with respect to education, the emphasis on technology should not be on how to manipulate the technology, but on how "to help learners enter new communities and cultures to tackle meaningful programs and address situations of social inequity…" (p. 125). Warschauer (2003) adds that those who see technology alone as a solution are missing the point; context and social structures must be taken into account. Technology can often serve to amplify already existing practices by examining how people in a particular realm

currently learn, collaborate, share, and succeed; technological interventions can be sought that enhance these practices (Agre, 1997). ISCs employed moderators to make sure the focus was on global education, not learning how to use technology, but the lack of familiarity with computers and the English language still greatly limited online discussions (Salt, 2005).

Another argument found in the literature, less prevalent but still strong, is the belief that online education lends itself to becoming so standardized and efficient that diversity and individuality are lost (Rose, 1997). Carr-Chellman (2005) also suggests that the use of English and that certain technology already predispose certain groups to adapt better to the online learning format. Democratic in nature, online classes involve a less hierarchical structure, with the instructor often taking the role of facilitator. "Those who see great potential to Internet communication believe that a knowledge-based economy will give birth to a world without experts or leaders by promoting instead the creation of working groups without hierarchies in which everyone contributes more or less equally to the solution of complex problems" (Stromquist, 2002, p. 76). Whether this is believed to be positive or negative, it does post challenges to student who are not used to such a format.

ICT also fuels the debate between the education constructivist perspective and the transmission perspective (Carr-Chellman, 2005). Constructivists are strong supporters of ICT; however, the social nature of constructivism requires students to discuss, participate, and shape their learning. This is a Western style of learning that places more demands on Eastern students, who are less accustomed to participatory practices in the classroom. Yet others still believe that mastering online communication can be a form of empowerment, particularly for those with cultural or social differences who traditionally have difficulties asserting themselves (Stromquist, 2002). Stromquist writes, "Through the increasing presence of new communication technologies,

we are experiencing a moment of great creativity in which new forms of conveying ideas and images are in constant effervescence but also a time of contradiction and tensions (p. 81). Anderson-Levitt (2003) concluded that "according to world culture theory, rather than diverging, schools are converging toward a single, global model" (Introduction). ICT can provide support for both sides of this debate.

Some regions are actually experiencing cultural revivals due to the use of ICT. Warschauer (2003) provides an example regarding Hawaiian language and indigenous culture, which were close to becoming extinct. There had been no Hawaiian newspapers or television41 shows, and for years it was forbidden to speak anything but English. However, revitalization efforts in the 1970s slowly combated this and have been aided by the Internet. Educators from the University of Hawaii launched a bulletin board system called Leoki (meaning "powerful voice") that is now available to any Hawaiian language speaker. More recently, a version was made available for the broader Internet. Schools and universities use the web pages to teach technology as well as Hawaiian language and culture. Hornberger (1997) stated:

> For students in Hawai'i, indigenous-language content creation is bridging a very special divide, that between a recent past in which their language and culture faced persecution and near elimination, and a future in which their words, changes, songs and stories will thrive with the assistance of new media. (p.107)

In addition to language playing a vital role in cultural identification, Battro (2004) found that skills are often context-specific, and that they develop based on the needs individuals have to participate in their sociocultural environment. Computer technology requires certain skills sets, but for the average person to use a computer to communicate or to find information, all he or she must do is click a mouse. Battro (2004) found that this ability to click is universal skill that all

people in all cultures can perform, adding "without digital ability to 'click' the current state of globalization would have never been reached" (p.79). With the Internet as a tool that all cultures are able to use, it has infinite potential to be used as a new social space that restructures social relations (Poster, 1997).

There are many forces that impact learning due to the implementation of ICT. Three major levels of concern seem to emerge regarding identity formation: identity as a computer user, local-cultural identity formation, and individual identity representation.

A study of computer users at community technology centers in California found that identity formation was a critical component of learning how to use a computer (Stanley, 2001). Before the students were computer literate, they did not perceive themselves as computer users. There seemed to be too great of a divide. As they mastered skills and engaged in a community of practitioners, their self perceptions changed, and they began to represent themselves as computer users (Stanley, 2001).

The second level of identity that emerges is that which is represented on screen in relation to the user's local or cultural identity. The establishment of Global English plays a major role here (Warschauer, 2003). Global English is the first true global language (Burbules & Torres, 2000) and it represents the need for an international medium of communication. This suggests that the movement toward global English is in conflict with efforts to maintain local identity. Online translation programs are word-by-word and are of poor quality. There is no promise of improving this in the near future (Burbules & Torres, 2000). There is concern that individuals will lose their cultural identity when forced to standardize in order to use ICT. Lull (2001) is certain that the rapid and massive development of communications technology and the simultaneous opening of borders through globalization cannot but affect the nature and meaning

of culture. In studies of countries that have implemented language policies to create one official language, there is often a sense that *transethnicification,* an attempt to "flatten" cultures, is occurring as well (Hornberger, 1997). In India, for example, where over 850 local languages and dialects are spoken, English is the office language of commerce, despite the fact that only 5% of Indians speak English (Warschauer, 2003). In Egypt, where only 3% of the population speaks English, it is the required language for professionals, and it is the dominant language of the Internet in Egypt (Warschauer, 2003).

The third level of identification to consider is how the individual represents him or herself online as compared to his or her identity in a face-to-face setting. Turkle (2004) explored the development and manipulation of identity in an online setting, and found that with the growth of electronic communications, people have the ability to create identities for themselves. In functions such as screen names and demographic information, false representation is possible and probable. "On the Internet people may become fluent with the manipulation of personae but, in the process, may become less comfortable with their sense of having an authentic self" (Turkle, 2004, p. 50).

The debate over whether online learning is comparable to face-to-face learning will likely continue as long as both modes are operational. Warschauer (2003) believes face-to-face instruction is still superior, as it allows for even more fast-paced and flexibility and for quick interpretations of gestures, facial expressions, and other audiovisual clues from dozens of people simultaneously. Instructors are permitted to quickly sense student progress and make adjustments as necessary. ICT also limits informal learning opportunities that have a tremendous impact on learning (Warschauer, 2003).

Regardless of the debate, it is clear that ICT will continue to spread across the world, and education will continue to use it as a prominent vehicle, if for no other reason than profit (Carr-Chellman, 2005). What also must be recognized, according to Warschauer (2003), is that as removed as technology may seem from any educational agenda, it must be recognized as a biased tool. "Social context, social purpose, and social organization are critical in efforts to provide meaningful information and communication technology" (p. 200).

In a report for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin (2005) concluded that online learning has a long way to go before it fulfills its promises for the new economy. However, they state that there are three ways that ICT strongly and positively impacts education: access, quality, and cost (Larsen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2005). Warschauer (2003) provided the example of a Westerner working for a U.S. foundation who went to Latin America to help set up computer centers. Not wanting to get involved in politics or any type of agenda, he just wanted to set up a training lab and move to the next project. The nonpolitical nature of this project failed to attract learners as they could not connect a need or personal desire, suggesting once again that technology must be considered more than just a tool.

There are two dominant approaches to ICT according to Warschauer (2003): determinism and neutralism. Media determinism assumes that technology exists separately from the learning context. Those who subscribe to this approach believe that the mere presence of a computer in the classroom will automatically generate learning. Neutralists treat technology as a neutral tool, not good or bad and without any reference to what it can achieve. This point can be illustrated by those who see programming engineers as neutral. These engineers created American Standard Code for Information Exchange, and they build the desktop interface based on an office

metaphor (files and folders). The very platform of the ICT shows strong bias and, in turn, hinders inclusion (Warschauer, 2003). Warschauer's example emphasizes the importance of coordination between design and implementation of ICT as well as the understanding of how cultural norms can unintentionally impact the end user.

In summary, ICT has transformed education in industrialized nations and continues to bring educational opportunities to developing nations and remote regions of the world. However, access and literacy play a role in its success or failure. ICT is not a neutral tool; it carries power and influence. Those who use it can control content and delivery methods that either aid in inclusion or worsen impoverishment. Educators must consider deeply the impact ICT has on individual, cultural, and global identity, and multicultural approaches should be considered in the design and implementation of international communities. More opportunities to implement ICT present themselves daily. Much more research is required to ensure that this powerful tool will be used for positive purposes, particularly with regard to economic development and education in developing nations.

International Online Learning Organizations

The subject of this case study is a non-profit foundation aimed at building intercultural understanding by utilizing new technology, primarily the Internet. It is a selective, non-credit program for college students who show interest in an aptitude for intercultural understanding. The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of some of the learning organizations that have emerged in this non-profit, non-credit category and to report the challenges and triumphs they have experienced during this infancy period of online technology in the learning environment.

For-credit higher education online programs have been omitted intentionally from this section as the focus of this study is the impact of globalization on knowledge sharing practices. Since the classroom, whether it be traditional or online, often has teacher-center prescribed theory and practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the opportunity for true intercultural collaboration and the emergence of a new identity is dissimilar to that that presented in a non-credit based global community of practice. Some who define learning as a result of knowledge sharing argue that some forms of organized education fail to become true learning organizations, which can occur when processes and outcomes are prescribed. What results is that more people are able to access, not influence, the courses (Burbules, 2000). In many cases, corporations are taking over the task of educating by training their own workers and opening academies that promote knowledge sharing practices. In fact, AT&T has trained more people than any university in the world (Burbules, 2000).

Under a very broad definition, international exchange programs and distance (not necessarily online) learning initiatives have existed for centuries. They have afforded the privileged, wealthy, and well-educated the opportunity to travel to other countries to acquire knowledge in a specific subject area and to immerse themselves in a foreign culture. One of the most commonly recognized, formal programs of this nature is the Fulbright scholarship which, since its inception in 1946, has engaged over 273,500 participants in international exchange and scholarship (Institute of International Education, 2007). Today this scholarship program operates generally in the same manner, requiring participants, who have been chosen through a highly selective process, to live abroad for a period of a year to pursue research interests. Yet, even with the success of this program and many other exchange programs across the country, in 1999 less than 1% of American university students studied abroad, and of those who did, the

overwhelming majority studied in Europe (Stromquist, 2002). Additionally, there is a trend toward standardization in US and European universities in curriculum, accreditation, and credentialing (Stromquist, 2002), suggesting that exchanges between these two regions have less impact. Another trend is a decline in money available for such program, as evidenced in a 43% reduction in constant dollar funding since 1994 for the Fulbright program (Engberg, 2001).

However, since the 1990s, rapid spread of Internet access throughout industrialized nations, and increasingly to developing nations, has provided a new and arguably less costly form of international exchange available to a broader range of students, workers, special interest groups, and social activists in more areas of the world (Warschauer, 2003). This technology has altered the manner in which intercultural exchange is implemented and administered (Warschauer, 2003).

Learning organizations that promote knowledge sharing encourage the emergence of new ways to think and to get things done to the extent that they affect behavior (Garvin, 1993). Examples sought for this section are non-credit, non-profit programs that involve adult learners who entered the programs voluntarily. All are Internet based, multinational, and learner centered (no instructors, only facilitators or mentors). The primary goal in each project included discovering a new way to accomplish tasks and create processes through multicultural collaboration.

In the arena of nonaccredited, voluntary adult education, labor organizations have taken advantage of technology to exponentially increase their reach around the world. The Association for Progressive Communications helps over 50,000 non-government organizations (NGOs) in over 133 nations fight their cause electronically (Matthews, 1997). Labor disputes involving large TNCs, such as Coca-Cola and Bridgestone/Firestone, have been fought through the support

of cross-border alliances fostered over the Internet (Salt, 2005). Consequently, more labor organizations are turning to the computer to build membership and form alliances to protect workers in the new global marketplace. Their goal is to develop understanding of local problems within the international context (International Study Circle Program, 2007).

With assistance from the International Federation of Workers' Education Association (IFWEA), a study was done to analyze International Study Circles (ISCs) that ran from March 1997 to February 2003. Participants included 100 men and 78 women from 12 countries: Barbados, Belgium, Bulgaria, England, Estonia, France, Germany, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, Spain, and Sweden (Salt, 2005). Topics of discussion focused on globalization and its impact on the workforce. Findings from study include the following: (a) local issues dominated conversations rather than global issues, (b) participants had difficulty tying international experiences to local issues, (c) skilled facilitators were needed to keep the ISCs relevant to all participants, (d) an overwhelming sense of defeat by TNCs pervaded discussions, and (e) political orientations complicated discussions (Salt, 2005).

Comments from the mediators in this study, as reported by Salt (2005), stated that by encouraging discussions and debates, they constantly felt at risk for heightening differences rather than fostering unity. Additionally, language and computer usage were barriers. Local discussions were conducted in local language, but feedback was given in English, and it was decided that the language for international communication would be English. After this decision, the French and Belgian participants withdrew and formed their own ISC. Much of the feedback from the participants pointed to the fact that they wanted more human interaction. They suggested improving chat capabilities and other tools that promote direct contact, such as the inclusion of photos and videoconferencing. They also asked to keep written and oral language

less abstract for those not fluent in English. In the end, of the twelve countries that began the project, only three remained active. The countries that remained were the ones for which English was the dominant language and for which access to necessary technology was not an issue. On a more positive note, it was recognized that use of online technology helps reach more people and has the ability to strengthen a movement (Salt, 2005).

Another organization that recognized the potential of an online medium is the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), "a voluntary organization of 21 member countries who work to strengthen open multilateral trading systems by encouraging the flow of goods and services, capital, and technology" (Treuhaft, 2000, p. 51). The Telecommunications Working Group (TEL) is a subgroup within APEC that has been using online learning to achieve its goals. In 1996 a steering group from Asia-Pacific nations, including the US, launched a human resources development program that would use the Internet to encourage cooperation, develop web-based training, and develop a distance learning network. With assistance from Algonquin College, two specific courses were developed. In addition, a Phase II was implemented to address problems and to improve and expand the program (Treuhaft, 2000).

The greatest lessons from this project concern how to deliver online learning in a multicultural context. The main areas involve access to appropriate technology, accommodation for a variety of learning styles, and addressing fundamental cultural differences in how Westerners and Easterners approach learning. As Treuhaft (2000) writes, "developing and designing learning in such an environment calls for sensitivity to the needs of different learners from different backgrounds using different learning styles and strategies" (p. 53). Another overriding issue was language. Even though English is the official language of APEC, proficiency was not sufficient for all to take advantage of the course as it was designed. During

Phase II, steps were taken to simplify and standardize English in an effort to increase understanding and participation (Treuhaft, 2000). While an entirely different set of obstacles has presented itself, ultimately technology has allowed a greater number of citizens from a wider range of nations come together to work on a common goal (Treuhaft, 2000).

Latchem (2005) provides summaries of several case studies of online projects involving multiple nations. One involved the University of Melbourne Institute of Land and Food Resources Global Seminar, which has helped students "appreciate that perspectives and roles in seeking solutions to global problems are influenced by sociocultural, political, technical, environmental and ethical/philosophical considerations at the local level" (Latchem, 2005, p. 180). At Curtin University of Technology Business School in Western Australia, business students took part in hypothetical business negotiations between China and Singapore. Eight weeks of communication via the Internet and videoconferencing culminated in a videoconferenced negotiating session. "The exchange revealed differences in Australian, Singaporean, and Chinese values and practices and gave both sets of students valuable lessons in cross-cultural communication, exercising patience, gaining understanding, and building trust – all of which are essential in conducting business in Asian contexts" (Latchem, 2005, p. 182).

One of the largest organizations using information and communication technology (ICT) to reach a global audience is the Development Gateway Foundation (DGF). DGF is an international nonprofit organization based in Washington D.C. The mission of DGF it is to reduce poverty and enable change in developing nations through ICT. The foundation began as a World Bank initiative in the 1990s but incorporated in 2001. The foundation provides web-based platforms to support government, share knowledge, and connect and empower organizations in or for developing nations (The Development Gateway Foundation, 2007). One of its functions is

dgCommunities, a collaborative space where over 36,000 members from 200 countries share knowledge, tools, and contacts in an effort to reduce poverty and promote sustainable development. Participants join specific communities within dgCommunities that are of interest to them. Professionals with expertise in particular community areas can become community guides or advisors (The Development Gateway Foundation, 2007).

The Melton Foundation

The Melton Foundation was founded in 1991 after founders William Melton and Patricia Smith Melton were in Berlin shortly after the wall came down. The purpose was "to build a world-wide community of talented people from diverse cultures capable of addressing global issues based on the principal of open communication and mutual respect" (The Melton Foundation, 2007). The Foundation's guiding principle is stated as follows: The Melton Foundation is committed to bringing positive change in the world through a network of people from diverse cultures empowered by lasting bonds of friendship, open communication, and mutual respect" (The Melton Foundation, 2007).

Mr. Melton founded a multinational computer and telecommunications company in 1981. His expertise in this area contributed to his belief that bringing together talented young people and modern telecommunication technologies would foster new social forms among vastly different cultures that would benefit the participants as well as the world. The Melton Foundation prides itself on being one of the early adopters of technology, employing e-mail since the foundation's inception. Today fellows use a sophisticated Intranet portal that includes collaboration spaces, profiles, work portfolios, and channels for group work and for sharing information (The Melton Foundation, 2007).

The Foundation has five member universities from China, India, Chile, Germany and the United States. Undergraduate students are selected annually from each of the participating universities to become Melton Fellows and to complete the InterCultural Training Experience. They must meet several milestones in order to retain their fellowship that supports their participation through connectivity and travel. Upon graduation from undergraduate studies, junior fellows become senior fellows. They are expected to continue their work through and for the foundation and to participate in activities and workgroups of their choice. They also take on the role of mentor for junior fellows entering the program. Senior fellows are also expected to provide leadership within the Foundation. Based on interest and local and global needs, senior fellows join particular project groups, work teams, and interest groups to continue their Foundation work. Various discussion groups are also created for fellows to converse with each other on any topic they find relevant or timely. This Foundation relies heavily on technology as participants are housed at their home universities on five different continents. While they meet at the beginning of the program for orientation at one of the host universities and again at a closing symposium, the majority of their communication is conducted via the Internet in discussion rooms. The Melton Foundation is governed by a board of directors and managed by an executive and a staff (The Melton Foundation, 2007).

One of the factors impacting the identity of participants in these learning environments is language, the dominant language of the global economy even though over three-quarters of the world speaks no English at all (Warschauer, 2003). English is used in market transactions, science, international politics, and sports. Eighty percent of all websites are in English, and key international bodies such as the World Bank, the European Union, and the United Nations use English (Stromquist, 2002). "The rise of global English is the flipside of movements for local

identity; it represents the need for an international medium of communication for global economic, political, and social exchange (Warschauer, 2003, 95). In the study of the ISCs (Salt, 2005), countries for which English was not the native language withdrew from the project. However, no suggestions or recommendations for how to combat this issue were provided. APEC experienced the same problem but maintained English as the international language, though they allowed the use of simpler, more concrete English (Treuhaft, 2000). With the dominance of English comes the perception that online programs are inherently westernized, culturally and politically (Warschauer, 2003).

A major theme in the rhetoric concerning globalization is the dichotomous relationship between diversity and homogeneity. Global learning organizations attempt to meet the needs and interests of peoples from all cultures, which suggests a form of homogeneity. In the limited research available for these organizations, it seems that individual differences are realized and more pronounced after participation (Treuhaft, 2000; Salt, 2005; Latchem, 2005). Yet, this is not necessarily a negative, as some may surmise. The stated goals of these projects include the desire to understand other cultures by working together towards a common goal. While not all were successful in this either, communication lines were opened and many organizers and participants are determined to continue to improve the process and continue to use technology to progress the functions and expand the outreach of Communities of Practice and their learning communities.

Communities of Practice

With respect to education, John Dewey was one of the first major theorists to discuss *The Great Community* (Dewey, 1916). Dewey wrote about capturing the sense of community once had in small home towns and schoolhouses while in an urban and modernizing landscape. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey claims that citizens are simultaneously part of two

communities—those bonded by like-mindedness, and those joined by civic duty. The tension

between the communication within and across these groups is vital for maintaining a democratic

society (Dewey, 1916). Young (2000) criticizes community as a vehicle to suppress and exclude

those with whom the group does not identify, making community more exclusionary rather than

inclusive. According to Arendt (1958), space and place are conditions of community. Space

develops from a sense of familiarity, which may be positive or negative in nature. The process of

turning a space into a place involves participants finding out how to adapt the space to

accommodate daily use.

The discipline of education has adopted and adapted many of the early social theories to

explain the phenomenon of learning. Two of the leading modern theorists on the conception of

learning as a social process are Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. Their 1991 work, *Situated*

Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), presented a break from the belief that

learning is an individual cognitive process, and focused on the social engagements that permit

learning to occur (Hanks, 1998). They emphasize the action and practice that the learners engage

in. LPP refers to the process of newcomers becoming experts and masters in their fields or

communities. One of the major forces that helped create LPP as a framework was the advent of

technology in the areas of computational media, video, and presentation devices, which all

helped facilitate new modes of communication and collaboration (Pea and Brown, 1991). The

fundamental change occurring is described by Pea and Brown (1991):

> These technologies are dramatically transforming the basic patterns of communication
>
> and knowledge interchange in societies, and automating the component processes of
>
> thinking and problem solving. In changing situations of knowledge acquisition and use,
>
> the new interactive technologies redefine—in ways yet to be determined—what it means

to know and understand, and what it means to become 'literate' or an 'educated citizen.'

(p. 12)

Lave and Wenger (1991) express their issues with classical theorists who favor duality and concreteness. "A theory of social practice emphasizes the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning and knowing" (p. 50). Their other concern was that too much emphasis had been placed on learning either as an individual or as a community. "In reality, however, participation in social practice—subjective as well as objective—suggests a very explicit focus on the person, but as a person in the world, as a member of a sociocultural society" (Lave & Wenger, 1998, p. 52).

Lave and Wenger (1991) clarify that schooling and learning should not be confused. Often learning and teaching are treated as synonyms, yet they are not the same. Teaching, at least in the school setting, implies that there are pedagogical forces already in place, and that learning is often more prescribed than discovered. For these reasons, they purposely omitted school settings in their studies of LPP; rather, they focused on the learning that is achieved through apprenticeship.

One of the limits of the framework of LPP with respect to this study is that it focuses on communities of practice based on the transition from newcomer or apprentice status to exist in the same community of practice as a master or expert. This is not true for all communities of practice. Wenger's follow-up book, *Communities of Practice* (1998), focuses more on the identification and reification processes within social groups.

The three dimensions of practice that comprise Wenger's (1998) properties of a community include (a) mutual engagement, (b) joint enterprise, and (c) shared repertoire. Mutual engagement is more than a group of people in the same organization or in the same place; it

requires a commitment to community maintenance. An interesting and often overlooked aspect of such communities is that they focus as much on diversity as they do on homogeneity. The differences that people bring into the practice are what contribute to that practice being unique. Joint enterprise occurs as a result of collective practice and negotiation. Even when outside rules and constraints impact the community of practice, the manner in which the participants work within these constraints defines their specific enterprise. Wenger (1998) explains:

> Collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. Such communities allow people to work out common sense through mutual engagement. We all have our own theories and ways of understanding the world, and communities of practice are where we develop, negotiate, and share them. (p. 48)

With respect to learning, Wenger (1998) emphasizes the value of shared history. Communities of practice are often the result of generations that have passed down the ritual and practice within that community through what Wenger terms "memory." History in this sense is not completely an individual or collective history; rather, it is a "combination of participation and reification intertwined over time" (Wenger, 1998, p. 86). However, this concept does not specifically apply to this case study. The online group is a cohort whose members begin the programs simultaneously. There are no newcomers or old timers. While other cohorts had previously gone through the same program, and mentors are paired with new fellows to help ease the transition, the online portion of the fellowship is comprised of all new members.

Due to this being the case, the focus is more on how these members socialized within this setting. Power is equally disbursed from the onset of the program, at least theoretically, and no

one member has the benefit of having more history than another within the community of practice. Identity and practice are not separate; they are connected and share the following parallels: negotiated experience, membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multimembership, and belonging defined globally but experienced locally" (Wenger, 1998, p. 150).

Virtual Communities of Practice

With the onset of globalization, many organizations have increasingly found themselves dealing with a culturally diverse and geographically distant workforce. The need to synchronize a transnational organizations' different parts while overcoming the cultural differences and geographical distances, together with the advancement of virtual technology, have led to the creation of global virtual teams. Two important characteristics defining global virtual teams are their reliance on technology-mediated communication, used much more than face-to face communication, and team members working and living in different countries (Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000).

Interaction may also take place in a virtual world instead of real space and time (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). Rheingold (1993) defined virtual communities as social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace.

Virtual communities of practice (VCoPs) have been referred to as groups that use networked technologies to communicate and collaborate; they are designed, while communities of practice are emergent (Johnson, 2001). Wenger and Snyder (2000) prefer to call them *distributed communities*, as these communities generally connect in many ways, including face-to-face, although they may rely primarily on *virtual* communication. They use the term

distributed to describe any community of practice that may not rely on face-to-face meetings and interactions as its primary vehicle for connecting its members (Wenger et al., 2002).

An online community is different from the typical place-based notion of community. The Internet has sometimes been described as a highway or a network, but Palloff and Pratt (1999) argue that these metaphors can be replaced with one that depicts the internet as collection of electronic communities. Such communities can be consciously established by negotiating aims, ethics, and norms, in much the same way that face-to-face communities establish themselves. One particular benefit of online learning for building community may be that it provides a means of treating status differences that can arise in groups. Palloff and Pratt (1999) claim:

> The availability and number of personal interactions using computers is limited only by time and access, not by distance or social class. We can create, cultivate, and maintain social relationships with anyone who has access to a computer. Connections are made through the sharing of ideas and thoughts. How people look or what their cultural, ethnic, or social background is have become irrelevant factors in this medium, which has been referred to as the great equalizer. (p. 15)

Online participation in a group can be more thoughtful because students have an opportunity to think for a while before responding online, whereas in the classroom the more impulsive students have more opportunity to speak than do students who may need more time to reflect before providing a response (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). .

Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007) identify the benefits, barriers, and success factors in virtual CoPs. They primarily looked at European VCoPs created at higher education institutions for the purpose of sharing research. The major benefit, they found, was the ability of experts in a particular field of study to link with others to further research and understanding. The barriers

fell into two categories: technology and trust. Technology was key with respect to the access to it and the ability to use it effectively. The second category has to do with the ability to build trust and a sense of community without the face-to-face contact. Studies on trusting behavior emphasize relationships that are built primarily on face-to-face interaction (Daniel et al., 2003). The success factors included items such as ICT skills, cultural awareness, and good coordination and management of the interactions that lead to achieving the community's goals (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007). However, these studies represent only one of the potentially endless forms of VCoPs that can enhance not only education settings but economic, political, and social organizations as well.

Of particular interest in the new concept of community that exists in cyberspace is how participants formulate identity. "'Identity Practices' refer to the many individual and active moves that social actors make as a way of forming, expressing, and defending their identities (plural) in response to and in relation to one another." Sometimes these are private, and sometimes they are public or collective (Burbules 2000, p. 330).

Turkle (2004) explored the development and manipulation of identity in an online setting. With the growth of electronic communications, people have the ability to create identities for themselves functions such as screen names. False representation of demographic information is possible and probable. "On the Internet people may become fluent with the manipulation of personae but, in the process, may become less comfortable with their sense of having an authentic self. At the same time, mastering online communication can be a form of empowerment, particularly for those with cultural or social differences who traditionally have difficulties asserting themselves" (p. 42).

"Identity formation is a fluid and contextually driven process" (Suarez-Orozco, 2004, p. 177). Some do not notice parts of their identity until it is challenged. For instance, a Chinese youth may not recognize his ethnicity until he travels to a Western culture. Imposed or ascribed identity can also be a factor in development (Suarez-Orozco, 2004). Being black-African in the United States is different than being Irish. Race is always present for the African, yet for the Irishman it may be present only on St. Patrick's day or when the individual chooses to make his ethnicity part if his identity that is shown to others. This has interesting implications for online groups consisting of international members, particularly if all members are assigned typical names from one culture, or even numbers, yet they are from China, Latin America, Europe, and Africa.

Culture allows an individual to make sense of experiences. Maintaining connection with one's own culture provides a sense of safety and comfort. However, this is dependent upon how highly the individual values his culture of origin. It may turn out that there is greater affinity for a new culture. All of these factors contribute to the individual's identity (Suarez-Orozco, 2004).

Transcultural identities are particularly adaptive in this era of globalization and multiculturalism. "The key to successful adaptation involves acquiring competencies that are relevant to the global economy and to the human condition. Those who are at ease in multiple social and cultural contexts will be most successful and will be able to achieve higher levels of maturity and happiness" (Suarez-Orozco, 2004, p. 193).

Dube, Bourhis, and Jacob (2006) built a typology of VCoPs by reviewing 163 articles (including journals, conference proceedings, and book chapters), 10 books, and 9 research reports. They also collected data from 18 VCoPs that were implemented in 14 different organizations. Through careful analysis, they created a list of 21 structuring and descriptive

characteristics of VCoPs. These characteristics were categorized into four general categories of (1) demographics, (2) organizational context, (3) membership, and (4) technological environment. To varying degrees, these characteristics were found in the VCoPs, so the data is presented on a continuum defining each characteristic from the lowest to greatest level of complexity (Dube et al., 2006). The chart below is a modification of their findings.

Table 1

Characteristics Found in VCoPs

		Increasing Level of Complexity > > >	
Demographics	Orientation	Operational	Strategic
	Life Span	Temporary	Permanent
	Age	Old	Young
	Level of Maturity	Transformation Stage	Potential Stage
Organizational Context	Creation Process	Spontaneous	Intentional
	Boundary Crossing	Low	High
	Environment	Facilitating	Obstructive
	Organizational Slack	High	Low
	Degree of Institutional Formalism	Unrecognized	Institutionalized
	Leadership	Clearly Assigned	Continuously Negotiated
	Size	Small	Large
Membership Characteristics	Geographic Dispersion	Low	High
	Members' Selection Process	Closed	Open
	Members' Prior Community Experience	Extensive	None
	Membership Stability	Stable	Fluid
	Members' ICT Literacy	High	Low
	Cultural Diversity (same profession, language, vision)	Homogenous	Heterogeneous
	Topic's Relevance to Members	High	Low
Technological Environment	Degree of Reliance on ICT	Low	High
	ICT Availability	High Variety	Low Variety

Smith and Trayner (2008) explore various virtual communities and identify some of the aspects participants experience in this type of community. Their findings include the following*:* (a) reframing the online world as social, not just technical, (b) feeling recognized, ignored or misunderstood by other participants or by the facilitators, (c) noticing social behaviors,

relationships, affinities, alliances, and conflicts between people in the group, (d) recognizing others and starting to understand the existence of diverse views or 'language' (discoursal) differences, (e) becoming more self-conscious of online social conventions, (f) recognizing different roles (e.g. leader, supporter, interlocutor, etc.) and assuming one (even without knowing it), (g) feeling comfortable with tensions and ambiguities—and realizing that there may be social resources for handling them (Smith & Trayner, 2008). These factors present new concerns and challenges for communities of practice that have embraced both technology and global perspectives.

Summary

Globalization, represented by the increase in multicultural collaboration and the increase in the dependence on information and communication, is playing a major role in shaping modern knowledge sharing practices. As the forces of globalization continue to converge, there is little research available for the unique circumstances that a global online venue presents. The cultural, social, and political considerations that a diverse membership presents in a virtual setting should be a concern for those who design and/or lead such projects. This chapter presented available research that supports the foundations, methodology, and goals of this study.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The purpose of this case study is to examine the impact of globalization on community of practice (Kimble, Hildreth, Wright, 2000) using Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice model (1991). A qualitative research design was selected for this study, as it is phenomenological in nature and bound by a purposely selected case study. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What factors impact full participation in a global virtual community of practice?

2. What shared practices comprise and sustain a global virtual community of practice?

3. In what ways does culture impact participation in a global virtual community of practice?

4. In what ways does the use of information and communication technology affect participation in a global virtual community of practice?

Approach to Research

Qualitative design. Qualitative research design was developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. Qualitative research is an overarching concept that encompasses many types of inquiry intended to explore and explain social phenomena (Merriam, 1998). Results are trends or themes that are described in words (Patten, 2004). This approach often starts with the specifics of the situation based on observations. While observing, "some qualitative researchers consciously avoid considering previous research since it might color the way they look at a given situation" (Patten, 2004, p. 171). Merriam (1998) adds:

> Often qualitative studies are undertaken because there is a lack of theory, or existing
>
> theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon. There are thus no hypotheses to be

deduced from the theory to guide the investigation. Typically, qualitative research

findings are in the form of themes, categories, typologies, concepts, tentative hypotheses,

even theory, which have been inductively derived from the data. (p. 7)

Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews

and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions

(Merriam, 1998). According to Myers (1997):

The motivation for doing qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, comes

from the observation that, if there is one thing which distinguishes humans from the

natural world, it is the ability to talk. Qualitative research methods are designed to help

researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live.

(Overview section, par.1).

In order to conduct and evaluate qualitative research, it is important to know about the

various paradigms used. Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as a set of basic beliefs that

represents a worldview, defines the nature of the world and the individual's place within it, and

guides action. It also contains the investigator's assumptions not only about the manner in which

an investigation should be performed but also in how the investigator defines truth and reality

and how the investigator comes to know that truth or reality. In a later work, Lincoln and Guba

(2000) proposed that the values underpinning ethics and aesthetics be added to this framework

on research paradigms. They suggested that answers to questions provide an interpretive

framework that guides the entire research process, including strategies, methods, and analysis.

According to Merriam (1998), "One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that

reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective

phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured as in quantitative research" (p.

202). The distinctions among the various traditions and categories of qualitative research are not always so clear cut. There is considerable disagreement as to whether more than one research paradigm can be accommodated within one study. What is agreed upon, however, is that the optimal research methodology is one that reflects the worldview of the researcher.

The focus of this study is to examine in depth the phenomenon of participation in a specific global virtual community of practice rather than to determine any specific outcome or theory. The proliferation of virtual communities as platforms for knowledge sharing has attracted interest from several disciplines, yet despite growing interest, the overall quality and depth of research varies considerably (Daniel et al. 2003). One reason for this may be the research issues that cut across disciplines, such as the humanities, education, and technology, are limited in interdisciplinary methodologies for addressing the issues thoroughly (Daniel et al., 2003).

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a school of philosophical thought that underpins all of qualitative research that is acknowledged as a philosophy as well as a research method (Merriam, 1998). The concept was first introduced by Edmund Husserl, a European philosopher (Ray, 1994). The underlying philosophy of Husserl's phenomenology is that the only thing we know for certain is that which appears before us in consciousness. Phenomenology seeks to identify and describe the subjective experiences of a group or individual with respect to a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research relies on the investigator as the primary instrument for data collection and is committed to discovery and understanding through an inductive approach.

Moustakas (1994) developed a rationale for a phenomenological study that aims to determine what an experience means for the individuals involved while being able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings

are derived (Moustakas, 1994). This systematic approach to phenomenological data collection

and data analysis puts the emphasis on the human aspect of research, as well as the strong

interpersonal nature of the data collection (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological concept of

bracketing, or consciously setting aside one's prejudices, provides an autobiographical

component to the research report. "The researcher's excitement and curiosity inspire the search.

Personal history brings the core of the problem into focus" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). A

phenomenologist, prior to conducting interviews, must take some time to reflect on his or her

own life experiences with regard to the phenomenon being studied as a way to become cognizant

of prejudices and assumptions, often with an attempt to set them aside from the interview process

(Merriam, 1998). Moustakas (1994) adds that the final analysis becomes a blend of the real and

the imagined as information from the participants is influenced by the researcher's intuition and

self-reflection in an effort to present a unified understanding of the experience being analyzed.

Polkinghorne (1995) identifies three ways in which phenomenological research can be

useful. First, by providing a deeper understanding of what certain kinds of experiences are like,

practitioners can gain better insight as to how to work in their professions. Second, through its

exploration of situated human consciousness, phenomenology can help to make sense in

psychological and human terms of some of the findings of traditional research, which are

typically presented in statistical language. While statistics can be helpful in discerning a pattern,

they may not provide the meaning behind the patterns. Third, social action and public policy can

be informed by this type of research by providing genuine insight into the lives of those people

and groups that can benefit from the research (Polkinghorne, 1995).

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data

collection was conducted through observations of the online communication as well as through

group and individual interviews at the orientation meeting, which was held in Cologne, Germany in September 2008. Wellman (1999) acknowledged that asking the right kind of questions and adapting research methods to an emerging field poses many challenges. For this reason, a phenomenological approach to research bound by case study, conducted by a researcher who is enthused and professionally entrenched in the subject matter seemed the most viable combination of methodologies.

Case Study. According to Patton (2002), case study in itself is not a research method, as case studies may employ a variety of methods. Rather, case study is a process that constitutes a way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data. A specific case is a means of bounding a study, which allows for a deep and holistic understanding of the particular unit (Patton, 2002). Stake (2005) states that case study design is selected when the understanding of the case itself and its particularities and complexities is of very special and specific interest.

Effective case studies have two common themes: they are holistic and they are context sensitive (Patton, 2002). Stake (2005) defines a case study as a unit of analysis that is specific, unique, and bounded. The determination of the case impacts the purposeful sampling process (Patton, 2002). In this case study, the unit of analysis is the Melton Foundation's 2008 Intercultural Training Experience, which is a three-month orientation program for the incoming cohort of Melton Fellows. The qualitative case study design seeks to describe a particular unit in depth and detail, holistically, and in context (Patton, 2002). Accomplishing this required the use of methods such as observations and descriptions focused on the unit rather than just on the individuals who comprised the unit. Once the data were collected, they were organized into a comprehensive case package that allowed me to fully understand the situation and experience as a holistic entity, as recommended by Patton (2002).

The research process in this case study was inductive, as it built upon abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from the details provided by the participants and based in the literature (Patton, 2002). Analyses and results from this study are not intended to be generalized. The body of literature on global virtual communities of practice is relatively new, but it is expanding rapidly. The aspect of cultural identity seems to be one of the least substantiated areas with respect to global communities. Therefore, no existing instruments were used in my study; rather, rich, descriptive information yielded from the highly personalized interviews conducted in Cologne.

The Research Setting

Glesne (1999) suggests providing a detailed description of the research site to show that the findings of the study pertain to that particular location at that particular time. This is to help readers interpret and use information gained from the study. There were basically two settings involved in this research: the online portal and the orientation meeting in Cologne. Before describing these settings, I provide a description of the participants as a unit. Individualized descriptions of each participant are provided in chapter 4.

Participants as a Unit. The participants in this case study are college freshmen who were accepted to the Melton Foundation as trainees, the first stage that requires completion before becoming a Junior Fellow. Trainees embark on a three-month InterCultural Training Experience, which serves as an orientation to the Foundation. Trainees are selected annually through a highly competitive process from among the most qualified students at the five participating universities: Friedrich Schiller Universität in Jena, Germany; B.M.S. Educational Trust in Bangalore, India; Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China; Universidad de La Frontera in Temuco, Chile; and Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. Although each

university adapts the criteria for selection to its local context, the following represents the core expectations for all Melton Fellows:

(1) A first year, full-time student at the participating university;

(2) An academically outstanding student;

(3) Able to communicate well in English, both orally and in writing;

(4) Eager to interact with counterparts in other cultures through the use of modern technology;

(5) Shows potential to serve as ambassador of goodwill; able to interpret one's own culture to others;

(6) Interested in the attitudes, problems, and way of life of people of other cultures and eager to join an international community;

(7) Involved in the study of a foreign language;

(8) Has a track record of initiative, self-motivation, flexibility, leadership, responsibility, and seriousness of purpose;

(9) Willing to be an enthusiastic participant at, and an effective contributor to the annual symposiums sponsored by the Foundation;

(10) Able to make the commitment to attend the New Fellows Orientation, be a conscientious contributor to the workgroup discussions, be an active participant in the program at an MF institution through completion of undergraduate studies, and continue to serve as a fellow after graduation, actively working as a member of an international network. (The Melton Foundation, *Information for Applicants* section, 2007)

Approximately thirty trainees are selected annually to participate in a three-month InterCultural Training Experience. The trainees' program is conducted online and through the use of various multimedia formats. The group is divided into approximately five team-up groups, making each group approximately six members. The trainees are evaluated on their online journals (portfolios), which they are required to maintain during the program. The program is divided into three phases, with specific assignments due at the completion of each phase. The assignments are responses to a variety of short answer questions about their experience and participation in their team-up group. At the end of the three-month program, the trainees are evaluated by a committee, and a determination is made as to whether they will become Junior Fellows. Those selected are invited to attend the first face-to-face meeting of the trainees at a week-long conference in Cologne, Germany.

The sample in this case study is one team-up group within the InterCultural Training Experience program. This program meets the criteria of being a non-credit, non-hierarchical, multinational program that conducts the majority of its communication through information and communication technology, as opposed to face-to-face interaction.

The key to sampling in qualitative research is that it is done purposefully. It is generally accepted in qualitative research that the size of the sample does not have a bearing on the credibility of the study (Orcher, 2005), as results of the study are not intended to be generalized. To identify which workgroup participated, the Executive Director of the Foundation informed all trainees of my research intentions with a letter of introduction that I provided. Through the mentors assigned to each workgroup, I was informed of which groups unanimously provided consent. I monitored two separate team-up groups through the online portal during the three month period, printing and saving the postings in a notebook for easier review. I had been

forewarned by the Melton Foundation that there would likely be some attrition during the orientation period. Monitoring two groups improved my chances of working with one group that remained whole. This indeed ended up being the case. For this reason I made the final selection of interviewing the group that focused on human rights, which began and concluded with six participants. This was the largest group, and all trainees successfully completed the online orientation training and were invited to Cologne where they officially became Junior Fellows. The human rights team-up group also contained at least one participant from each country and a balanced gender representation.

Observation setting: the portal. The Melton Foundation prides itself on being one of the early adopters of technology, employing e-mail since the foundation's inception. Fellows and trainees use a sophisticated Intranet portal that includes collaboration spaces, profiles, work portfolios, and channels for group work and for sharing information (The Melton Foundation, 2007). The online portal allows password protected access through the Melton Foundation website, and as the researcher, I was given access to this portal. Trainees and fellows are able to navigate in and out of various groupings of fellows through the portal, and one can access threads and posts in any area. In addition to logging in to the portal, new postings are sent directly to your designated e-mail account. The subject line is coded to show which on-line group the e-mail originated (such as "trainees 2008" or "religion" or "human rights") as well as the originator of the specific post. Fellows and trainees can respond via their e-mail accounts or by entering the portal. During my observation period, I used a combination of approaches. At first I accessed my University of Georgia e-mail account to monitor discussions by the two groups I was observing. However, soon the memory for this account was full. I requested and received a temporary increase in memory from UGA's IT support after explaining the nature of

my study. I also learned from one of the MF coordinators that I could e-mail a command to a particular e-mail address which would then provide me the entire chain of e-mails from any particular group. I found this to be most helpful, as I could request the thread for a certain time period, print the pages, and store them in a notebook. I could then delete the messages in my inbox. However, I then realized that reading the various threads in this manner was confusing, as they printed the latest posting first, thus requiring that I read them backwards. Nonetheless, having all of this data in one place was useful.

  Interview setting: the orientation meeting. The MF holds an Orientation Meeting (OM) for the trainees each year in Cologne, Germany. Cologne is selected for its central location relative to the participating countries. For the 2008 trainees, the meeting took place the first week of September at a comfortable youth hostel that is just a short walk from the banks of the Rhine and a bridge that leads to the city center and the Cologne cathedral. Students were paired with a roommate and were provided meals in the dining room at the hostel. The hostel also provided meeting rooms for the various activities throughout the week. The OM is the first opportunity for the trainees to meet each other in person, so there is much anticipation for this event. There is also some anxiety, as each team-up group must present its deliverable, which is a presentation on the global issue assigned to them. As mentioned previously, the evaluation of the deliverable is on the process more so than the product. Yet the competitiveness among this group of students is evident as they desperately seek time to work together to put the finishing touches on their presentations. The meeting coordinators, while not wanting to minimize the value of the final product, schedule the presentations for very early in the week. They want to remove the pressure of making this presentation so the trainees can focus on the activities and enjoy the time they have with each other.

The week is devoted to activities that encourage discussion on multicultural issues. There are many ice-breakers and group activities, as well as presenters on a variety of related topics. Bill Melton also conducted a meeting via WebEx, during which the trainees were able to ask and respond to questions. Winthrop Carty, Executive Director of the Melton Foundation, conducted a similar meeting that explored with the trainees the mission of the Melton Foundation.

During the OM, the individual interviews were held in various locations such as a meeting room, stairwell, lounge, and my dormitory room. As the trainees' schedule was quite full, I tried to interfere with their activities as little as possible. The managers of the OM allowed me about 30 minutes to speak to the entire group to explain my purpose in being there and share some of my research on global virtual communities. As I was the only outside observer ever permitted to attend the OM, for which I will be eternally grateful, I wanted to make sure I was not interfering with their processes and goals. I also did not want to keep my case study participants from attending any of the planned activities. Therefore, my interview schedule was dictated by the meeting agenda. This did not pose any problems, other than I intended to conduct the group interview after all of the individual interviews. Due to scheduling and flight departure times of the trainees, I had to hold the group interview earlier in the week than anticipated. See Appendix B for the interview schedule.

Data Management

Data Collection. The process of data collection was consistent with the aims of a phenomenological case study, as it was divided into field notes of observations of the online discussions, individual face-to face interviews, and one group interview. My observations of the week-long orientation meeting also provided me with a solid understanding of the Foundation and allowed me to observe how the trainees in my study interacted in a face-to-face setting.

My presence as an observer of the online discussions held in this team-up group was not intrusive. This may have been due in part to the fact that communication was asynchronous, thus avoiding any sense of my observing them as they wrote. Trainees logged on at their own convenience, posted, and logged off. I logged in to the discussion room at least weekly throughout the three-month program to observe the communication to take note of patterns and levels, content, group dynamics, and characteristics unique to each participant. It was equally important to notice what was not happening as to notice what was, noting, for example, behavior such as extended absences or lack of initiative. I also noted any behaviors or discussions that warranted follow-up during the interviews at the end of the program. With respect to Lave and Wenger's (1991) community of practice model, I was conscious of noting how the online community of practice compared to the characteristics of a traditional community of practice. While this was not a comparative study, using Lave and Wenger's list as a guide helped me to notice particular behaviors in the group.

The majority of the data collection came from the interviews, the instrument of choice for qualitative research (Patton, 2002). "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of the others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). The goal of these interviews was to provide an understanding of how the participants experienced participation in a global virtual community of practice. Patton (2002) recommends that the interviews are informational and conversational and that interview guides permit the researcher to probe and pursue topics or issues that arise. Therefore, questions were designed to elicit feelings, opinions, behaviors, sensitivities, and background information. The questions changed slightly from interview to interview as themes begin to emerge, which is

consistent with the phenomenological approach. The key to maximizing interview results is to establish rapport between researcher and participant, something not permitted in quantitative interviewing (Patton, 2002).

I conducted one-hour, individual, face-to-face interviews with each of the participants, as well as one group interview. An interview guide was used for both the individual and group interviews. The reason for choosing this approach was that some of my questions were derived from the observations of the online orientation program. I used a set of core questions that supported my four research questions guiding this study, but additional questions emerged as the observations of the online communication ensued. Since I had only one opportunity for face-to-face encounters with my participants, I exercised the freedom to explore topics that emerged. All communication leading up to the meeting in Cologne was conducted online. The participants' online communication was printed and stored in a notebook. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

Data analysis. Inductive data analysis is dynamic and emergent, as the qualitative design dictates that data collection and data analysis be conducted simultaneously throughout the study (Merriam, 1998). While some strategies are identified with certain traditions or themes, others have emerged as general approaches to any qualitative data. As this study is phenomenological and seeks to present a holistic description of the case based on individual participants' input, I employed the constant comparative method of data analysis.

The constant comparative method of data analysis is a prevalent process in inductive analysis (Merriam, 1998). As its name implies, it requires the researcher to constantly compare information between and among participants or groups. First developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method is used as a means of developing grounded theory. By

comparing ideas and incidents from one participant or group to those of another participant or group, the researcher can create categories within and between the data, ultimately deriving a new theory to explain a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). While this particular study is not a grounded theory study, it is inductive and the constant comparative method allowed me to identify themes and categories that emerged between and among the participants. This practice provided a holistic description of the case.

This study employed several levels of data analysis, which were consistent with the constant comparative method. First, data was categorized chronologically, topically, and by participant. Based on observations of the online communication, the analysis involved making inferences to create a model that provides a "conceptual overview of the landscape" (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Merriam (1998) suggests linking the categories in this manner will show how they work together in some meaningful way. I developed this before I conducted the face-to-face and group interviews, as the interview questions were derived from the categories identified throughout the process. I reviewed the hand written notes taken during face-to-face interviews for comparison with transcripts. I did this to ensure that any additional comments I may have made during the interview were reflected in the transcripts. I then read the transcripts from all participants three times before making any notations on the transcripts. This allowed me to gain an overall perspective on the general themes that were emerging, as well as on any outlying comments from some of the participants. I then read the transcripts again and made notations regarding themes and categories. This process required several readings and numerous alterations to the categories and themes I developed. I then created a new document and began listing these themes and categories. The next step included re-reading each transcript with the purpose of identifying specific statements by participants that addressed each category. I cut and

pasted these quotes from each transcript into one document. As I saw overlap in the areas under which the various statements could be placed, I reconsidered the titles of the categories in an effort to merge and rename. I then reviewed the categories and the content of each to determine which research question each addressed. The final product enabled me to create the chart in chapter four and categorize my findings by theme. I then re-read the transcripts again, while comparing concepts to the table, to ensure that the categories accurately reflected the themes that emerged during the interviews.

As an example of the coding process I implemented, following are three passages from the transcriptions from the participants. These were examples of some of the dialogue that occurred during the conversation about the impact of the participants' national identity on the team-up group. The underlined sections contain words or phrases that were repeated among the participants. As I began to recognize the repetition, I would cut and paste these words and phrases into other documents organized by category. These passages became part of the categories of Organizational Culture/Identity and Global Culture/Identity.

Table 2

Sample of Coding Process

Participant	Mitra	Dirk	Shantel
Passage	Culture doesn't have very much impact on our group because we are so diverse already. Like you saw in our cultural presentation yesterday, all of us, each one of us in our group speaks a difference mother tongue. The foundation wanted the true meaning of the work intercultural, then they should have taken the exact culture out of the countries. There are guys in India who wear that	I think in a special way we are very similar. The reason for this is not that our countries are so similar but we are all studying ...and in this way they also have liberal thinking. But in this way I also think it's a problem, thinking that all this culture is so similar. We must remember that all of these people in the Melton Foundation are a very special group in their country. I think the normal Indian guy is	We all seemed to have very similar views about these types of topics. A lot of us are very open minded. A lot of us would say that we would not judge other people.

	traditional dress every day. It is part of their culture. Or, I don't know. Maybe they should have taken some conservative Chinese. But they didn't. <u>They took the global mindset. So I think they are selecting minds that are already similar.</u>	really different from me. But in <u>this special society there are more similarities</u>. But normal people are not as similar.	
Categories	Global Culture Organizational Culture National culture not important	Organizational Culture Global Culture Selection Process	Organizational Culture Global Culture

Validity and reliability. To get the highest degree of accuracy in the findings, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest prolonged engagement at the research site to provide scope and persistent observation of the elements that are most relevant to the study to provide depth. I achieved this by using the constant comparative method with the observation notes throughout the three-month program. Triangulation is also a valuable method of increasing accuracy in data. One way to achieve this is by collecting data in various formats, such as observations and interviews. Glesne (1999) suggests utilizing multiple readers as well as having the participants themselves confirm interpretations and conclusions that will increase the accuracy of the reporting. The group interview provided another opportunity to allow participants to respond to some of the findings I had at that point. I asked questions about common responses as well as about some of the outlying comments I heard. The interviews were conducted after the three-month period, as I did not want to have any impact on participants' behavior during the online orientation program. Additionally, since all participants, other than those from Dillard University, were communicating in their second language, I felt it was important to verify with the participants the intentions of their words. After the transcriptions were completed, they were sent via e-mail to each participant to ensure that all information contained in the transcript was

available for me to us in the analysis. All participants agreed, based on knowing that their identities would be withheld.

Another way that I increased accuracy was by declaring any limitations of the study by identifying the information that was not available. I recognized that I would not have access to any conversations conducted outside of the online discussion forum. This occurred occasionally when students met by via Skype or conversed through instant messaging. Additionally, I was not present for any conversations that occurred on campus among trainees and the Melton Fellows. Through the interviews I learned that many discussions occurred on the physical campuses that supported the trainees' experience. While the content of those conversations may or may not have affected my findings, the fact that the participants used vehicles outside of their designated virtual community (the portal) was an important factor to consider when drawing conclusions about the study.

Fontana and Frey (2000) found that "gaining trust is essential to the success of the interviews, and once it is gained, trust can still be very fragile. Any faux pas by the researcher may destroy days, weeks or months of painfully gained trust" (p. 648). How quickly a researcher gains trust depends heavily on how sensitive the research topic is and how personal the information is that must be divulged. Before conducting this study I had anticipated that gaining the trust of the participants was going to be an obstacle in my ability to observe. However, this was not the case. The executive director of the organization endorsed my participation; he has a strong history with the Foundation, and the students were aware of this. The mentors in the group introduced me to the participants and sought their permission for me to observe. All were very receptive to my presence and seemed flattered that their program was of interest to a researcher. I provided as much detail as possible to the participants so that they understood the intentions of

my study and recognized that their identities would not be revealed. Fontana and Frey (2000) add that gaining such trust is a matter of treating people like people and not like distant subjects that are of no concern to the researcher. If the subjects feel that their best interests are valued, then they will share accounts and stories of their lives. Providing the participants with information on me, my status as a student and researcher, and my experience with online communities helped them understand that I had much in common with them.

An important factor to consider as I collected data was that the majority of the participants were communicating in their second language. I anticipated that since the communication was online and asynchronous, participants would have adequate time to formulate responses in English without being put on-the-spot. Through the interviews I realized and the students attested that English was not a problem for them. I also believe that my training as an English-as-a-second-language instructor helped me interact with the international participants in an appropriate manner.

The group interview was held at the end of the second full day of activities. I had the team-up group remain in the meeting room at the conclusion of one of their group activities. At that point, I had conducted only two of the six individual interviews. Through the group interview, the four trainees that I had not yet interviewed were given a preview of the types of questions I would be asking them individually. By comparing the depth of the responses of my first two interviews compared to my last four, it seems this preview gave the students more time to reflect on their responses.

When I compare my first interview and my last, there seemed to be a progressive improvement with the level of comfort the trainees had with themselves and with me. It is difficult to discern whether or not the trainees' comfort level was due to their personality or due

to the fact that their highly anticipated OM was either just underway or near completion. Those

whom I interviewed after a few days of the OM were clearer during their discussions with me,

particularly considering how abstract the Foundation is as well as my study. This may be due to

that the fact that the topics of discussion and of activities throughout the day were closely tied to

the topics I addressed in my interviews. As a researcher, I feel this added depth and reflection the

responses I received from the participants. However, I feel it is necessary to acknowledge this as

it influenced the responses. The trainees were immersed in multicultural and globalism rhetoric,

so my questions were quite natural for them. This should be noted if my study findings are

compared to other studies. For example, a similar study on a GVCoP focused on manufacturing

practices and comprised of production managers of all ages from middle America may produce

different results (as evidenced in the studies in Chapter 2). The participants in my study were

already global-minded and well prepared to discuss the topics I presented.

      Researcher bias and assumptions. Glesne (1999) emphasizes the importance of being

alert to biases and subjectivity. Declaring such biases and subjectivity in reporting will help

others as they interpret and apply findings and conclusions. My selection of this topic and case

study was driven by my interest in international exchange and multicultural collaboration. I

believe that my participation in an international internship and overseas travel have been the

most meaningful learning experiences in my life. Not only do I see value in understanding other

cultures, but I believe that one can learn the most about individual identity through immersion in

situations that highlight and challenge the hegemony of one's own culture. I also believe that

optimal learning experiences are those that cause a certain level of cognitive dissonance due to

having to maneuver amidst unfamiliar practices and value systems. Growing up in an immigrant

household allowed me to recognize practices that were unique to my family and not part of the

average American household. I recognized at an early age that culture is one of the strongest forces that underpins almost every aspect of our lives.

This particular case study attracted me because of its mission in connecting people from a variety of cultures in a manner that encourages understanding and collaboration. I am alarmed and saddened by how few people, particularly Americans, participate in exchange programs, but I recognize that it is an opportunity that many simply cannot afford in terms of time and money. Many more just don't value the experience – until they have one themselves. I am excited at the idea that technology can change all of this. Even though there are costs associated with being a Melton Fellow, the process is an experiment that explores how technology can provide cultural exchange regardless of geographic limitations. I believe that online and face-to-face interactions are, by nature, different. For this reason, I am not interested in determining which is better. Rather, I am interested in what themes and obstacles emerge in a global virtual community of practice. I am hopeful that the level of learning and understanding that is achieved in this case study far surpasses that which the participants would have reached in their traditional school settings. I also hope to find that their participation sparks a lifelong commitment to global citizenship and multicultural understanding.

To fully disclose my connection to the Melton Foundation, William and Patricia Melton, founders, are the step-father and mother of Karen Fox, who is married Steve Beeson, a friend from my undergraduate studies at James Madison University. I was in search of a case study for my dissertation around the same time that I met Karen for the first time. She had just returned from a Melton Foundation symposium in Chile and, after a long and invigorating conversation, she provided me with the link to the website. At Steve and Karen's wedding, I approached Bill

Melton with my idea of conducting research on his foundation, to which I obviously received a favorable response.

Chapter Summary

Conducting research on an emerging field is a challenge due to the lack of existing instruments and hypotheses. This chapter presented the theories and approaches that informed this research study, as well as the reasons they were selected. Based on the nature and goals of the study, as well as the worldview of the researcher, the study was employed a qualitative approach through the constructs of phenomenology and case study. Descriptions of the unit of study, the observation setting, and the interview setting provide insight as to how the data was collected, organized, and analyzed. Also presented in this chapter are the steps taken to ensure validity and reliability while considering the biases and assumptions of the researcher.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The previous chapter provided a description of how the research methods were employed and a description of the interview settings. In this chapter I describe the results of the data analysis. I present themes that emerged from an inductive analysis across the data from the six participants and from the participants as a group. The themes are categorized by the four research questions that drove this study.

1. What factors impact full participation in a global virtual community of practice?

2. What shared practices comprise and sustain a global virtual community of practice?

3. In what ways does culture impact participation in a global virtual community of practice?

4. In what ways does the use of information and communication technology affect participation in a global virtual community of practice?

A table of the compressed themes extracted from the findings of this research project is provided, followed by a summary of the findings.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
Understanding the MF: Faith in selection process	Availability of mentors	Institutional Identity of the Melton Foundation	Value of ICT
Accepting the abstract	Physical pace for f2f support	Identity of a Global Citizen	Synchronous and Asynchronous Channels
Trust among members	Democratic processes	Individual Identity	Availability of Tech Fellows
Language obstacles and support	Openness to ask questions	National Identity	Impact on Exchange

Impact of evaluation on participation Proximity of participants	F2F meetings	Identity of the CoP	(vs. collaboration) Pronounced similarities among participants
Balancing responsibilities outside of CoP			

Participant Profiles

Before sharing the research findings, I am including some additional details on the participants in the team-up group that was the focus of this study. The Melton Foundation accepts only 30 trainees from five countries each year. These trainees get to know each other quite well, as do the Junior Fellows on each college campus. The participants in this study were concerned with their identities being revealed due to the limited number of individuals who match their descriptions. For this reason, I am quite general in their descriptions, and all names have been changed. Much more is revealed about each participant through the interview responses. The criteria for selection as a trainee are specific and the selection process yields individuals who are very similar in age, life experience, and world view, and who have a similar, strong dedication to academics and career. Following is some additional information on each of the participants in the team-up group in the case study.

Shantel and Trina are from the U.S., and both attend Dillard University in New Orleans. Shantel is from the Midwest and is majoring in broadcast journalism. Her career goal is to conduct international humanitarian work. Currently she is involved in student government. Before coming to Cologne, she had not been outside of the U.S. Trina is from the same home city as Shantel. She attended a military high school and is majoring in psychology. She had not been outside of U.S. before coming to Cologne.

Dirk is from Germany. He is a student at FSU studying chemistry and political science. He had traveled to China with his family for a brief visit. His father works in technology and has regular interaction on an international level.

Shao is an engineering major from China. He had traveled to Japan once before on a structured tourist visit.

Gabriela is a nursing major from Chile. She had not traveled outside of Chile until the OM. She has participated in an online group before that included participants from other countries. She speaks English eloquently and says she learned it mostly from British media.

Mitra, from India, is majoring in engineering. He traveled abroad once to Spain and spent time living with a work associate of his father's.

All of the students were amenable to speaking with me. I found they are keenly aware that they are part of a unique organization that is difficult to define. As a result, they don't often discuss the MF with their friends and classmates that are not part of it. I got the sense that they enjoyed speaking to me, as an outsider, about the MF, as they rarely have the opportunity to do so. They are all proud of their association with the MF and view it as an integral part of their plan to achieve their long-term career goals. All the participants, with the exception of Trina, exuded confidence and a strong sense of themselves. Trina seemed more shy and insecure. I did not observe Trina taking on a leadership role at anytime throughout the week other than during social activities. Trina was an alternate and was added later to the organization at Dillard due to another trainee withdrawing. While she did not implicitly express that this impacts her behavior, observations of her suggest that she is somewhat insecure about her involvement in this group of very outspoken, highly motivated ensemble of future global leaders. Shantel, the other American in the team-up group, has a very strong sense of confidence that seemed to enable her to take

more risks without fearing how she might appear to the other participants. She relied heavily on her past successes and her admirable goals to carry her through this experience, and appeared to be quite successful.

Data Results

RQ1: What factors impacted on full participation in a GVCoP?

Understanding of the Melton Foundation. An established and universally accepted belief among the Melton Fellow trainees is that the Melton Foundation is a prestigious organization not only on their university campuses but also in the realm of global associations. The selection process to become a trainee is selective and competitive, and candidates are evaluated on a variety of qualities. About the selection process, Shao said,

> The most significant feature is that it is very competitive. You can prove that you are suitable for those kinds of intercultural experiences. As I looked around and saw my peers that do so many excellent things like you, you don't know what your chances are.

The MF offers intercultural experiences and international travel, so it is highly revered on these campuses. Gabriela said the MF is not publicized well enough at her university in Chile. She heard of it only through word of mouth, or "gossip." While the Chilean, U.S., and German participants said they were not up against hundreds of candidates, all commented that the quality of the 30-40 candidates at each campus was intimidating. Candidates were aware of the types of students who were Junior Fellows—top students involved in many activities in their university and in their community. The prestige associated with the organization was strong and highly respected at all campuses.

The selection process provided the trainees with an in-depth understanding of the process of becoming Junior and Senior Fellows. They discussed the mission of the organization and

learned about the various projects around the world that are supported by Senior Fellows. Shantel said, "We were fully drilled on [the mission] during the training, so I had a good idea what [the Foundation] was all about."

Through this type of dialogue, candidates came to understand that the segment of the MF experience during the undergraduate years is to prepare them for Senior Fellowship to carry on the mission of the MF through their various professions and civic activities. They also know that the MF will provide funding for international travel for the rest of their lives, as long as they remain active in the organization. This lifelong commitment to the MF is discussed frequently.

Dube et al. (2006) created a typology of VCoPs identifying structuring characteristics that promote long-term sustainability of the community. Studies on the factor of "orientation" revealed that "a VCoP has a greater chance at being launched and successfully developed if its mission is in line with the overall mission of the organization" (p. 75). As the mission of the MF is to foster intercultural understanding, the members of the team-up group are keenly aware that their participation is a microcosm of the greater picture of multicultural communication. Participants were also impacted by the degree of institutionalized formalism within the MF. Dube et al. (2006) define this as the degree to which a CoP has been integrated into the formal structure of an organization. As the VCoP is considered a formal unit of the MF, and it is fully integrated, its value to the long-term of organization membership is well recognized by the members.

Much time at the Orientation Meeting (OM) was devoted to how the MF is a way of thinking and acting that provides a positive impact on the world through intercultural understanding. The orientation period is purposely structured to ensure that trainees understand the objectives of the MF. Due to the open discussions and continuous linking of the activities to

the mission, the participants could easily articulate the type of individual that MF was seeking.

Mitra stated,

> They selected us. Why else would they select us? Why was there a selection? There was
>
> a selection because they wanted certain type of people. Perhaps people who are open
>
> minded. Or have a global culture or intellect or viewpoint. Why would they want that?
>
> Because they want to integrate these minds, educated minds that could build a network or
>
> to build a global world or something. That is what the Foundation is striving for.

The trainees know that meeting the requirements of the orientation process determines if they

can meet and sustain the standards of a Fellow. The amount of time and effort expended on

learning about the organization creates a strong sense of identity among fellows.

Findings from previous studies show that the member selection process has a strong

impact on the personality and functionality of a VCoP (Plant, 2004; Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

The MF, with its highly selective admission process, can practically guarantee that members will

be share similar world views, thus making management of the VCoP easier (Dube et al., 2006).

Accepting the abstract. Despite the trainees' understanding of the quality of character of

Fellows, trainees had a difficult time explaining in concrete terms the MF as an institution. I

contextualized the question by asking them how they describe the organization to their friends

and family. Their answers had in common words such as "intercultural understanding" and

"Internet," but there was a clear level of frustration as they attempted to explain what the

Foundation is and does. Gabriela stated,

> This is what I struggled with at the beginning, it was a very long winded explanation, I
>
> would say it was a program that deals with intercultural exchange and communication; it

deals with Internet platforms and an annual symposium…and I actually didn't understand when I got into the Foundation that there is a lot of slang and…acronyms.

Shao added,

This is the very question that I am afraid to ask because it is very hard to answer….I don't think just knowing those activities can tell you what is the Melton Foundation. I myself am just starting to know now what it is. This comes from chatting with friends from other countries. It is very hard to explain.

One trainee from FSU withdrew after only a few weeks. Dirk, who had worked with her during those few weeks said, "there was really no context. So it was really abstract those first four weeks. She didn't like it in this way. And I can understand it; it was so abstract in this way." He said that e-mails were from people she did not know, yet they were using words such as "family," "team," and "friend."

According to Dirk, "Before team-up groups there was just a lot of socializing and getting to know each other. This was very abstract, with strange names." He added,

The funny thing is that the English word 'Foundation' is really strange…so I say the Melton Schiftung…it's like a…a…secretive…cult…but more because of the [acronyms and abbreviations]. So when I speak about the Melton Foundation with another guy, I try to use German words so it doesn't sound so strange.

In trying to define the MF, the trainees readily talked about a demanding schedule of work and meetings; however, they struggled with trying to explain the intangible. Toward the end of the OM, the coordinators referred to the "spirit" of the orientation. After hearing this concept, and upon reflecting upon the trainees answers to my questions, it seems this is what they were trying to explain. They accepted and believed they were in the early stages of

becoming part of a very great thing. Defining it, while frustrating, did not hinder their enthusiasm for wanting to become a Fellow.

Findings drawn from the professional literature highlight the way a new concept of community that exists in cyberspace can call into question how participants formulate identity. There are many individual, public and collective moves that participants make as a way of forming, expressing, and defending their identities (plural) in response to and in relation to one another (Burbules, 2000). The trainees seemed to have little difficulty describing their own identities, and even the collective identity of the MF. However, they struggled with providing descriptors of their team-up group. While there are no prior findings on the concept of a "personality" for a virtual community of practice, there is a fair amount written on the various components of VCoPs that seem to elude definition. Such components include trust, tacit knowledge, (Wenger et al., 2002), and social capital (Putnam, 2002). However, according to Daniel et al. (2003) there are limited numbers of empirical studies that attempt to measure such concepts as primary outcomes. A standard measuring approach for such concepts has not been developed, as they are multivariate, multidimensional, and multidisciplinary. Even measuring concepts such as communities is problematic, as sociologists and anthropologists have struggled unsuccessfully over several decades to agree on a standard definition of a community (Daniel et al., 2003).

Trust. While many factors contribute to a successful community of practice, virtual or traditional, trust is one of those factors that, if absent, can stunt its ability to function (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Literature on social capital also brings trust to the forefront as a central variable (Daniel et al., 2003). There is much debate in the research on how virtual communities build and sustain trust when members do not interact face-to-face. In this case study, the issue of trust

seemed to be impacted more by the belief in and commitment to the organization as a whole than to the individual relationships among trainees. Due to the rigorous selection process, demanding orientation schedule, and overall mission of the organization, trainees seemed to have an automatic or inherent sense of trust in each other. Shantel said,

> Well, I don't know about everyone else, but when it came to trust, just knowing that everyone online had applied to be in the MF and was accepted into the MF, if they all made it so I knew they would automatically do their part to get it done.

> All agreed that they entered the community with a sense of trust; it was something that

could only be lost. The trust extended beyond the trust in the fellows; it extended to the process of becoming a member. There were no concerns or complaints over what may have been perceived as unnecessary requests or tasks. The fact that they were being monitored and measured supported the trust they had in the Junior Fellows (JF) and Senior Fellows (SF). Trainees wanted affirmation that they, too, were the quality of the MF. Trina added,

> I feel like someone who wasn't motivated would have never even applied to be in the MF. So when they are in this group, they are motivated to make it happen. So there was no reason to not trust them. I mean, I was hoping it would be like that…without any doubt.

Sentiments from Gabriela were similar:

> I'm thinking that [trust] is more of my default state, and there is a risk there. When I meet a group of people, I have no reason not to trust them. If they give me a reason for not trusting them then, yeh, I won't trust them later on. But that was not the case.

> Some of the literature supports the statements from the trainees. Wenger and Snyder

(2000) point out that many VCoPs cross boundaries across workgroups, organizational units, and

organizations. The level of trust increases as the similarity among the members of the work group increases, meaning that a VCoP with a more limited membership will have members that experience a higher level of trust and willingness to share knowledge. The MF is an exclusive group, and the online communities are not open to outsiders. The specific community in this case study was limited to trainees. While they were from five different countries and universities, they had a strong connection to the trainees from the other campuses.

It is widely accepted that trust develops primarily through face-to-face encounters (Daniel et al., 2003; Schell & Black, 1997). Research findings focusing on social capital in virtual communities, which relies heavily on the variable of trust, shows that geographical and cultural distribution impacts the amount of information members have with each other, thereby limiting the ability for trust to develop (Daniel et al., 2003). This held true for some of the members of the team-up group.

Dirk did not have such immediate faith in the process or the interaction with him team-up groups:

> When you look and you see only names and you e-mail them and, I don't know, we Germans are not like the Indians and Americans who loved it and said 'Yeah, oh, we like it so much and we are all now family and let's do this and we are all one team.' And this in Germany sounds very strange. Yes, you have only e-mail names and you are so far away. Everybody would say now we are a big family. Yeah, the bonding in Germany functions a bit different.

While Dirk did have some reservations about instinctive trust between individuals, he had trust in the overall process and expressed little concern with respect to his team-up group's

ability to meet its goals. If any doubts arose, Dirk, as other trainees, relied on the Fellows at his campus to reassure to have faith in the process.

Language. Shared language and codes allow for access to people and to information (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown & Duguid, 1991), and impacts how people and information are perceived. According to Daniel et al. (2003), members of a community who share a common language are able to, over time, negotiate and evaluate the benefits of the exchanges among community members. In the MF, all communication is in English, yet the trainees recognize English as the global language and the non native English speakers appreciate this opportunity to improve their skills, particularly through the use of ICT. During the interviews, and even during the week-long event, none of the participants brought up the issue of language as an impediment to participation. The acceptance of English as a global language and as a necessity is discussed early on in the selection process. While researchers agree that shared language impacts the construction and maintenance of communities (Daniel et al.,2003), less formal boundaries can actually promote the assimilation of new knowledge and allow for easier integration of new members (Wenger, 1998).

When I asked about the disadvantages of having to communicate in a second language, responses were that it limited how expressive the trainees could be. Using a second language also impacted the desire to take on a leadership role. For example, Shao said,

> Of course it was a disadvantage. The first thing I had to do was slow down my work speed. Since everything is in English I have to spend more time getting everything comprehended. Actually, after the team-up group I had to spend more time there, so I have been rather inactive in other channels. And other times I had to ask people to restate things they have said because I am afraid I have misunderstood what they mean. Of

course if it were in Chinese I would have been more active. If this were a Chinese group all speaking Chinese, it would have been easier for me to take more of a leading role.

Some worried about not understanding items correctly and, at first, were afraid to ask for clarification. This was for two reasons: (a) The trainee did not want to sound like he/she did not understand, and (b) the time it took to get clarification was too great. He/she chose to assume what was intended and move forward that way. Dirk said, for example,

One time I think what does he or she wants? I don't know? Then Shao writes, "I don't understand you." And I think awww, thank god, god bless you, Shao, that you also did not understand. And then I say to myself, why didn't I write that I don't understand it? So then I think OK, next time that I don't understand I will write back and say please write it in another way. I didn't do this and I think that was not so good of me.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) was regarded as a strong support mechanism for non-native English speakers, as it gave them time to formulate answers and use the dictionary. While body language helps considerably in communication, they found it beneficial to have time to look up words and form deliberate answers. Gabriela said,

English really isn't a problem for me but I did try to take some time and I was not so spontaneous. E-mail is such an excellent tool that is thinking about it and sitting on it and actually crafting an answer that is more meditated in that way. I think in a discussion room a lot of things can cost you a first impression. So if you just sit on it for even five minutes, you can get a completely different opinion.

Dirk said,

I can express me much better [in German]. When I write in English I have to think--don't be so direct. But I want to tell them what I think, so it comes to directly and so hard. Then

everyone things I am direct and the Germans are so direct. But I want them to know what I want, so this is a bit difficult. So in a German group I can express myself much better and I know how German readers will understand me. You understand the coding. And so sometimes this is a bit strange. And sometimes mails from the other groups are not so clear, and I didn't always understand what they want. Yes, I think online it is a bit more difficult. Online sure I have a dictionary, but in person it is much faster. I can say, can you repeat that and it's just a few seconds. In e-mail if I say please tell it again then I get the next e-mail one day later. And I can two days later write back. So it takes much more time.

The concept of coding, or understanding cultural connotations of words, while not explicitly stated, was alluded to by others as well. Shao said,

When you write it out, not in a live meeting, you can check again and again to make sure you are not misunderstanding something. But I think face-to-face talk is also good. Like face-to-face talk—maybe two persons—you can talk it out, you can use body language, also some physical things to make you understand. But a Skype meeting or with six people around, it would be a nightmare for me, I think, because you could not stop and ask "Could you say that again and again?" That you can't do.

During the group interview, the non native English speakers shared their appreciation of e-mail as a vehicle to communicate and felt it leveled the playing field somewhat. Dirk said, "When you read something that you don't understand, you can use your book [dictionary] and look into it. When I something write and it is a bit more complex, I can also have a look in the dictionary." Gabriela responded:

Yes, I agree. When you have a meeting or are talking like this, it is easy to forget

something or not know how to say something. But in an e-mail you can take your time

and try to get it all. You can think "Did I forget to say anything?" before you send it. You

can be more concise. You can write things that are well thought out. So you can even

afford not to forget anything that you would maybe forget in a live meeting.

Perfection with respect to grammar and spelling was not paramount for the majority of

the participants. Trina said,

I didn't really think about it. I would see grammatical errors but I wouldn't really think

about it. But for this to be their second language, and I don't really know how long each

person has been really speaking it, but they communicate really well. Better than some of

the people from the United States. So it was good...tt sure made it easy to be the editor on

my team.

Shao concurred with Trina regarding the issue of grammar:

Of course with spelling I can always use a dictionary, but the trainees all speak English a

little differently, so everyone's grammar is a little different. It was not so important that

mine was always correct as long as other people can understand what you mean.

Grammar and spelling were not important to all of them. Gabriela wanted perfection in

her responses. However, the others were more concerned with meaning. As long as they

understood each other, they did not concern themselves with grammar and punctuation.

Evaluation. The trainees felt that the most important factor in their performance

evaluation was a completed deliverable and their contribution to it. Yet, the primary vehicle for

evaluating the trainees' contributions was through their portfolio. While the portfolio was used to

document the trainees' participation in the team-up group, the focus was on the process and their

reflection upon their participation in that process. There were three phases for portfolio submission. For each phase, trainees had to respond to questions that required them to reflect and comment on their participation and their group's performance; however, the level to which the portfolio evoked reflection varied among the trainees. Shao said,

> Writing a portfolio you can't have your true feelings expressed because the questions are fixed…It's not as good as you and me sitting here because you can understand what I mean by other things than just words. The portfolio was supposed to be feedback from us, so it wouldn't mean anything to compare our responses to the others. I don't think the portfolio should be a very important part of the evaluation because it is just asking your feelings and the ideas that you have; there is not really a criteria.

Shantel saw the portfolio quite differently, as a very strong and specific measuring tool. She said,

> The portfolio was really tedious. Because you had to write a certain amount, you wanted to make sure you wrote that certain amount. You want to make sure it wasn't a bunch of bull. You wanted to make sure that they read the information and saw that you were vital info that they can actually tell that you were taken time out to fill this out and that you are really giving something to you group.

> Trainees did not see each other's portfolios; they were available only to the evaluation team at each campus. Trainees were aware that they were being evaluated, though the extent of knowledge of evaluation differed by country. At the beginning of each phase, questions were posted. Trainees were given a certain amount of time to write their responses and submit. They could rewrite as often as they wished, as only the final submission was recorded. Mitra seemed to have received the most feedback from his evaluation team on his portfolio, which he appreciated. He said,

They would just give advice…it definitely helped because we don't know what they want—like if we are working well enough. I know I am saying that we don't have to send a set amount of e-mails, but that doubt is always there. So they told us that it's not about how many we send; it's about what we send. Is it good enough? Does it arouse something?

With respect to how much the portfolio made the trainees ponder their performance, only Trina used the word "reflection" or admitted to putting a lot of thought into her responses. She said,

Sometimes I needed to just think about things. I didn't have the answer right away. I know on the last part they asked us about the team-up group. In the first portfolio it was about getting started. And one was about the Melton Foundation guiding principle. It was about interpreting it and using it in everyday life. You read it once and then you sit down and read it again and then you really reflect on it.

There was also wide disparity with how integral the portfolio was to their performance rating. The activity resulted in being a form of a self-check for each participant, ensuring some self-assessment of participation and performance individually and as a team-up group. All felt it was a positive or at least a necessary component of the process. For example, Mitra said,

Yes, that took time, but that is how we got judged, so we had to fill it out. But that portfolio was something that we didn't ever know if we were doing enough. After each portfolio deadline we had a meeting with the group and the lead fellow. They told up basically what was wrong with our portfolio, if we should work harder, or if we are absolutely OK. If there was something wrong, like when I was sick, I just had to explain that. It would be different if I had been partying or something like that.

An interesting situation arose during the group interview. The extent to which it evoked the intended level of reflection was difficult to assess. It seemed to play a larger role in some trainee's participation than others. The desired outcomes of reflection may also occur with each individual at a different time, so knowing the full benefits of this exercise cannot be assessed during this study.

The trainees' choice to participate in the VCoP was the same as their choice to be in the MF; participation was a non-negotiable condition of membership. The subject matter of the VCoP was less significant to both the trainees and the MF as compared to the process and the significance of completing the deliverable. McDermott (1999) points out that engagement depends on the value a topic brings to both the individual and the organization. While desire to be a JF was very strong for each participant, the support from the MF and the trainees' desire to be considered the same quality of other Fellows provided an almost automatic sense of obligation to be a full participant. In addition to participation being compulsory (at least after the trainee chooses to be a trainee), all trainees enjoyed the process and the interaction with members from around the world. Palloff and Pratt (1999) maintain that virtual communities that are well constructed, learner-centered, and learner-empowered encourage self-reflection and promote the use of critical thinking and knowledge sharing among members. This provides a sense of responsibility for producing pieces of learning that will be useful for the others in the group. If learners are trusted and empowered, they realize that they are the experts at their own learning (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

Proximity. A unanimous concern within the team-up group was the difficulty in coordinating meetings due to the range of time zones covered. The team spent much time deliberating on a time to meet, but even when one decided upon, other commitments kept some

of the trainees from participating. Some participants had class; for others it was the middle of the night; and for others there was no access at that time to the technology. The group recognized that having all members present was virtually impossible, and they seemed to accept it. For example, Mitra said, "All the time everybody…everybody had limitations with meetings, with…everybody knew what was required and everybody stood up for it, so that was good."

Some of the trainees continued to meet on MSN or Skype because it was an efficient way to make decisions and it provided opportunities for discussion. Asynchronous communication was inefficient when trying to make many decisions, particularly regarding roles or deadlines. A member of the group would post the meeting notes afterward for the rest of the members to see. There did not seem to be any animosity regarding decisions made while members were not present. This was an understood practice, and there were still many ways for them to contribute. I asked the trainees to think about how things would have been different if their team-up group was from the same campus. Gabriela said,

> It would have been very different because I would have had more access to them in person. I could have met them a lot more offline than online. And, it would have been easier to get a hold of them sometimes because that was very hard sometimes to get a hold of them when they are 1,000 miles away. I actually had to go to other trainees in other team-up groups to say hey, can you check to see if that person is checking their e-mails?

The two US trainees from Dillard shared the same hometown. Trina admitted to relying heavily on additional communication with Shantel to ensure she had all of the information and deadlines correct. While they were at DU and while they were working from their homes on summer break, Trina called Shantel frequently.

The limitations due to proximity were recognized and accepted by all team-up members. It is and will remain a factor for all virtual communities of practice to reconcile. Wenger et al. (2002) found that the physical distance encourages psychological distance and that it takes more intentional participation efforts from members and from the VCoP's leader to keep the community alive. Wenger (1998) also suggested that communities that share tacit knowledge have greater success than those that share explicit knowledge. It seems that the ability to develop and recognize the tacit knowledge was hindered by the lack of face-to face interaction.

Balancing responsibilities. It naturally follows that the quality of students accepted into the MF lead busy and active lives. First and foremost, they must carry a high GPA. In addition, they had to show leadership skills and the desire to contribute to their communities. These trainees must constantly negotiate their responsibilities to their universities, the MF, various activities, families, and friends. I asked them how they prioritized and managed their time. Regarding school work, MF work, and organization responsibilities, all found these to be woven together. Gabriela said,

> They are all linked together. If I don't do well academically, I cannot be here. If I don't do well in school I am not fulfilling that part of the Melton Foundation which is academic excellence. If I am too hectic with the things I have to do, I will try to do my school things first or try to delegate something with the Melton Foundation and say I am just too busy with something else. But this would only happen at the extreme limit. I can usually handle both. It just takes very long nights.

The MF valued all of these things, so letting one lapse would affect the other. They did express that they would often just have to deal with whichever deadline was first, and several admitted to having friends and family tell them they were too busy. Mitra said,

I can't really say the school is more important or the Melton Foundation is more

important. It's very relative. Like if I have to submit my deliverable tomorrow, then that

is the most important thing. If I have an exam then I just forget everything and prepare

for the exam. It's all relative and it's about striking a balance.

They felt they all had decent time management skills and that the MF was forcing them to

improve these skills. Their responsibilities to their CoP were very much entrenched in the greater

picture of their lives. Shao added,

School is the most important, but I don't think that during our training period it is such a

conflict between those two. We have work but we have time period for that work; there is

a deadline, maybe a week or two weeks to do that work, so we can allocate it anywhere in

this week. We know when we will be busy for schoolwork. I may be busy later in the

week for schoolwork, so I know I have early in the week for Melton Foundation work, so

it is not a problem.

To prioritize their responsibilities, trainees had to look at how the MF fit into their

personal goals. Shantel commented,

I was looking for something to build upon what my high school had instilled in me.

Because I come from a very diverse high school where like we're not really learning

about other cultures that we have, but we worked all together the different teachers and

the different students in my school. I know I attend an HBCU and I still wanted to; I

didn't want anything I already learned to go away. I didn't want my mind to close or

anything so I made it my business to be in the Melton Foundation. And I knew it would

be a good opportunity with the traveling and everything. And it would probably get me

interested in studying abroad. Just help me to ensure it and progress myself….My career

will be international. I want to go into broadcasting, but I also want to be an international

humanitarian. Down the road I'd like to be involved in public policy. So this will

definitely help me.

The challenge of balancing responsibilities was clearly shared by all members of the CoP.

Their approach to doing so was quite similar and rooted in their understanding of how the MF fit

into their lives and goals. This mutual understanding among the trainees provided a comfort level

and seemed to allow them to give themselves permission to not lose sight of the other demands

in their lives. They all alluded to the value of their individual contributions, recognizing the

responsibility of making themselves valuable in order to contribute to the strength of the entire

organization. Mitra added,

> If the Foundation lives to its potential, we can do some really good work, and good work
>
> in every field. We have the potential to come up with a very different product that we
>
> have never imagined before. That is the change we are talking about. Change that is
>
> really different because so many different minds come together. I think my answer may
>
> be very confusing. But it is because we are so different, we are so alike. And that is what
>
> I see as the strength of the organization. We focus a lot on culture and difference in
>
> culture and difference in thinking. We bring different brains, different intelligence,
>
> different artistic abilities….When we become senior fellows some of us will remain very
>
> good friends. Some of us will go into very different professions. Some will be in
>
> psychology some will go into marketing. If you make a psychologist and a marketing
>
> person meet, then you can get some very good human relations. Stuff like that I'm talking
>
> about, some collaborations that we maybe would not have seen unless we are senior
>
> fellows. It may do some good for us; some good for people around us.

The literature supports the concept that the more relevance the topic of a VCoP, the more engaged its participants will be (Wenger & Snyder, 2000). These findings with respect to participation support the three dimensions of practice that Wenger (1998) identified, which include (a) mutual engagement, (b) joint enterprise, and (c) shared repertoire. The commitment to community maintenance was an overarching theme supported by the responses from the participants. Their collective practices and negotiation impacted the community of practice and the manner in which the participants work within the constraints of their virtual space.

RQ2: What shared practices that comprise and sustain a GVCoP?

Mentors. There were several avenues trainees could use for support during their training. (1) Each trainee was assigned an official mentor, a Junior Fellow (JF) from his or her campus. (2) Within each team-up group there was at least one mentor. In this team-up group there were there were two. These individuals did not interfere with the online communication within the team-up group, but monitored it to ensure that work was getting done. The trainees knew they could ask questions of these mentors at any time. (3) Trainees could rely on all JFs at their campus. (4) Each campus has a designated "Tech Fellow" identified as the primary contact for technical training and support.

For support and mentorship, the trainees relied most on the JFs at their home campus. These JFs were instrumental throughout the selection and orientation process, so the trainees felt quite comfortable with them. Once students were selected as trainees, they were immediately welcomed by the JFs. About this group Gabriela said,

> They were the ones I actually depended on the most. They gave me a manual and I read
> it, but I didn't understand a lot of things. Everyone was open and willing to answer any
> questions I had. And I did have my own campus mentor, and he did help me a lot with

the manual. And then we had campus meetings just for the manual. And then we had a

campus meeting just to set up our e-mails so it wouldn't be so overwhelming. We even

had a meeting where we reviewed the slang. So we had a lot of preparation in that sense.

Shantel felt similarly:

It [the on-campus group] was very, very, very important. They were good students. They

made our transition very smooth. They helped us with whatever we needed help with. As

soon as we got in we hit the ground running. They knew that they were [graduating], so

we did a lot together.

Due to the uniqueness of the MF and the fact that it is a strong community, trainees

tended not to seek support or advice from individuals outside of the organization. As stated

earlier in this chapter, the difficulty in explaining the MF to others basically precluded

"outsiders" from being able to provide sound advice with respect to participation. For example,

Shao said,

This experience is not something that you can talk to about with just anyone on your

campus. They don't have the experience to reply so many e mails each day. And also,

they don't have the intercultural experience.

Shantel had similar comments:

When you're going through something as rigorous and as tedious as this training process,

you want someone you can talk to and say "Oh, I'm going through this" and "Did this

happen to you?" They can tell you how they got through it. You just want someone you

can let your load off to and they will understand and help you through it.

Each campus has a designated space—an office or room—for MFs to congregate to

work, socialize and hold meetings (at FSU this space is shared with international students).

Trainees at all campuses found much support and encouragement from the JFs and enjoyed spending time in the "Melroom." While the JFs were not part of the online team-up group, they were the first the trainees turned to with questions or concerns regarding the team-up groups. Since all JFs had been through the same process, they provided much support and reassurance. It is important to note what is clearly missing here—while it is clearly the goal of each trainee to become a JF, trainees did not express any sentiments indicating they were treated as anything but equals among the JFs. Information flowed freely with respect to providing assistance and guidance as the trainees navigated their tasks. For example, Mitra said,

> The trainee experience online is one thing, and face-to-face experience with your mentor is another. When you go to Melroom you can talk to anyone who is in there. It doesn't have to be your mentor. In a meeting there is an agenda, so we just talk about that agenda. The fellows from the other semesters we can talk to about anything. If we have any doubts about anything we can clear it up. And we can talk about any random topic you can say we're talking about this on e-mail, what do you think about this? And this is good. It's part of the experience—getting different ideas from different people.

It seems the trainees were more apt to turn to their on-campus support group for help than ask their fellow team-up group members.

Some trainees spoke with other trainees about their groups, but they provided much less of a support group. Shao said,

> Well, at one point I was not certain about what was going on in the training process and what would happen after, so I asked some of the other fellows how theirs was going. For example, one of us was very anxious about his or her group. It seems the group was stuck at some point and everybody seemed to disappear. Then a junior fellow said to just wait.

If you push harder or just wait everything will be fine and it will work out. So, he just

kind of eased us a lot.

The team-up group relied very little on their designated online mentors, except for asking

technical questions regarding how to submit work and to check to see if it was received properly.

They also did not specifically rely on their tech fellow, though all were glad to have such a

designee at their campuses. Generally any JF could answer the technical questions, as all used

the technology regularly. Interestingly, the trainees relied least upon the other trainees on their

campus, with whom they rarely spoke about their deliverables or issues with their team-up

groups. The trainees didn't feel confident that they were getting accurate assessments of how

poorly or how well the other groups were doing. During the group interview I asked the team-up

group to compare themselves to other team-up groups, and none could answer because they

know so little about the other groups, even about who comprised the groups.

It seems the trainees were most concerned with hearing from their mentors—or the JFs in

general—that what they were experiencing was normal and OK. The deliberate lack of guidance

from the Foundation on the online collaboration was somewhat unsettling to the trainees, but

assurance from the JFs that this was normal made them feel better about the process.

Democratic practices. Leadership of a VCoP can be appointed (Gongla & Rizzuto,

2001; Lesser & Everest, 2001), or roles may emerge through interaction (Lesser & Storck, 2001).

It is by design that the Foundation does not dictate the process of completing the deliverable.

Schwen and Hara (2003) found that when CoPs are built with a top-down approach, there can be

unintended negative consequences. Less prevalent in the literature, but nonetheless a strong

argument, is the belief that online knowledge sharing lends itself to becoming standardized and

efficient to the point that diversity and individuality are lost (Rose, 1997). Carr-Chellman (2005)

suggests that the use of English and the familiarity to certain technology already predispose certain groups to adapt better to the online learning format. Democratic in nature, online classes involve a less hierarchical structure, with the instructor often taking the role of facilitator. Whether this is believed to be positive or negative, it does pose challenges to student who are not used to such a format.

> Those who see great potential to Internet communication believe that a knowledge-based economy will give birth to a world without experts or leaders by promoting instead the creation of working groups without hierarchies in which everyone contributes more or less equally to the solution of complex problems." (Stromquist, 2002, p. 76)

The MF values the negotiation process required of the trainees as they designated a leader and other group roles. Consequently, each team-up group met via e-mail and was left up to its own devices to determine how to reach that goal. All team members commented on the slow start they had. One recommended that they choose a moderator for each week. All agreed with this idea. However, as they moved forward with this plan, they soon encountered several problems. First, the time lapse between sending and reading e-mails was often 24 hours, due to the range in time zones and each trainee's availability. Therefore, a week could pass with only minimally completed communication. Then, the first moderator grew very ill and had to move out of his apartment to receive greater personal care. He did not have Internet access during that time, so he was completely out of touch with the group. One team member grew anxious with the lack of progress and took it upon herself to begin steering the group. She was not completely comfortable doing this; however, she was even more uncomfortable with not meeting deadlines. From this point on, she was the leader of the group. She began calling synchronous meetings to

discuss roles and deadlines. While not all members could make these meetings, the information was shared with all in a timely manner. No one seemed to oppose this process at the time.

Interestingly, the first time they reflected upon this process openly was during the group interview. Trina said,

> With the leader it just kind of fell into place. You could just pretty much tell that she needed to be the leader. I mean, we elected each other or we put ourselves up there and volunteered ourselves. Oh, I'll do this part or I'll do that part. That's how I fell into the role of being the editor. I knew that was a task that I could handle, so I was like, I know we're supposed to experience new things, but I didn't want to do it with this. It's not just me I'd be experimenting with; it's with the entire group. I knew I could handle the task of being the editor, but I couldn't have designed the website. If they would have told me to design a website, I would have been like, yeah…I'd probably still be working on it.

Mitra added,

> We had opposing ideas right from the beginning, but this was not a problem. We had no problem saying what we thought, and then we just voted and whichever way got the most votes is how we did it…very democratic. We didn't even give the opportunity to convince others, we just went with the winner.

Each member was asked to describe the process of assigning roles, and each basically told the same story. The natural leader took over, meetings were held, roles were assigned or volunteered for, tasks were discussed, and deadlines were set. No trainees objected to how this process unfolded. All felt they had a say in decisions. Sometimes they used surveys, but more often than not they just posed questions in e-mails. All appreciated the leadership role Gabriela took, and all were comfortable with allowing the majority to rule when decisions had to be made.

Shantel said, "There just didn't seem to be any tension with these types of things. No one was upset that this topic didn't get selected or this topic did get selected. We were still laid back and just rolled with it. We just did it."

During the group interview Gabriela said,

I'm really glad that you feel that because I didn't really feel that good about it. I don't really like to do it that way, but I did it at the point where I couldn't really wait anymore. He did say that we were done five days before the deadline, but that was when everyone sent in their information. I actually worked up to the last day. I had sent it in a very tight time slot because I had to arrange the information and get all the details done. So I'm really sorry someone was annoyed by me at some point…yes…I'm sorry.

After this, the rest of the group said they all thought she did the right thing and were thankful for her lead. She seemed very relieved as no one had discussed, until that point, how everyone felt about the way roles and deadlines were assigned.

Fontaine (2001) found that clearly assigned roles are an important factor in sustaining a VCoP, as they help the participants to legitimize what they are doing. Once the assignments were made there did seem to be some relief among the trainees, particularly for Gabriela. The trainees were able to then focus their time on the project rather than the negotiations. All team members commented that meeting deadlines and creating a good deliverable was the most important part of this project. There were no hard feelings over who did what. Even when meetings were missed or e-mails did not get responded to in a timely fashion, there was trust among the team-up group that each was contributing what he or she could, and that there must have been legitimate reasons for not making a meeting. Two factors that contributed to the success of the group were their commitment to their goals (deliverable and becoming a Junior Fellow) and their adherence

to clear deadlines. Students selected for the MF are top students with many accomplishments. Therefore, it is expected that they will work hard and be successful. The majority of the pressure to succeed came from themselves. They did not want to let the team down and took responsibility for their portion of the project. To these ends, it seemed apparent that the trainees had a very understanding of what it meant to participate fully. Gabriela said,

> I would describe an ideal participant as someone who is respectful of others and their opinions and respectful of themselves in that if you disagree you can say it. I feel everyone is entitled to their own opinion, and it is respectful of oneself to admit it and say it. Other things, responsibility, possibly time frames, deadlines, anything like that. And, or even actually saying, this is too much for me. I can't do it by myself. Possibly that's it.

The others' definitions all focused on tasks and deadlines.

Mitra added,

> The team-up group was not a competition. The competition was over when we got selected. The team-up was to see if we are dedicated enough. The team-up we used 99% for work. Sometime you might say one thing to one person, but the team-up group was really for work [not socializing].

Openness to ask questions. Non-native English speakers shared the concern that they were getting the correct meaning from the e-mail messages. Despite their comfort levels with the group, there was some resistance to asking for clarification on certain exchanges, but often this was due to the time it entailed to get responses via e-mail. Dirk also mentioned that it was difficult to understand Shantel via Skype. He did not want to ask over and over again for clarification, so he did not. After this experience, he preferred communicating via e-mail. Several of the members of the team-up group said they experienced confusion over Shao's name and

were unsure of the participant's gender. However, no one asked about it. I asked Dirk about this, and he said, "It's a strange question. It's uncomfortable." In hindsight he recognized that it would not be awkward to ask this question, because no one was sure. "But at that moment I didn't know," added Dirk. Now that the members had met face-to-face, they agreed their conversations would be even more open and take on a social nature.

Gabriela, who self-described herself as shy, said,

For a new generation of trainee, I would recommend that they don't hold back, because that is what I did at the beginning. I am actually a very shy person, but I was so excited about meeting people here that I forgot I was shy. But I would recommend them not to hold back their ideas or opinions because no one is telling them they are wrong. And everyone is very open and very friendly. Everywhere—on campus, off campus, online— everywhere through the portal everyone is very friendly and welcoming, so that is one of the [advice] I would give.

Dirk had similar advice:

I will tell them to start more personally. "Hi! How are you?" In this way the work will not be so official all the time. Then I will know the other guys and I will know who cannot be a good moderator of the group. I think the roles can be better assigned like this.

As an observer of the online communication and face-to-face communication among team members, I saw stark differences. While respect was ever present, the openness was much stronger in the face to face meetings. Mitra was pleased with the ability to discuss certain topics with other trainees. Regarding the students from Dillard, he said they were very open about discussion racism in the US. Likewise, subjects like Pakistan and the Hindu-Muslim rivalry are often considered taboo, yet in this forum, it was common conversation. He added,

It's like what the media wants to show. But there's lots of stuff that they chose not to show. We get to know the other side. Each of us can see the other side of cultures, something different than what you see on TV or read in the newspapers or in books....So this is what it's like when we meet together. It's a big doubt clearing session. And everybody seems very enthusiastic about it.

Face-to-face meetings. It is generally accepted that ICT will never be a perfect substitute for face-to-face meetings, and most VCoPs need some fact-to-face time to be the most effective (Daniel et al., 2003). Sustaining a VCoP long-term requires strong personal relationships, which are best established through face-to-face meetings (Kimble et al., 2000). The setting for these interviews was at the OM, the first opportunity for these students to see each other in person. There was a high level of excitement surrounding this event. I questioned the trainees on whether they would have preferred to meet in face-to-face fashion before beginning the online orientation portion of their training period. I received mixed responses. Shao and Dirk would have preferred to meet the group face to face. Shao said,

I think it would be different because if you meet somebody beforehand and then you are communicating online, you would have an image about each other. Then when we were communicating online it would be more like pretending you have face-to-face because you would have that image. When you open your e-mail and you are writing to a Western name, not a Chinese name. This makes the person even more of a stranger and more like a computer.

Trainees agreed that most of the communication was very impersonal and the motivation to communicate was purely task oriented. There were few attempts to socialize. Dirk felt similarly, stating that it is difficult to form a bond with someone else without taking the proper

time to do so. He felt discussion was the best way to accomplish this. He also commented that he felt he was talking to a computer. He did not understand the other members who chatted about personal things. Dirk does this in his personal life with his friends (e-mail and facebook), but to do so with strangers was not comfortable. During the interview he said that he would advise others to start earlier with socializing electronically.

Trainees who appreciated the online time before the meeting did so because it provided a channel to learn about each other without judging by appearance or culture. However, Trina is also the individual who stated that when she met the person face-to-face said, "Oh, this is who you are!" She did not indicate that this changed her perception of who the person was, but it was more like finding the last missing link. Mitra commented that it was interesting that upon meeting face-to-face he immediately knew someone so well. He liked this aspect of the OM and of the entire process. Shao believed strongly in the value of nonverbal communication and also in being able to put an image to an e-mail address or screen name. For example, he said, "I think that the online family did not make me feel, like that close. It was basically working stuff. So I'm not motivated to communicate socially."

Regardless of their responses to that question, all felt that their communication online would change now that they had met in person at the OM. It would be more personal and meaningful, and when it came to dividing work they would have a better sense of the roles each should take.

RQ3: What is the impact of culture on a GVCoP?

Wenger & Snyder (2000) found three levels of cultural influence that must be considered when evaluating a CoP: national, organization, and professional. Dube et al. (2006) found that all VCoPs rest somewhere along a continuum of homogeneity and heterogeneity when it comes to

the cultural diversity that exists in these three areas. Hofstede (1993) shows how concepts of management and professional relationships and processes may be formulated and interpreted differently in groups that contain members from various cultures. These differences may amplify other issues, such as communication and collaboration. Organizational diversity may require that members of different organizations may have to adjust their practices and behaviors in order to work effectively with others (Hesselbein & Johnson, 2002). Professional diversity is supported by the specialized terminology, values, norm, and knowledge base that come from various professional groups (Cramton, 2001).

Before observing and interviewing, I made the assumption that questions regarding culture would yield insight to the nature of negotiations with individuals from different countries or with different national heritage. While there were some overtones of behavior that arguably stemmed from national identity, the trainees' concept of culture provided an array of perceptions that supported the similarities and differences in the group. Several cultural identifiers surfaced during this study, listed here in order from strongest to weakest: (a) culture of the MF as an organization, (b) identity as a global citizen, (c) individual identity and personality, and (d) national culture. The concept of national culture includes the understanding of one's own cultural heritage, understanding each other's, and understanding what others perceive as their own and each others' cultural identity.

Culture of the MF organization. The selection and training process provided to the trainees a strong sense of the MF culture. Trainees were immediately enveloped into the Foundation through meetings, online participation, mentors, and spending time in the designated MF space on campus. For all, this was a very positive experience. MF espouses that it is a way of thinking, acting, and interpreting the world in an effort to bring peace and understanding. This

goal is very attractive to participants, and they seem anxious to learn how they can contribute to this goal. The on-campus groups support trainees through immediate acceptance, an open and welcoming environment, and the sense that each fellow has something special to make him or her a contributor to the greater good. The MF pays much attention to the vocabulary and acronyms it uses, partly to ensure that all participants speak a similar language. As the researcher, I was often corrected when I used incorrect terms to identify MF groups or events. The importance of this unified speak is valued by all, and the trainees mentioned how they used their on campus groups to help understand this aspect of the Foundation.

An intrinsic part of the Foundation is the international travel, which is attractive to all trainees. The MF pays for all travel association with symposia, which provides opportunities that some of these students may not otherwise have. Additionally, the MF supplements travel for senior fellows if a trip is organized that includes MFers from at least three countries. These opportunities are like carrots dangling for the trainees, and the desire to be part of this is very great. Identifying with this group becomes the overriding factor. Mitra stated this poignantly:

> If the Foundation wanted the true meaning of the word intercultural, then they should have taken the exact culture out of the countries. But they didn't. They took the global mindset. So I think they are selecting minds that are already similar. They are not exactly molding minds to accept other cultures when they are so strikingly different. We are the same kind of people from different cultures. The point is not to show that the cultures are similar, because that is wrong, they are not. But, they are getting more similar every day because of globalization. Now we are able to every day find some similarities in these cultures. Like, would the Melton Foundation have existed 100 years ago? I don't think so. I think it has to exist today because the world is getting smaller; globalization.

What Mitra and the other trainees seem to be alluding to is the perception that only the elite benefit from globalization. Some use the term "hyperelite" to suggest a "post national culture for which borders and local culture are irrelevant (Watson, 2004). Participants in this category have the means to travel often and may have a multicultural background. Individuals who leave their developing nations for educational opportunities in the West may also fall into this category (Watson, 2004).

The strength of the Foundation's identity and purpose seemed to override the disparities among the cultures, particularly during the orientation program. During the OM, certain activities were implemented with the goal of reminding trainees that while they share this level of similarity, they are grounded by their national culture in many ways that may not be readily apparent.

An interesting observation I made during the week of events occurred when the trainees were asked to sign an agreement stating that they would uphold the spirit of the MF. While this contract was more figurative, and there were no stated ramifications if the trainee did not abide by the agreement, the trainees from Germany at first refused to sign it. They argued that the spirit of the MF was impossible to define, and there was no clear way to prove or disprove that they were upholding it. They did not want to be held responsible for something that was so intangible. After many discussions with the coordinator who was from Germany, they reluctantly agreed to sign the document. While I did not conduct any formal research to understand what was happening with the trainees from Germany, the coordinator, who is German herself, said it is not uncommon for German youth to be skeptical of formalized contracts. This concept was reinforced by a Senior Fellow who was a guest speaker during the OM. He was over the age of 40 and grew up in East Germany. He was a trainee in the Melton Foundation before it relied so

heavily on ICT. He said he is very mistrustful of electronic communication and the idea that anything he says online could possibly be used against him at some point in his life. There are clearly remnants of the darker period in Germany's history that still impact social behavior. I suspect that with time, this may change.

Global citizenship as a culture. The concept of a Global Citizenship has been growing more prevalent in the literature since the 1990s with respect to politics, education, the environment, and technology (Putnam, 2002). The definitions vary, but generally all indicate that a global citizen lives with the consciousness that actions affect humanity regardless of borders, governments, and religions. Mitra's description of the culture of the MF so closely aligns with these definitions:

> The Foundation has chosen the same standard of mind from all of these countries not because we represent our cultures, but all are global. They read a lot, they watch the news a lot. They have moved out of their country's culture. They just can see the broader picture a bit more. And that's very good to connect. Otherwise there would be fights. There would be fights between Americans and Germans, fights over Hitler and Gandhi, fights over philosophies. We still disagree a lot, but we can ask about different viewpoints without fighting because we can look at the broader picture. Intercultural understanding is reciprocity. It comes only when the mind is a bit broader. If anybody is too much into their culture, it becomes a bit too conservative, and that's not possible in the Foundation.

The MF selects trainees who think a certain way and who have the ability to look beyond the confines of their own borders. In this way, they see more similarities than differences in each other. Global citizens are generally described as those who are less tied to place and more tied to

function. This holds true for these trainees as they identify more strongly with the views of the MF than with those of similar cultural heritage. Even among the MFers from the same country, cultural differences were clear. During one group activity, two of the DU trainees described how different their lifestyles are, even though they are both young black men from California. The group from India shared that they each spoke a different native language. Dirk saw two sides to this phenomenon:

> I think in a special way we are very similar. The reason for this is not that our countries are so similar but we are all studying…and in this way they also have liberal thinking. But in this way I also think it's a problem, thinking that all this culture is so similar. We must remember that all of these people in the Melton Foundation are a very special group in their country. I think the normal Indian guy is really different from me. But in this special society there are more similarities. But normal people are not as similar.

Shattle (2009) collected definitions of a global citizen by interviewing those who proclaimed themselves to be one. Among his various conclusions, he found that "awareness of the wider world provides the motivation for many self-described global citizens to embark on sustained involvement in society or polities and to begin to take responsibility for a global common good" (p. 11). Responses from the team-up group align with Shattle's findings.

Culture and national identity.

While *culture* and *intercultural* are terms woven into the everyday lingua of the MF, it was interesting that they did not permeate the team-up group's process or content. The topic of the deliverable was Human Rights, and each member reported on the condition and status of human rights in their particular country. However, the higher goal of the deliverable is intercultural communication—the process of negotiating and communicating with others from

different countries. On this level, cultural heritage has limited impact on the process. I posed to each trainee in the team-up group a question regarding how they represented their countries. Their responses reflected a clear level of discomfort with the concept of them representing their culture. Shao said,

> Personally I avoid that type of concept. I think it is very hard to capture the concept of a country's people. You're always showing the individual. We often have deep, deep things that you cannot immediately recognize in someone's character. It is very, very difficult to separate individual things and national things. I think I'm off of the stereotype of the Chinese. But still there is something that influences me inside because I am brought up in a Chinese background. I do not think it is a bad thing to represent—to be very Chinese, because I'm quite sure we have to have a national character even if we have a small world. Otherwise we will get lost. I don't know if I'm representing an individual side or a cultural side. I'm thinking this way because I put more stress on individual values. Maybe that is today's Chinese culture.

> Mitra said of his delegation from India,

> It [culture] doesn't have very much impact on our group because we are so diverse already. Like you saw in our cultural presentation yesterday, all of us, each one of us in our group speaks a difference mother tongue. It's from a different region. One is a Muslim. So it is all different that all five of the Indian trainees speak different dialects and have different religions. I think of us representing the dynamism of the culture, the evolution of India, not the culture of India. But, we all have it in us. We all know our classical music. We all know our culture.

Individual identity and personality. In their responses to my question about how they represented their culture, all trainees, while respecting their national voice, mentioned their individuality. For example, Gabriela said,

> Well, during the discussion groups we have many opportunities to represent our country by just saying how the culture is here—or actually our perception of the culture and by the university, it is the only university from Chile, so it is quite prestigious. My career mentor is actually quite proud of me because I am the first nursing student to make it to the Foundation, so I am also representing nursing students as well. And for myself, I actually think I represent myself more than anything else.

Shantel also did not feel she could represent a typical American. "I am a black female, and I have no idea what their views are coming towards me. And, I can say that I rep myself pretty well."

When trainees provided information on their behavior or roles in their groups, they were quick to point out that they were more due to personal preferences and personalities than to their national culture. For example, Gabriela's leadership role was not because she was Chilean, it was because she was restless at the lack of action taken by her team, and she felt comfortable and confident that she could step in and drive the process. When trainees "disappeared" from online discussions or meetings for any amount of time, other trainees did not blame this on their culture but on their individual responsibilities outside of the MF. They also found similarities and differences among their beliefs but did not discuss these in the context of representing their cultures. Rather, they were expressing their personal opinions. Shantel added,

> You could tell by the way they responded by e-mail you could tell who was the go-getter who wanted to take the lead. It was much more about personality. I don't think culture had anything to do with it. I think they were all individuals with their own views. No,

we all seemed to have very similar views about these types of topics. A lot of us are very

open minded.

It is necessary to point out that for the trainees to understand how the level to which they

represent their culture, they must not only understand their culture but also understand the other

members' perception of their culture. Dirk felt strongly about this. He said,

What is important is that it was what Mitra THINKS other people think of India. He

thinks and he thinks others think that India is very poor and there are people working in

the fields. But we, people in Germany and other places, know there are two Indias. There

is another side. And also where my father works there are many jobs that go to India. So

in this I think that it is that Mitra doesn't know that the other countries know so much

about India, as we know India from the technology side.

Identity of CoP. Identity, as a major component of a community of practice, is a

concept that the community members found difficult to define with respect to their team-up

group. For example, Gabriela said,

I don't really know. I couldn't really think of one word or one sentence to describe the

group. We are such different people at such different stages. Some stages were slow,

some sages were fast. Some stages were people just panicking about. Everyone is so

different; I just couldn't describe the group as a whole.

Rather than defining themselves with character trait or group dynamic, they defined

themselves based on their tasks and goals. Trainees are well aware that to become a Junior

Fellow, they must complete all requirements of their orientation program. To this end, they are

very dedicated to their group and to completing the deliverable. Trina commented,

I'd say the personality of our group is, um, I think we are all striving for perfection, even though we may disagree on the path we take to perfection. Perfection was our destination. I think we were all striving for our project to be great.

During the group interview, the following words and phrases were given when I posed this same question: "laid back," "frustrating," "confusing," "not so smooth," "difficult,'' and "needed a moderator." It seems they equated their identity with the process more than their personalities and group personality. They all agreed that their team-up group was designed to complete a task rather than to be a social forum, so it makes sense that the description of their community is more process oriented.

Some comments surfaced that provided insight to the identity of the group; however, they referred to personalities that that were exposed during the OM, when they were face-to-face. Here is where they socialized beyond focusing on their task, so it provided time for interplay among individual personalities. For example, Dirk said,

It's a type of group dynamic. It works or not works. I think in this group it works. Like when three persons make a joke in front of everyone, the fourth person makes one too. It is…like a virus. And it's good. I think it is cool that I can talk with each other and it's really easy. So I think our group dynamic works, and I also hope it will work in the portal and when we have to do our next paper.

Trina's example was similar: "I just think we were very helpful or encouraging with each other, especially understanding each other's strengths and weaknesses."

Cramton (2001) found that VCoPs that are deprived of rich face-to-face time, especially in the early phases of formation, may have problems and/or take longer to establish a send of identity. While the trainees were able to unite in purpose and desired outcomes, they had no

conceptualization of their community in the context of having a personality. All trainees were aware of and looked forward to the OM where they knew they would have time to socialize and learn about each other on a more personal level.

RQ4: How does ICT affect participation in a GVCoP?

Value of ICT. ICT is an intrinsic and integral part of the MF. It was founded by an early technology and internet pioneer and has been supported since then by other techno-savvy leaders. It is the means by which this international organization is able to have leadership dispersed around the world. The orientation portion of the trainee period is 100% online. Once they become fellows they choose to join any of the many online workgroups Fellows have established to provide services to the Foundation and to their communities. All of this is to say that ICT is not an add-on to this organization; it is what supports this organization. The use of technology for collaborative projects was not prevalent among the trainees. Mitra said he has been using a computer since he was four years old, so he felt very comfortable. He is also at a leading engineering university in India, so he is among others who are innovative and technology-minded. Shao had not used e-mail at all; Trina, Shantel, and Dirk used Facebook and e-mail for personal purposes. Gabriela had some experience in an online forum on books. Despite this lack of experience among them, none expressed any apprehension in learning. All felt well supported by their mentors and the appointed tech fellow at each campus.

The trainees saw the value in ICT. For example, Gabriela said,

Well, I have to say that I would not have had the opportunity to work with anyone internationally if it hadn't been for online. And the fact is that from our experience, it actually worked and we get solid results from it. Our deliverable did go through. We did

get the work done. It was actually quite, quite well. So we have this experience backing

us up.

I asked the trainees their thoughts on comments some people make that ICT does not

provide "real" learning experiences. All disagreed wholeheartedly and proudly provided their

deliverable as proof that not only is it a valuable learning tool but also a necessary and efficient

tool for working with other cultures.

Synchronous and asynchronous channels. The MF portal is intended to be the

centralized communication forum for all fellows. Trainees received organization instruction at

their campuses—either in groups or one-on-one—to get set up in the portal and learn how to

navigate it. However, none used it very often. Dirk logged in to it only three times during his

orientation period. The biggest complaint was that the portal did not offer a reliable synchronous

function. Also, if correspondence was received while a trainee was in the portal, he or she would

have to log out and log in again to know see the new message. Because of this delay, the trainees

in this group relied on e-mail as their primary mode of asynchronous communication.

Asynchronous naturally circumvented the issue of finding suitable time to meet across varied

time zones. It also provided non-native English speakers time to ensure proper interpretation of

incoming messages and thoughtful crafting of outgoing messages. Interestingly, some trainees

felt e-mail ensured that messages would be interpreted correctly; others felt there was greater

opportunity for miscommunication as body language and real time dialogue was lost.

MSN or Skype were used for the synchronous meetings. Of these real-time meetings,

Shantel said, "The meetings were really quick and we just got right to the point. There was a lot

more work that got done during these meetings when you were chatting back and forth."

Gabriela concurred by saying synchronous meetings and face-to-face meetings are much better

for brainstorming. Synchronous communication had its drawbacks as well, so its use was limited to dividing tasks and setting deadlines. Not everyone had access to Skype or MSN; one trainee never participated in a synchronous meeting. Dirk had much difficulty understanding the English spoken in a Skype meeting, so he felt more comfortable moving forward with e-mail.

The trainees found value in both synchronous and asynchronous communication and felt both were necessary to complete their deliverable in a timely fashion. As the researcher I anticipated there would be more discussion from the trainees on the topic of ICT; however, it did not seem to be considered an obstacle. A combination of their age, education, and access to ICT provided enough familiarity with this channel of communication. While they experienced difficulties, all were interested in learning more and better ways to conduct work electronically. Their attitudes support the finding by Stromquist (2002) that mastering online communication can be a form of empowerment, particularly for those with cultural or social differences who traditionally have difficulties asserting themselves. While these students may not have had a history of difficulty with asserting themselves, this was the first time they were attempting to do so on a global level. They are competitive by nature, so rather than avoid new technology, they embrace it.

Access. For varying reasons, not all trainees had constant access to the technology required. Shao had to pay by the hour for access, so he tended to log in, gather information, download it, log off, and work offline. He did have a laptop in his dorm room. Dirk had a computer in his dorm, as well as when he visited his family's home. Mitra had constant access, but he felt ill for almost two weeks at the beginning of the orientation. He had to move to be taken care of, and where he spent this time he did not have computer access. Trina used computer labs and the library available on campus. She, too, fell quite ill during one point in the

orientation and could not travel across campus to log in. When she returned home for the summer break, she was able to use her family's computer. Shantel went through a period of limited access while she completed an internship. She was not able to log on during her long hours, so her participation was limited. These issues related to access did not seem to cause problems among the trainees. There was some frustration when no action seemed to take place or when some people could not make meetings; however, as each of them found themselves in a similar position during the course of the program, they did not hold this against each other. They just accepted it as part of the process.

Tech fellows. The institution of a Tech Fellow at each campus provided a level of comfort for the trainees. Not all of them called upon this individual for support, as all of the Junior Fellows seems able to solve technology issues. Overall, however, there were very limited accounts of problems with the MF Portal, other than the lack of a reliable chat function.

Impact on exchange. ICT had a clear impact on the nature of the collaboration of the group. An intercultural project suggests that there is sharing among cultures; however, the descriptions of participation from the trainees indicated that there was less negotiating and sharing than there was dividing and submitting. For example, Gabriela said,

> That is actually one of the things I was very worried about with the project. We all did our own things and went our separate ways, gathered information, and just sent it. Since I designed the website, I actually read everything, but I don't know if everyone else did. So, that was one of the week parts in our deliverable. We didn't really get much to communicate and discuss. Maybe the other groups did. But I would straighten out that part if I had the chance to do it again.

Shao had a similar response:

In our team-up group I think we each contributed our own part. Maybe that has

something to do with how we distributed our work--how we do similar things but in

different countries. But also it was more difficult to get that interaction on Internet.

Whatever you do for your work, the interaction is inefficient on Internet. Like we have

past and present in each country, but if we want to discuss each country's past and

present, I think it would take a very long time to come up with something. But face to

face, like this orientation meeting, you can tell that it is intercultural and integrating

because we are talking all the time in the activities and personal contact.

Dirk, too, felt that ICT limited the ability to have a true exchange. He said,

The problem was the fellows at FSU would say you must work together. You must work

as a team. But it doesn't function when you are in different countries. You must divide

the work and say OK you must do this one and you must do this one and then you

combine at the end. A process like, OK, I will write you my stuff and you look at it and

tell me what you think in a Chilean point of view and then she writes back and then I…I

just don't find that will work that way. It is not so much an intercultural exchange in this

way. It is not realistic. Not so much. At the beginning we had a little brainstorming, and

we would talk about our countries, and the Americans would say this, but this was

short—it comes to an end very soon. So then everybody works for their own, so there

wasn't so much from each other.

Pronounced similarities among participants. One effect that ICT had on the GVCoP

was to pronounce similarities among the participants. While participants briefly introduced

themselves in the trainee online group, their identifying traits were really just e-mail names and

addresses. Shao, Trina, and Shantel had names that the remaining participants struggled with due

to spelling, uniqueness, and unclear gender orientation. Gabriela and Dirk had more universally recognized names. Mitra's name is relatively common among Indians, is easy to pronounce, and all recognized it as masculine. The focus of the electronic communication was the content and the words. There was little socializing in the CoP; that was done in the larger community. The purpose of the electronic communication was to set deadlines and complete tasks. E-communication did not become a channel for social or cultural exchange; consequently, the field was leveled and all participants were equal players. Gabriela said,

> Everyone did seem more similar through e-mail. You can't see the person or the person's background. The text is pretty much similar. "Hello, how are you?" You know, those things don't change. Maybe a couple key words or how some things are expressed, or maybe some grammar rules. But those are really minimal things.

Additionally, the identifying characteristics of language and accent were of no consequence in this e-setting. Due to the ubiquitous need and desire to be clear and productive, few words were written that indicated personality or uniqueness of individual character. Some found comfort in this; others thought it was distracting. For example, Gabriela said,

> For a shy person, I think it is always easier to communicate on the Internet. It is easy to cover up your shyness because you don't have to look at anyone in the eye and you don't have to worry about your body language and things like that. So, for a shy person it is easier to use the Internet because there is always that barrier in the middle of the conversation or of the occasion. It can also be a hindrance, but can also work as some form of protection.

Trina felt she got to know the members better by having the opportunity to build a relationship online first:

With online it's like you're getting more background on the people. It's like you just met them but then to see them in person after talking to them online for so long it's like wow, this is who you are. So I think after communicating with them for so long online, it might be best. Because then you are basing your opinions of them off of conversations you have had with them and intelligence levels and things like that and you're not basing it off of looks or culture or other things.

Shao and Dirk both commented numerous times on the distancing effect of ICT. With respect to how online communication will be now, after the OM, Dirk said, "Many things will be different after the OM. Now I think it will be really different because now we have a face from everybody and a name. Now it is a person I write back to. This I think will help so much."

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the observations and interviews of this study. Based on the data collected and analyzed, the findings were organized by themes and then categorized by the research questions. Responses from the participants were compared to various studies and research in the field of global virtual communities of practice.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

This qualitative case study was designed to explore the impact of globalization on participation in a global virtual community of practice. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What factors impact full participation in a global virtual community of practice?

2. What shared practices comprise and sustain a global virtual community of practice?

3. In what ways does culture impact participation in a global virtual community of practice?

4. In what ways does the use of information and communication technology affect participation in a global virtual community of practice?

In response to these questions, findings were inductively derived from data using the constant comparative method of analysis.

The problem statement that directed this study addressed the question of how communities of practice are affected by globalization. More specifically, the study explored how knowledge sharing is impacted by the use of information communication technology by culturally diverse, geographically dispersed, individuals. The study was informed by the theoretical research on communities of practice to discern how the terms "global" and "virtual" impact the community of practice framework (Wenger, 1998). And finally, this study was intended to reveal the factors that might hinder equitable participation in a global virtual community of practice.

Chapter Four presented the findings of the study specific to each research question. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the conclusions of this study based on the findings from the

research questions and related literature. As the research questions used in this study yielded results that respond to the two key elements of a GVCoP, global and virtual, the findings will be presented accordingly under the two categories, Cultural Diversity and ICT. Within each section I will also present the findings regarding any obstacles relating to these topics. I will also comment on the practical and theoretical implications of this study and suggest opportunities for further research.

Cultural Diversity

Language. A foremost concern regarding a multinational community of practice is language (Dube et al., 2006). Based on the research (Hornberger, 1997; Salt, 2005; Trayner, Smith, & Bettoni, 2006; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007), it seemed inevitable that participants in this study who communicate in their second (L2) or third language (L3) were going to exhibit evidence of inequity, first in the online discussions, next in the interviews, and then during the orientation meeting in Cologne. While participants responded to my question regarding the impact of L2 and L3 communication, it was not the subject of much concern or attention for them. There are several reasons for this. First, it is a requirement of the Melton Foundation that English is the official language of all communication. Therefore, participants must have a certain degree of fluency in order to be selected as a trainee. Second, the participating non-U.S. speaking universities are extremely competitive, as is the selection process for the Melton Foundation itself. All participants had studied English throughout their primary and secondary education and are, as evidenced by selection into the Foundation, high performing students. Third, as expressed by the participants themselves, they believe that to be competitive in a global marketplace, one must speak English. Whether this is right or wrong or will always be this way,

it is an accepted understanding among these students who have high aspirations for international careers.

During the observation period of the online portion of their orientation, I was impressed with the vocabulary level and general fluency of all of the participants. In fact, issues relating to grammar, vocabulary, slang, and colloquialisms were often most evident with the American students. As a former ESL instructor, I am sensitive to such elements of speech and writing in a multicultural setting. What revealed itself as the greatest support for L2 and L3 users was the use of ICT. As the majority of the communication was asynchronous, participants had time to draft postings and translate others' comments as needed. Most used online dictionaries and grammar tools to assist them. Due to these aids, online communication was a welcome platform for the participants. Conversely, Skype and other real-time meetings between participants proved to be quite challenging due to accents, connection issues, and language barriers.

An interesting aspect of the issue of language that emerged from this study is the unifying factor of the jargon and acronyms unique to the Melton Foundation. In the training manual there is a list of proper terms that all trainees and fellows must use. With the various "rooms" on the portal and with the various groups the trainees must join, it is vital that the terminology is universal. The fact that the trainees speak different languages makes this even more important. In my early communications with the administrators of the program, I learned this firsthand as we tried to negotiate the possible groups I could observe. I used the term *work group* rather than *team-up group* and consequently confused the coordinator. While the standardized terminology is functional, it also contributes positively to the identity and culture of the organization.

These findings are consistent with the research by Trayner et al. (2006). Where members are not using their first language, the choices of language, colloquialisms, abbreviations, jargon,

and culturally specific references can discourage participation. Trayner et al. (2006) found that participants in virtual communities who have support from online friends or colleagues with whom they can check their understanding or interpretations are more likely to continue participation in the face of potential misunderstanding than those who do not. This means that ensuring the social processes and technological means are in place for checking meaning with fellow participants could be as important as the choice and use of language. Additionally, studies have shown that the tension between knowing and not knowing creates opportunities to explore the shape of meaning and to allow the community to create new meanings and to develop identity practices around those meanings (Trayner et al., 2006). The ways in which new meanings are given to language as a community matures and the ways that these tensions are negotiated are an ongoing enterprise that is not limited to native English speakers (Trayner et al., 2006).

Participation. My use of the term *culture* and the preconception I had for the role it would play in this study went through some major transformations. Initially, based on research (Burbules & Torres, 2000; Gangla & Rizzuto, 2001; Latchem, 2005; Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007), I expected to encounter certain behaviors and attitudes that could be specifically attributed to the participants' nation of origin. Learning and teaching styles in various parts of the world differ from the democratic practices typical of a Western classroom (Merriam, 2007). Therefore, it was reasonable for me to expect native English speakers from North America to emerge as the most vocal and argumentative. I assumed they would be the ones to suggest new ideas and to take leadership roles (Ardichvili, Maurer, Li, Wentling & Stuedemann, 2006), particularly as the structure of the online training period was democratic by

design. The Melton Foundation purposely does not make the online negotiation process prescriptive. Rather, it allows for the team-up group to develop its processes organically.

It is reasonable to assume that the one representative from each country in the case study would not exhibit the stereotypes attributed to his or her culture. Nonetheless, I used this concept as a frame of reference during my observations of the online portion of the program, during the interviews, and generally throughout the week of activities at the orientation meeting. I also posed the question to the participants regarding how they saw themselves as representatives of their culture. While participants were cognizant of what is stereotypically expected of them based on their nation of origin, none considered themselves as representative. Shantel even emphasized that she is a black female, a minority population in the United States, and that she did not feel comfortable representing the country. She was aware that participants from the other countries had not met African Americans before. Rather than bear the burden of representing all Americans, she knew who she was as an individual and therefore felt comfortable representing only herself. Shao and Mitra also clearly expressed their awareness of the behavioral stereotypes of their respective countries, China and India, yet stated that they did feel like they were representative of their traditional cultures, nor did they feel the pressure to be. Mitra articulated what it seemed the others were suggesting–that they were chosen for the Melton Foundation because they exhibited the individual characteristics that made them global citizens, and that this was a purposeful part of the selection process. Consequently, when the concept of culture was broached with each participant, there was little sense of bearing the responsibility of representing their nation in a traditional. As an observer throughout the online orientation program, I was surprised that I would not have necessarily identified participants by country had names and other specific references been omitted. During the week in Cologne, there was a sense that each

participant wanted to portray a positive image of his or her country and to share his or her heritage in an educational sense; however, it was not first and foremost on their minds. They were all much more concerned with the culture of the Melton Foundation and how they were becoming part of it.

The obstacles that presented themselves with respect to the cultural diversity in the groups were minimal, yet are worth highlighting. I again reiterate that one representative from each country is just that, one representative. However, the comments I will make here were reinforced during my observations throughout the week of orientation, which included open discussions among all trainees on such topics. The first comment is with respect to the openness of some of the trainees in the online discussions with the members of the team-up group as well as with the entire cohort of trainees. The content of the online contributions from Mitra and Shao reflected more work-related topics rather than those that would be considered more social in nature. For example, the Americans, Indians, and Chileans were comfortable calling their fellow trainees friends from the very beginning. They were more apt to discuss personal opinions about a range of topics, including social and personal issues. For the Chinese and Germans, this was not the case. Their postings were focused on the tasks related to their deliverable. Neither of them was comfortable with using the term "friend" until after they met in Cologne. However, during and after the orientation meeting, this changed. They were just as friendly and open as any other participants. In fact, the German and Chinese trainees in this study were the most vocal and often stayed after sessions to continue discussing a variety of topics, including personal ones. I hesitate again to attribute this only to culture, as individual personality plays a large role here. Dirk readily began sentences with "Germans do" or "Germans don't" while Shao definitely did not speak of Chinese as a collective identity. Conversely, the U.S. participants in the groups who

were the most forthcoming with personal information and opinions online were the least vocal during the orientation meeting. They were even reserved and somewhat shy during the interviews. Based on what I learned about them as well as on my personal observations, I believe they were the most overwhelmed by the entire program. They had the least travel and international experience and were the only ones in the group who spoke only one language. During the presentation, one of the Americans was the only trainee to use notes. The others spoke freely. The Americans also seemed to know the least about the other countries, as well as their own country. For example, during this time the U.S. was preparing for the presidential election, and Sarah Palin had just received the Republican vice presidential nomination. The students from the other countries were fascinated by this and had endless questions for the Americans. However, the Americans had little to say about politics or their opinions on the state of affairs. (I am aware of this as the trainees then bombarded me with similar questions, as I was the only other American present.) Clearly there is a dichotomy with respect to how identity manifests itself in online and face-to-face settings that warrants further study.

Institutional culture and identity. The concept of institutional culture and its value are perhaps the greatest revelation for me as the researcher in this study. Although I had been prepared to investigate the roles of culture and identity in this GVCoP, I was not prepared for how the participants' primary association of these terms were with the Melton Foundation rather than with their national culture or individual identity. There are several reasons that may explain this phenomenon. First, the tradition and recognition of the Melton Foundation on each of the participating campuses is extremely exclusive and positive. With only five or six individuals selected each year, competition is fierce and the quality of applicants is high. Melton Fellows on campus tend to hold various leadership positions. As discussed in Chapter Four, articulating

exactly what the foundation does or means is difficult, even for the members, as it is abstract and requires a certain level of global awareness to appreciate its mission. Those students who are accepted as trainees recognize that it is a privilege and a responsibility. They are also aware that they must prove themselves during the three-month orientation program in order to become a Junior Fellow. With only a handful of fellow trainees on their campuses, they tend to stick together and gravitate toward the other Junior Fellows on campus in an effort to remain on track and to learn all they can about the foundation. The participants in this study had difficulty articulating how the foundation works and what it actually does. They expressed that even their closest friends and family members didn't understand it. Consequently, identification and bonding with the other fellows is very strong. Due to the amount of work it requires and the need to dedicate time to communicate with fellow trainees around the world, the foundation has a very strong presence in each trainee's life. The fact that membership is lifelong and activities will continue long after their college careers also strengthens their commitment to the organization.

These findings are consistent with the trends in Dube et al.'s (2006) typology of VCoPs, in particular to three of the characteristics that contribute to the identity of the CoP. One of these characteristics is orientation, which describes the degree to which the mission of the VCoP aligns with the overall mission of the organization, thus strengthening the participants' commitment to the objectives and their allegiance to the organization. The second characteristic is institutionalized formalism, which describes the degree to which the CoP has been integrated into the formal structure of the organization; in this case study, participation is required for membership. The third characteristic is the member selection process. Dube et al. (2006) found that the more selective the process is, the better members will manage the knowledge sharing process. The pros and cons of open versus closed CoPs vary depending upon the mission of the

organization. Despite the mix of cultures and countries, the selectivity of the Melton Foundation orientation program promotes a membership that is homogenous in its world view, which all but ensures that each trainee is committed to full participation.

The participants shared with me the relief they felt upon being informed that they had successfully completed the trainee process. The length of time from application through selection and through the orientation meeting in Cologne spanned several months at most of the campuses. For college freshmen who are navigating many lifestyle changes and challenges, the commitment to the Melton Foundation was a prominent and ever-present focus. This powerful and stressful experience provided a natural and immediate bond among all of the trainees that was evident from their first introductions in the online portal. For the most part, the trainees were open, friendly, and anxious to converse with their counterparts from around the world. There was a sense of inherent trust for which the designers of the selection and orientation program should be commended.

Trust. In both quantitative and qualitative studies that focus on participation in VCoPs and social capital, the variable of trust becomes central to the discussions (Daniel et al., 2003). It is accepted that trust is an essential element within virtual communities that produce social capital, yet the relationship between trust and social capital is complex, and measuring either is problematic (Daniel et al., 2003). Trust is an element that is universally accepted as a necessity in any CoP, yet how trust can be achieved without the intimacy of face-to-face interaction is also the subject of much debate.

Numerous studies have been conducted on various types of Internet relationships focusing on the levels of intimacy, closeness, and the frequency of use of virtual communication. Cummings, Butler, and Kraut (2002) suggest that face-to-face interactions are more effective

than e-mail communication in creating feelings of closeness or intimacy, while other studies suggest the opposite. In Cummings et al.'s (2002) article reviewing three empirical studies on online social relationships, online communication was found to be less effective than face-to-face contact in creating and maintaining close social relationships. The strength of the relationship was predicted best by face-to-face communication, as participants rated email as an inferior means of maintaining personal relationships (Cummings et al., 2002).

.   Cummings et al. (2002) reviewed an additional study conducted in 1999 by the HomeNet project. This project compared the value of using ICT to maintain relationships with partners. They found that participants corresponded less frequently with their online partner (5.2 times per month) than with their non-Internet partner (7.2 times per month) (as cited in Cummings et al., 2002). This difference does not seem significant, as it is only two times less per month. However, in additional self-report surveys, participants responded feeling more distant, or less intimate, towards their Internet partner than their non-Internet partner. This finding may be attributed to participants' beliefs that email is an inferior mode of personal relationship communication. Intimacy is necessary in the creation and maintenance of relationships, as it is defined as the sharing of a person's innermost being with another person (Hu, Wood, Smith, & Westbrook, 2004). Other forms of online communication, such as instant messaging (IM), voice and/or video-chat, online journals, message boards, and chat rooms allow for both an increase in self-expression and the ability to overcompensate for the barriers of online communication through customizable features (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Self-disclosure and intimacy may result from these formats that provide individualized features, which are not as personalized in email correspondence. In addition to the limitations of email, the barriers of non-personal

communication in email could be a factor, and this could lead to less intimacy and trust among these online partners.

These studies provide a possible explanation for Dirk's and Shao's hesitancy to forge personal relationships before meeting the team-up group in person. However, Daniel et al. (2003) found that there are other forms of trust that contribute to an organization's success. These include: a) trust in the community, b) trust in specific people, and c) generalized trust in human nature, for example. What emerged in this case study was the high level of trust in the organization, which transferred to automatic trust in the team-up group. This contradicts a general assumption about trust not being transferable (one individual to another) or transitive (if a trusts b and b trusts c, a doesn't automatically trust c) (Lamsal, 2001). In the case of the Melton Foundation trainees, all participants felt that trust was automatic and was something that was, as Gabriela stated, their default state. While it was enhanced by the face-to-face encounter, it existed based on their strong association with the Foundation.

Information and Communication Technology

Access. Out of the literature on ICT with respect to globalization emerged a primary concern of access to technology (Stanley, 2001; Warschauer, 2003; Turkle, 2004). Access to technology and information on a global level is seen as a leveling factor among and within countries, as evidenced by the term "digital divide," popularized by President Bill Clinton. Fortunately, access for most of the participants in the Melton Foundation training program was not an issue. The participating universities provide access to computers and to the Internet, and most students have computers or laptops in their dorms or at home. Some of the trainees had not used e-mail or a portal for academic or structured activities before engaging in the Melton

Foundation, but all were familiar with using e-mail and other functions for social purposes. Throughout the OM, trainees shared their facebook pages and YouTube videos.

Computer literacy. IT literacy was another major factor that emerged as an obstacle in the literature on virtual communities. Initial training and ongoing technical support were key factors in the success of members in participating in online communities. The Melton Foundation uses a portal, accessible through its website, to house the various groups within the organization. I was provided with a username and password in order to conduct my observations. I did not have a technology mentor, so I spent a few hours navigating the site and reading various threads. I had several years experience with teaching online and with participating in online courses, so I was somewhat familiar with the basic organization. Melton trainees and fellows are able to follow e-mail threads of applicable groups–such as their team-up group, campus group, or entire trainee cohort. Additionally, there are groups for each of the major projects being administered by fellows around the world. While the organization of the portal seemed relatively straightforward, the trainees shared with me that they rarely used the portal for communication. Upon registering on the site, a trainee inputs an email address, so messages are sent directly to that e-mail address. This is how most of the trainees and I received, monitored, and delivered messages. One of the complaints was that while in the portal, real-time messages could not be received. To do so required logging out and logging in again. For this reason, the trainees seemed to prefer instant messaging and regular e-mail.

Regardless of its shortcomings, the portal serves as a centralized and unified site for all of the MF communication. The trainees received an orientation to the portal at their home campus, but most reported that they were able to navigate it without much assistance. The team-up group in my study opted to try other means of communication, such as AOL instant messaging and

Skype. For most these were new forms of communication that they were eager to learn. The literature I had reviewed prior to this study regarding the willingness to learn new technology was not completely applicable to this GVCoP, as most of the studies available at the time were corporate and involved older participants who were not as adept with technology. The Melton trainees were 19 and 20 years old, and most grew up with access to computers in the home or in school. They recognize the more technology they master, the more connected they can be. This eagerness overrides any hesitation to try new modes of electronic communication.

Another prevalent attitude among the trainees was that technology is not auxiliary; it is the very essence of any global organization that relies on communication and relationship building. The trainees were appreciative of the opportunities technology provides to actually complete a project with a team that is spread over four continents and form friendships and professional relationships with people they would otherwise never meet. In many of the earlier studies on virtual communities, technology was not intrinsic to their normal daily routine. The participants not only had to modify their behavior by joining a virtual team; they had to master new technology skills and find the time to use it. For these reasons, attrition was great. These findings did not materialize in this study.

On-campus support. Despite the camaraderie among the trainees in their online community, the value of the support system available to trainees on campus must be recognized as essential to their success. At each university there is a designated office, typically called the Melroom, which provides a physical space for Junior Fellows and trainees to meet, socialize, study, or simply hang out. While each trainee is aware of various mentors available, participants in this study shared with me that anyone in the Melroom was open and available to providing support and answering questions about the orientation process, technology, and about the Melton

Foundation in general. The participants experienced and appreciated an immediate acceptance in Melroom. As stated earlier, trainees had difficulty sharing their experience with those outside of the Melton Foundation, so there was a general sense of relief to have a place where they could speak freely and know they were among others who understood. Also key is that in these locations, participants use their native language. Some trainees expressed to me that they sometimes had no idea if their participation levels were appropriate or if their portfolio questions were answered adequately. They sometimes wondered if behavior of the trainees in their team-up groups from other universities was typical of the fact that they were behind in meeting deadlines for their deliverable was to be expected. Such questions could be discussed in the safety of the Melroom, in their native language. According to the trainees in this study, this was vital to their success.

In addition to this large support system, each trainee had several other avenues of support. Each was paired with an on-campus mentor and each had access to a technical mentor who was responsible for training related to the use of the online portal. Additionally, in each online team-up group there were two mentors who observed the communication and progress of the group and occasionally stepped in to answer questions or redirect as necessary. All trainees recognized the mentors as essential.

An interesting aspect of this study was learning how the trainees perceived the difference between developing relationships online versus in person. The MF orientation program forces the trainees to develop relationships for three months before they meet their counterparts face to face. Opinions on the value of this were varied in the team-up group, as indicated earlier in this chapter. Some appreciated that it provided the opportunity to build relationships that were substantive rather than superficial. Others felt that they could not fully appreciate someone else's

personality without seeing the body language. The debate over which represents the truest self—the online or in-person identity—is worth exploring. One of the more interesting comments from one of the trainees on this subject was about how she felt when she finally met one of her teammates at the youth hostel in Cologne after communication for three months online. She said, "Oh, so this is the real you." She is also the trainee who felt the most passionate about the value of building a relationship online, on non-superficial terms. Upon my further questioning, she admitted she too could not decide which platform was more valuable to building relationships.

Dirk felt quite strongly about the value of building a relationship face-to-face first. He needed the OM to solidify his relationships and the trust in his cohort. He said that going forward his online communication with them would change; it would be more personal and he'd have a clear image in mind as he conversed with a person now instead of a computer.

Challenge of time. Organizing people across time zones makes arranging for synchronous meetings a significant challenge. It is inevitable that meeting times will not be agreeable or convenient for all—or sometimes anyone. Another problem is how to express a meetings time in relations to each participant's local time. Calculations and time zone abbreviations often confuses this process, as do factors such as "daylight savings" and culture-specific holidays. While there are tools that support this challenge, such as The World Clock Meeting Planner (www.timeanddate.com), there is no tool that can solve the issue of inconvenience (Trayner et al. (2006). For this reason, participants in a GVCoP must accept that they will have to be flexible and socially considerate. Trayner et al. (2006) suggest that within each GVCoP, participants should share all time and date availability, so a meeting schedule or calendar can be created and managed by the group.

In this case study, key challenges included finding meeting times and the lag time between comments and responses. This was the source of frustration for the trainees as an answer to a question would often take 24 hours. Added to time zone differences, students had to work around their academic class schedule, campus computer lab hours, or roommates. So, even if odd times for a Skype meeting were agreeable, other factors may have prevented it from happening or from including the entire team-up group. Had these trainees been part of a corporate workgroup with 24-hour computer access, or had they not been living in a dorm, their time to collaborate may have been more flexible. It was unfortunate to see how much time and how many e-mails were devoted to simply deciding upon a time to "meet."

In summary, the major findings of this study reflect the impact of globalization, specifically cultural diversity and ICT, on a community of practice. Culture was indeed a factor, but not in terms of a traditional definition of the term. In this study, the overriding culture revolved around institutional culture rather than national culture. Due to the strength of the identity of the Melton Foundation and to the rigorous selection process, trainees accepted into the program proved to be of a similar global mindset. Because of this, their national culture and identity, while ever present, was not the prevailing motivation for the extent of their participation in the community. Rather, their identification with the mission of the Melton Foundation and their desire to be part of the community drove their actions.

Globalization is forcing us to rethink how terms such as identity and culture are reified. Regarding ICT, the trainees are of the computer generation which caused them to perceive ICT as a normal part of their everyday life. Access and adapting to new technology were not issues. The Melton Foundation put in place a support system to ensure a certain comfort level with tools available to the trainees and fellows by appointing a tech fellow at each campus. While the

students did not rely heavily on the support system, knowing it was accessible at any time allowed them to focus on content, communication, and the practice necessary to complete their deliverable and training program.

Implications of Study

        Communities of Practice and Social Capital. Social capital is a useful construct for exploring culture, society, and social networks (Daniel et al., 2003). Since the early 1900s, the term has been used to account for the value that human networks, encompassing norms, trust, and shared understanding, bring to communities, organizations, and corporate entities (Putnam, 2002; Daniel et al., 2003). Putnam's use of the term shows the correlation between the level of engagement of a population in its community organizations or processes and general economic and social prosperity. While many disciplines have adopted the term or social capital theory, most research on how it is constructed and sustained in temporal communities does not address virtual communities. The descriptors of CoPs and Social Capital are similar (trust, shared practices, norms), but the key difference in the terms is that a CoP is a model for a process, while social capital is the desired outcome of a process. Putnam (2002) suggested that one of the most common shortcomings of social capital is the absence of consensus on how to measure it. Add to this the complexities involved with monitoring and measuring virtual communities, and the research becomes more scarce (Daniel et al., 2003). Hopefully, due to the interest and prevalence of GVCoPs, more instruments will become available to assist researchers in the quest to measure and analyze these communities as viable knowledge sharing mechanisms. As Lave and Wenger (1991) attest, not all CoPs are "successful." It is possible that simply showing up in a traditional community may have been viewed as success. As virtual communities do not clearly include the "showing up," more emphasis may be placed on the outcomes.

Social capital should be recognized as a highly relevant concept in this study. The key factors in social capital theory include interaction among individuals and groups and the dependence upon trusting relationships. Research on trust in virtual communities is slowly emerging, yet overcoming the prevailing belief that trust develops through sustained face-to-face interaction is challenging, as it is difficult to measure (Daniel et al., 2003). Finding from this study suggest that trust can and does exist within virtual communities, and it is enhanced by the level of social capital. The trust in the organization and faith in the selection process provided participants with an automatic level of trust in their team-up group and in the overall process of becoming a Junior Fellow. The value of social capital to communities of practice is that social capital can bridge cultural differences by building a common identity and shared understanding (Daniel et al., 2003).

Global Citizenship. Globalization has brought with it the concept of global citizenship. Global citizenship encompasses the values of exposure to other cultures, foreign language skills, tolerance and empathy for other cultures, curiosity about the world beyond immediate surroundings, and adeptness in navigating new and unfamiliar circumstances (Picard, Bernardino, & Ehigiator, 2009). Those who learn, work, or socialize in the increasingly global realm, whether face-to-face or via ICT, are gaining these skills and are connecting more on levels that are not tied to geography. Arendt (1958) identified space and place as conditions of community, adding that the process of turning a space into a place involves participants deciding how to adapt the space to accommodate daily use. ICT allows this to happen. The increase in the membership of online communities attests to the frequency that citizens of any country can join communities anywhere in the world. Consequently, not only the "superelite" but the average

person is connecting more and more with people based on interests, values, and shared goals rather than on borders.

Another outgrowth of globalization is glocalization (Glocal Forum, 2007). While glocalization was not overtly discussed during the Melton Foundation's orientation program, it was clearly an underlying current. The term describes the interplay between both local histories and broad global trends, supporting the coexistence of centralizing and decentralizing forces acting simultaneously (Jungck, 2003). During the OM, the trainees engaged in exercises and discussions that amplified that concept of glocalization. The "bridge exercise," for example, brought to the forefront the power of knowledge sharing at the global level and the relevance this has for local applications.

For the bridge exercise, the trainees were divided into teams by country and given a scenario about redesigning the bridge that crossed the Rhine, connecting the Cologne-Deutz neighborhood with the Cologne Cathedral and train station. Coordinators videotaped each group as they designed and built the bridge out of paper, tape, and markers. The point of the exercise was to reflect on how each culture approached and completed the project. The results were intriguing, and the trainees seemed to learn and appreciate the various cultural practices that drove their behavior. For example, the Chinese focused on the one clear evaluative measure of the bridge: it had to be long. They all agreed immediately that it had to be the longest, and it was. Their model was over 12 feet (compared to the other countries that were about one or two). The Germans spent the majority of their working time on thinking through both form and function and how to marry these perfectly. They also spent time practicing their presentation of their ideas to the judge, as they were aware of the need for approval from the "mayor" of Cologne before being awarded the project. The Americans went for a high-profile replica of the Golden Gate

Bridge, complete with flashing lights. They also added a toll for both cars and pedestrians, perceiving this project as a money-making proposition. The Chileans did not complete their bridge in the allotted time. They spent some of their group time listening to one member playing his guitar and singing. They did work hard, however. Their half-finished project was artistic and beautiful, and nicely complimented the architecture of old Cologne. Nonetheless, it was not finished so it could not be judged. The Indians did not complete their project either. All of the trainees from India are mechanical engineering majors. They could not move into the design phase without knowing specifics such as the depth of the water or the load bearing capabilities of the river walls. Hypothetical was not in their vocabulary. Consequently, they spent their group time arguing with each other about how to get the specifications necessary to complete the model. They laughed at themselves when they watched the video of their group dynamics and were the first to point out their shortcomings.

The first major lesson learned from this exercise was that each culture indeed had its own approach to managing the project, and recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of their approach makes each of them a stronger team member. The second was that there was value in the approach and product from each group. Had the groups been heterogeneous, they most likely would have had maximized the strengths of the various members and created a bridge that was functional, architecturally sound, aesthetically appropriate, economical, long, and completed on time! Each group would have also had a better-prepared presentation for the judge. The homogeneity of the groups resulted in every design being deficient in one or several of these areas. The trainees were immersed in many learning experiences such as this, both online and at the OM, which exposed and promoted the values of global citizenship. Greater appreciation for

various cultures promotes trust and mutual understanding, thus increasing the social capital of this community of practice.

Recommendations for further research

Perhaps one of the more comprehensive publications on this subject is a typology of virtual communities of practice developed by Dube et al. (2006). Based on 163 articles, 10 books, and nine research reports, the article provides a series of characteristics to aid in identifying the elements that define a VCoP (though not necessarily "global" communities). With the understanding that each VCoP has a unique personality due to the endless list of possible variables, the typology continuum can assist researchers in defining a GVCoP from a variety of approaches. This can be particularly useful in designing a GVCoP or in defining common elements for the purpose of making comparisons among various GVCoPs. As with most studies on CoPs, Wenger et al. (2002) are acknowledged for laying the groundwork. This typology takes this further by including elements such as geographic dispersion, cultural diversity, reliance on ICT, and ICT literacy, all of which support the increasingly important and evident impact of globalization on CoPs in general.

Through this case study, the following emerged as topics that warrant further research.

Group reflection in a GVCoP. Participants in this study expressed some degree of concern over not always knowing if their performance or their group's performance was satisfactory. While each member submitted a portfolio that required reflection on these two topics, some received little or no feedback and assumed no news was good news. According to the participants' comments, encouraging more open discussion on the status of the community or having the mentors lead this type of discussion would have been a welcome addition to the

overall process. More studies on the use group reflection to enhance a community of practice would be useful.

True collaborating in a GVCoP. With knowledge sharing as a central focus of a community of practice, how much sharing is actually occurring in a virtual community? In this case study and based on my own experiences, projects are often completed by assigning sections and then combining them. Outside of the individual who combines, how much knowledge sharing is occurring among the other members? Is there a way to enhance this in virtual communities?

Auxiliary support systems for GVCoPs. On-campus mentors and groups, alternative communication vehicles, and portfolios were important support systems for the participants in this case study. They seemed to fill a gap created by the distance and asynchronous communication within the team-up group. What factors outside of the designated virtual space build and sustain a community of practice?

Developing instruments to evaluate learning in a GVCoP. The interest in GVCoPs is multidisciplinary, giving breadth rather than depth to the research and instruments available for evaluation. Coordinated efforts in developing approaches to evaluate GVCoPs are needed, as interest in this form of communication and knowledge sharing does or will span all disciplines and industries.

Relationship between Communities of Practice and Social Capitalism. The more recent studies on global virtual communities refer to the value of social capital with terms that are identical to the terms used to define communities of practice. It would be beneficial to further define the relationship between these two concepts. Is the expansion of the term "community" forcing researchers to seek new models to frame the phenomenon of GVCoPs?

Identity in a GVCoP. Further investigation of the dichotomy of online identity would be valuable to developers of GVCoPs as well as to the participants. How do virtual and face-to-face identities differ and why? Is this an issue if concern? Does it help or hinder relationship building and trust among participants?

Recommendation for the Melton Foundation

This study was not intended to evaluate the Melton Foundation. The Foundation leadership was gracious in allowing me access to the 2008 trainees, and the trainees were as equally welcoming. It is clear that the Melton Foundation is a learning organization, as even during my short involvement I saw that constant evaluation and improvement is part of its culture. As an offshoot of this study, the Foundation said it was interested in any recommendations that would yield from this study. I wish I had more to offer. It seems their practice is well rooted in theory, research, and lessons learned. The one moment that revealed a potential suggestion occurred while I was conducting the group interview. I inquired about how the group determined their roles in completing the deliverables. The trainees who took it upon herself to take the lead actually apologized to the group at that time for being "bossy." The rest of the group seemed shocked by this, as they appreciated her leadership. She seemed quite relieved, and it appeared as if this was something that had been weighing on her heavily.

This brings up the value of reflection within a community of practice. Through the portfolios the trainees engage in reflection on their own performance as well as on the group as a whole. However, it may have been beneficial for the concerns that emerged through these reflections to be shared publicly with the group. Anonymity could be retained if the mentors in the team-up group were the ones to present the information. It seemed I was the first to gather the team-up group and basically ask them how it was going. This sparked some very productive

conversation that could have been helpful during the three-month process. This activity would have also supported the collaboration that seemed to be lacking due to the time-lag of electronic postings. Therefore, adding an opportunity for group reflection, whether synchronous or asynchronous, after each of the three sections of the training program would seem to be a welcome addition to the overall orientation process.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Below are questions with respect to four general topical areas for the one-hour interview with each participant. These interviews took place the week of August 31, 2008 at the Orientation Meeting for new trainees in Cologne, Germany.

Introduction
Describe the experience of finally meeting your workgroup face-to-face?
Tell me how the overall training program has been for you?
What have been the most surprising aspects about this program?

Factors that impact participation
1. What characteristics describe an ideal team member in your online workgroup?
2. Describe how you would compare yourself as a contributor to the others in your group?
3. Describe any barriers that prevented you from being a full participant?
4. Describe any factors that encouraged you to be a full participant.
5. Describe how the other participants' behavior impacted your level of participation.
6. How did the content of the conversation impact your level of participation? Please provide examples.

Culture
7. How has the process of participation in your workgroup differed to the process in the group that consists of those from your home university?
8. How has it been similar?
9. How do you feel about the program being conducted in English? Can you give some examples of how language impacted your participation?
10. What training or experiences prepared you for this program?
11. In your group, were there some "voices" that were "heard" more than others? Why do you think this was the case? Please give examples.
12. How comfortable did you feel with asking questions to your group members?
13. How comfortable did you feel with commenting on something you didn't know?
14. When you read a posting that required a response or comment, how do you proceed? For example did you answer or comment right away or do you take some time to think about it and perhaps even research the topic?
15. How do you think this process would be different if you were communicating in your first language?
16. How do you think this experience would be different if everyone in the group were from the same university? What aspects would be similar?
17. Describe your perceptions of the other members of your team based on the online experience.
    Probe: how did you visualize them or what descriptors did you rely on to identify them?
18. Describe a time that you were uncomfortable in the group.
19. Describe a time that you felt like you were a leader in the group.

20. How has this learning experience differed from learning experiences you have had in the past?
21. How do you feel you bonded with some people in your group over others? What was this based on?

Emerging Practices

22. Many people don't understand how an international group can operate online. How would you describe the experience to someone who wants to understand?
23. How did the group determine how to operate? For example, how were rules established?
24. What rules did your group establish?
25. Describe what happened when your group had to identify a project leader.
26. Did any leaders emerge in the group or do you feel participation and leadership was shared? Please give an example.
27. Characterize the personality of your workgroup.
28. Describe an incident in which someone did not participate according to the rules or to normal protocol. What happened?
29. What procedures were put in place by the MF that supported you throughout the process?
30. What procedures, if any, hindered your participation?
31. Characterize the conversations online. For example, did most people participate equally or were some people always first to participate and other always last.
32. Outside of your group, whom did you consult about what was occurring in the training program?

ICT

33. How did you learn to use the technology required for participation in this program?
34. How easy or difficult was it to learn the process?
35. What technical difficulties did you experience during the three-month period?
36. Describe the process of how you would resolve technical problems?
37. Where and what time of day did you usually conduct your work for this program?
38. What suggestions would you make to improve the online process?

Group Interview Guide

Questions for the group interview were created based on the responses and emerging themes from the observations and the individual interviews. The questions fell under the major categories of culture, participation, emerging themes, and information and communication technology.

Introduction
I will pose a question and go around the room so each person can have the opportunity to respond. You may decide not to respond, which is fine as well.
I will ask if anyone wants to build on something someone else says. You may signal me with your hand if you'd like to add on (but don't make this your response).

1. What has been the most surprising thing about the MF?

2. How would you characterize your team up group? Did you create any words or phrases or practices that make your group different that the others?

3. If you could change anything about the amount or timing of the online vs. f2f part of the program, what would it be?

4. What has been the best part of this experience for you?

5. What has been the most difficult part for you?

6. How has language played a role for you, particularly for the non-native English speakers?

7. How do you think the online participation compares to how you would have participated if this program had been done in person (assuming distance would not have been an issue).

8. Compare your on-campus group to your team-up group.

9. What advice would you give others going into this program?

10. How did your various time zones affect your ability to communicate?

11. How did ICT impact your communication?

APPENDIX B

Interview Schedule and Orientation Meeting Document Samples

2008 Melton Foundation Trainee Team-Up Group
Individual Interview Schedule
Cologne, Germany

Monday, September 1	8:00am – 9:00am	Room 712	Trina/USA
Tuesday, September 2	8:00am – 9:00am	Room 712	Shantel/USA
Wednesday, September 3	7:45am – 8:45am	Meeting Room	Shao/China
Wednesday, September 3	1:00pm – 2:00pm	Stairwell lounge, 3rd	Mitra/India
Thursday, September 4	8:00am – 9:00am	Room 712	Gabriela/Chile
Friday, September 5	10:00am – 11:00am	Lobby lounge, 2nd fl.	Dirk/Germany

Group Interview

| Monday, September 1 | 5:00pm – 6:00pm | Meeting Room | All |