

CENTURY POWER AND VIRTUAL TEAMING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

As ICT penetration increases across the globe, the use of virtual teams grows everywhere. Whereas the growing use of virtual teams in such emerging markets as China, India and Brazil has received considerable mention in the management and engineering literatures, virtual teaming in Africa has largely been ignored. This paper fills in this gap by examining how a new indigenous company, rather than a Western multinational operating in the country, has adopted the system in the building of a big power plant in Nigeria, Africa's largest economy. This paper looks at the benefits the firm is deriving from using a virtual team but also the challenges, since members are from Asia, Europe, North America and Africa. It also recognizes the special challenges in the use of a virtual team in a country where basic infrastructure is still in poor condition and concludes, in light of the extant literature, that virtual teaming will continue to complement conventional teams rather than replace them.

Keywords: Virtual teams; co-locations; power project; cultural differences; Century Power; Nigeria.

Introduction

When towards the first quarter of 2017 a top official of Century Power announced at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Energy Conference in Boston that the company would complete the first phase of its 1500 Megawatt power plant at Okija in Anambra State of Nigeria in 2022 and consequently add 495MW to the national grid, the Nigerian national media celebrated the statement. Nigeria is starved of electrical power. Any move which suggests an improvement in supply is enthusiastically received, even by the otherwise critical press. Therefore, the Nigerian media and the public have been seeing the project only in the context of provision of critical infrastructure. But the electric power project which will cost some one and a half billion dollars (\$1.5bn) on completion of the third and final phase should be

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of interest to international business researchers because, among other factors, it is making extensive use of virtual teaming.

Like in most parts of the world, virtual teaming is growing in Nigeria. It is part of the globalization process. What makes the use of this management strategy by Century Power in the building of a major power plant interesting is that it is to date the biggest of such projects by an indigenous firm. Most virtual team projects in the country are by western multinational enterprises (MNEs) which operate mostly in the oil and gas industry, the country's greatest foreign exchange earner and the government's major revenue source.

Virtual teaming is a technology system brought about by the ubiquity and pervasiveness of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities which enable members of a given project team to stay in different countries and regions of the world and work simultaneously regardless of differences in space, time, national and organizational cultures. It is also a management strategy used increasingly by firms in international business because it saves them enormous resources and enhances the speed of doing business.

Project team members can be operating from places as diverse as Canada, Japan, Egypt, Uruguay, New Zealand, France, South Africa and the United Kingdom. This system of work is obviously made possible by the generous use of the telephone, email, the Internet, the camera and video conferencing. Symmons and Stenzel (2007) define virtual teaming as a system where project teams work across time, national boundaries and organizational cultures with the stupendous aid of software technology. Ebrahim, Ahmed and Taha (2009, p. 2655) regard virtual teams as "small temporary groups of geographically, organizationally and/or time dispersed knowledge workers who coordinate their work predominantly with electronic and communication technologies in order to accomplish one or more organizational tasks". This definition is in line with Jones's and Graham's (2015 p. 49) idea of virtual teams:

A virtual team is usually described as a collection of people who are located in different areas, who often have different complimentary skills and expertise, and who normally work together using different communication technologies. Virtual teams are often used for specific projects in companies, guided by a mission, vision and a common purpose.

Virtual Teams: A Look at Some Advantages and Drawbacks

Virtual teaming has been growing partly because of the increasing ICT penetration across the globe and partly because of the advantages derived by the users like staying away from crisis areas and still carrying out duties as the

world experienced on a considerable scale when the coronavirus pandemic forced most many nations to suspend international flights into their airports in the first quarter of 2020. Symmons and Stenzel (2007) as well as Siebradt, Hoegl and Ernst (2009) have identified one of the greatest benefits as accessing information, skills and talent from multicultural sources. This would seem to represent a deviation from the conventional attitude in the management literature that regards cultural differences as a serious impediment to international business. Shenkar (2001) is one of the first scholars to challenge the notion that cultural differences are *ipso facto* bad for business, showing that multinationals go out of their way to partner with businesses from different cultures in order to fill in critical gaps. Cultural distance is a major driver of the unprecedented spate of strategic alliances across the globe, including the alliance between a major South African telecommunications operator and a local telecom company in the French-speaking Democratic Republic of Congo in an often-cited essay by Gomes, Cohen and Mellahi (2011).

Other benefits from the use of virtual teams include easy recruitment of talented project team members regardless of geographical boundaries, drastic cost reduction, fast project execution, and access to knowledge of local markets. These are considerable benefits to any international business manager. These benefits, however, should not make any person oblivious of the risks associated with virtual team in project conception or development, especially at the international level.

Siebradt, Hoegl and Ernst (2009), for instance, have pointed out that teamwork is more difficult to achieve in dispersed or remote teams than in co-locations. This is because teamwork is driven effectively by interpersonal relationships, and such informal relationships are often established through physical contacts or face-to-face meetings, rather than through videoconferencing or the use of Skype, Zoom, Webex and Teams. In today's management scholarship, task performance is not enough; relationships are important (Wehrich, Cannice and Koontz, 2010). The relationships are what Siebradt, Hoegl and Ernst (2009) call socio-emotional considerations. After all, people do not go to the office to just work and earn a living but also to interact with fellow human beings in a socially rewarding and productive way (Child, 2015). Human beings are not robots or working machines. They want to be treated with care and respect. Their feelings must be taken into consideration in corporate decisions. Hence, the rise of soft skills in modern management scholarship, a development reminiscent of Nye's (1990, 2004) soft power theory in American foreign policy which has been adopted by various countries and

organizations around the world. Soft power is simply defined as the ability to change the behavior of others to get what you want without coercion or payment (Nye, 2006).

Contemporary researchers and writers recognize communication, trust and teamwork as critical to the success of any organization (Pilbeam and Corbridge, 2010; Aguinis, 2014; Dierkes et al., 2003). It is all the more so in international business (Child, 2003; Nelsen and Nelsen, 2009). The top leadership in an organization must be able to communicate its vision to all stakeholders so that the latter can buy into it and work accordingly for the attainment of organizational goals. In the same manner, the organizational leadership should inspire the confidence and trust of followers. When organizational members feel that their leaders will not betray them but will rather reward them for acting as required, they can work with passion. As Buller and McEvoy (2012) have noted, high performing organizations have workforces which work with a passion while ordinary organizations do not generally have members who go beyond the call of duty. Working with passion leads to a culture of stretch and deliberate practice. Stretch is achieving results that initially looked almost impossible, that is, widely ambitious goals (Sitken, Miller and Kelly, 2017; Heskett, 2008) while deliberate practice means putting in more efforts than most people and organizations in order to attain most impressive results (Aguinis, 2014). Gladwell (2009) writes about the 10,000 hours principle which suggests that global excellence is achieved by individuals who put in as many as about 10,000 hours of practice in their chosen fields.

Needless to say, teamwork is the soul of organizational success. Where leaders work like silos or engage in turf wars, such organizations are doomed. Good coordination is more critical in managing dispersed teams than in traditional ones, and where there is poor coordination the members work in silos. The result can be catastrophic. Agreeing with Rosan (2001), Ebrahim, Ahmed and Taha (2009, p. 2656) have observed, "virtual teams are more vulnerable to mistrust, communication breakdowns, conflicts and power struggles".

To put it succinctly, teamwork, communication and trust need to be displayed more in dispersed teams than in co-locations because project team members come from different regions of the world with their own cultural idiosyncrasies and may not have met one another in flesh and blood. Communicating with, say, the Chinese is a bit challenging. They are not as categorical or direct in their statements as Europeans, Americans and Africans; they rather hint at issues. Whereas silence is considered in a lot of cultures as

acquiescence, it is not so with them. This researcher has been in a meeting where Nigerian government officials publicly levelled strong allegations against Chinese contractors without the Chinese attempting to correct the negative impressions before observers like journalists who were covering the event, thus leading them to conclude in their reports the next day that the Chinese were guilty of the offences. The allegations turned to be completely false, as revealed by a ministerial investigation.

Like Africans, southern Europeans and a lot of Asians, Chinese business leaders are not often punctual at business meetings. Guang and Trotter (2012, pp. 6460) advise: "For business firms planning to negotiate in a polychronic culture, it is wise to build a substantial margin of time into agendas". In other words, a scheduled videoconferencing may not start on time. As Ghauri and Fang (2001) have stated, the Chinese see business negotiations as a kind of war, and they do all manner of things to wear down the other party. Being late at meetings may be part of the effort to keep the other party guessing, and consequently make him or her concede as much as possible. It is also important that international business partners have at the back of their minds the fact that a lot of traditional Chinese, like many Asians, regard signing of contracts as evidence of a lack of trust (Mead and Andrew, 2009). Even when they agree on something during business negotiations, they could ask that the same issue be renegotiated the next day without apology. An elderly person in the family may have refused to ratify the agreement, and typically the refusal would not be challenged.

The Chinese are very deferential to those with power and authority, which makes their culture a quintessential power index society, that is, a culture where there is a big gap between those with power and those without it, and the latter regard it as normal (Hofstede, 2001). They also defer to old age a lot (Mead and Andrews, 2009). And as Fukuyama (1997) has observed, many Chinese businesses are family owned and headed by elderly family members, in contrast to Japan where businesses are managed mostly by professionals based on education and merit. Consequently, Japanese businesses internationalize better; they are bigger and more successful multinational firms. A key explanation for this phenomenon, according to Fukuyama (1997), is that there is a much higher level of trust among the Japanese than the Chinese. It has to be noted, however, that Chinese cultural values have been changing, resulting in what is famously known as the paradox of Chinese values (Miguel, 2015; Fang, 2008; Faure and Fang, 2008).

Understanding Chinese cultural idiosyncrasies is immensely useful in today's international business. A number of Chinese firms like Alibaba, BYD, Haier, Huawei and various state-owned enterprises are today key players on the global scene (Duncan, 2016; Tse, 2015, 2010). Goodman (2012) has reported how a European pharmaceutical firm suffered a huge loss in China because it replaced its top manager in China who had developed an excellent relationship with the people over the years. The Chinese authorities punished the firm for not discussing with them before the replacement; the Chinese value long-standing relationships even in business. With 1.4 billion people, China is a huge market. It is the second largest economy in the world, after the United States of America. China has emerged Africa's largest trading partner, with the volume of trade between them rising to \$149.1bn in 2016 (ChinaDaily.com, 2017) and has thus displaced the European Union and the United States. It is also now the manufacturing headquarters of the world, consigning the United States to the second position. What is more, Chinese societies go beyond China, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan. The Chinese may be a minority ethnic group in Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia, but, as Chua (2003) has disclosed, they dominate the businesses and economies of these countries. The Malays make up to 60 per cent of the Malaysian population, for instance, but foreign businesses deal mostly with ethnic Chinese in Kuala Lumpur and other urban centres in the country, despite years of bumiputera designed to uplift the indigenous Malays, a policy which the Chinese describe as discriminatory and as treating them like second class citizens in their own country (Jakobsen, 2015).

Communication and cultural differences are more difficult to handle in virtual teaming than in the traditional environment of international project teams. In dealing with the Asians, for example, body language is important. But the use of ICT facilities, including videoconferencing, cannot always reveal a lot about the body language of project team members. The pictures may not be clear and the audio quality may be of doubtful quality.

In a typical emerging market like Nigeria, there is the additional problem of a lack of basic infrastructure like electricity power supply and poor broad band penetration which impedes electronic communication. It worsens human element challenges like language and accent, inability to observe body language, leadership and coordination as well as a high degree of autonomy enjoyed by team members that may not go down well with team members from uncertainty avoidance cultures as are found in Asia and Africa. People from cultures which are high on the uncertainty avoidance index do not generally

take risks as they follow organizational rules strictly, in contrast to those from, say, the United States which is low on the uncertainty avoidance index (Hofstede, 2001). Risk avoidance sometimes may lead to charges of a lack of initiative which, in turn, inhibits innovation and progress. Writing on a similar situation in the public sector, Fukuyama (2014, pp. 533-4) notes:

The best bureaucracies have the autonomy to use judgment in decision making, to take risks, to innovate. The worst mechanically carry out detailed rules written by other people. Ordinary citizens are driven crazy by bureaucrats who can't use commonsense and insist on mindless rule following. Policy makers occasionally need to take risks and try things that haven't been done before. Excessive deference to rules often makes this impossible and reinforces government's status quo bent.

Integration is another major challenge inherent in the use of virtual teams. In spite of the considerable attention which it has received in the international business literature by scholars like Child (2015) in the wake of the recent mergers and acquisitions which created integration problems for organizations, integration is not often recognized by researchers as a major problem of remote teams. This is probably because project team members are not on the staff of one particular organization. But there is a measure of integration required of the members for the job to be executed well. They need to blend into one team as much as possible. Proper integration leads to teamwork.

Despite the serious challenges in its use, virtual teaming is growing by the day across the world. In other words, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages; in a lot of places, the challenges are being tackled successfully. India is an example of a developing nation which has employed virtual teaming very well, and the rapid growth of its software industry owes so much to this system of project execution. In Nigeria, another developing nation, the petroleum industry, dominated by such western multinational enterprises as Shell, ExxonMobil, Schlumberger, Total Energies and Chevron, have been the greatest user of virtual teams because the operators have the expertise and financial resources to do so. And as Ebrahim, Ahmed and Taha (2009, p. 2654) argue, the use of virtual teams is relatively new worldwide and still requires "a large engineering effort". In recent times, nonpetroleum sector operators in Nigeria, including indigenous businesses, had begun to use virtual teaming on a substantial scale even before the coronavirus pandemic. An example is Century Power Limited.

Brief History of Century Power Ltd and Its Use of Virtual Teaming

Century Power was set up in response to the reform of the Nigerian electric power sector. Until the enactment of the Electric Power Sector Reform (EPSR) Act of 2005, the country's electricity sector was the exclusive preserve of the Federal Government. With the new law, state governments and the private sector can now be involved in the generation and distribution segments of the business, but the central government retains the monopoly in transmission (Nnaji, 2011).

Century Power Ltd is licensed to generate electricity and sell to any one or a combination of the 11 electricity distribution firms created out of the state-owned Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). Century Power is currently developing, preparatory to building a 500Megawatt thermal plant, which will increase to 1000MW in the second phase and finally to 15000MW in the third phase. With the environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) certificate granted by the Federal Ministry of the Environment since 2012, the plant is being built at Okija, a sprawling town in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State which is located in Nigeria's southeast. Work on the power plant is currently at the preparation stage. The project estimated cost of the first phase is a total of US\$900million.

Though the plant is sited at Okija in Nigeria's southeast, Century Power Ltd has two very important offices in two other geopolitical zones of Nigeria, which is a vast country. The corporate headquarters is in Lagos, the country's economic capital which is some 601kilometeres away from the plant. The second office is in Abuja, Nigeria's political and administrative capital, which is about 542kilometres from Okija and 768kms from Lagos. The Abuja office is to coordinate affairs with such Federal Government bodies as the Transmission Company of Nigeria which takes electricity from generation companies and wheels to distribution companies, the Ministry of Power, Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission as well as the Nigerian Bulk Electricity Trading Company which guarantees generation companies for their output if the off-takers, the distribution firms, are unable to pay for it.

The firms involved in the building of the Century Power plant are far more diverse than the locations of Century's operational offices in Nigeria. The owner's engineer is AF-Consult, based in Baden, the German-speaking part of Switzerland, which has been conceiving, designing and supervising construction of power plants for some 120 years around the world. The turbines will be built by the General Electric subsidiary in France. The engineering, procurement and

construction (EPC) contractor is most likely to be Daewoo of South Korea (personal communication). The design and procurement office will be run by Daewoo in conjunction with AF Consult.

Much as the Century Power project is still at the site preparation stage, virtual teaming has been used considerably throughout the project development stages. Team members in both Switzerland and the three locations in Nigeria rely on ICT from time to time to examine simultaneously the topography of the site, discuss various aspects of the project development and the ongoing site preparation, and exchange views and ideas on the suitability of every bit of work with regard to the plant, including power evacuation.

Virtual teaming has enabled Century Power to take decisions quickly, even faster than co-location teams, as has been the case in some other situations (Cascio, 2000). Siebradt, Hoegl and Ernst (2009) have strongly argued that dispersed teams could outperform co-location ones in terms of task performance. This observation is shared by researchers like Ferrazzi (2014) and Jones and Graham (2015). The use of virtual teaming has also saved Century Power considerable time and cost. AF Colenco and GE employees and consultants have been working on the project without visiting Nigeria physically. Their visits would entail obtaining visas to the country and seeking work permits. The visits would also entail paying for flight tickets and hotel accommodation. These benefits would be pleasant news to small and medium as well as new enterprises. Even large and established firms would like to save considerable costs. Jones and Graham (2015, p. 50) have reported that "Hewlett-Packard used virtual teams to save the company \$80,000 in reduced agreement costs in Argentina and another \$200,000 in faster cycle times in Korea".

There is also the safety consideration. Nigeria has of late been experiencing kidnapping of foreign workers for ransom by regional militants and Islamic terrorists as well as sea pirates. Many Western multinationals like Shell, Schlumberger, Eni and Julius Berger have been victims of this criminal activity. A lot of domestic firms have suffered the same problem, too. Consequently, many companies and organizations spend considerable resources in providing security to their employees, especially foreign ones. By using virtual teams, Century Power has bothered less about the security of its employees. The word 'employees' is used here in the expanded sense which regards consultants, suppliers and other agents as employees of given organizations (Sparrow, 2007).

Still, the benefits of the use of virtual teams should not blind persons to the risks. As already stated above, interpersonal relationships are crucial for communication, trust and teamwork in teams and organizations, and they are often enhanced by face-to-face meetings, which are not common in remote or dispersed teams.

Century Power's Future Use of Virtual Teaming

As Century Power progresses with its construction of a power plant in Nigeria, it will use virtual teaming on a greater scale than it has done thus far. It will derive more benefits from the system, and, equally importantly, it will encounter considerable challenges. Organizational members from four diverse regions of the world will be involved in the power project. The members will come Europe, North America, Asia and, of course, Africa. Even so, the members will come from different countries in each region. Group 5 of South Africa is likely to be chosen to run the Design Office (personal communication). If chosen, it will work on the project with Nigerian engineers who are already on the ground. The South Africans are likely to be white South Africans, as they are ones who participated in the construction of the 141Megawatt Aba Power project in Abia State, Nigeria, where Group 5 was the contractor for the design, supply and installation of the plant built at \$520m (Geometric Power, n.d). The involvement of white South Africans and Nigerian engineers in a Nigerian project will expand the multicultural scope.

This development has at least two management implications. Members of South African firms internationalizing into African countries are frequently accused of haughtiness and a failure to blend with cultural expectations of their host communities (Nartey, 2015; Gomes, Cohen and Mellahi, 2011; Museisi, 2013). Differently worded, it would appear that South African firms have yet to embrace cross-cultural competence which may be regarded as the ability of an international manager to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds and social classes by immersing themselves emotionally in the culture of the host community (see Johnson, Lenatowitcs and Apudid, 2006; Dean, 2001; Goodman, 2012). International management experts believe cross-cultural competence goes a long way to mitigate the challenge of liability of foreignness (LOF), which refers to the social and economic costs a firm incurs when it moves beyond its national boundary (Gaur, Sarathy and Kumar, 2011). Researchers also believe cross-cultural competence reduces cultural distance which international or expatriate managers experience. By cultural distance is meant the degree of differences in values between one culture and another.

Unlike liability of foreignness, cultural distance can occur within the same nation (Gaur, Sarathy and Kumar, 2011; Shenkar, 2001). Some countries are heavily divided within in cultural terms, making them what Huntington (1993, 1996) calls cleft societies. An example is Nigeria where the northern part is Islamic-oriented because the majority of the people are Muslims while the southern part is Western-oriented because the majority of the people are Christians (Fukuyama, 2014).

The second management implication is that it should now be obvious to international business researchers and writers that Africa is culturally heterogeneous. In the words of Nartey (2015, p. 116), "Africa is not culturally homogeneous, a fact that is well-researched and explored by anthropologists but completely disregarded by business practitioners and academics". As Clarke (2010) puts it, it is divided like the rest of the world. Gomes, Cohen and Mellahi (2011) have called attention to how contrasting African cultural attitudes and practices collide in African organizations. George et al. (2016, p.381) put it succinctly:

Africa is a continent of extreme ethnic and linguistic variety, dating back to before colonial rule when it comprised up to 10,000 different states and autonomous groups with distinct languages and customs. Today, more than 25% of all languages are spoken only in Africa, with over 2,000 recognized languages spoken on the continent (Heine & Nurse, 2000). This extensive ethnic and linguistic diversity affects how individuals, groups, and organizations relate to one another, and has a bearing on how business is done as well as the costs of doing business in Africa.

Given the fact that Daewoo of Korea is preferred for the Procurement Office, it means that its technical team will have to work with those from AF Colenco of Switzerland, the owner's engineer, and the French subsidiary of General Electric of the United States of America on building turbines for Century Power. This will present some cultural challenge, considering that Korean and Western cultures are remarkably different. Even among Westerners, there is a pronounced difference between European and American cultural values. For instance, one major reason often cited for the collapse of the Daimler-Chrysler merger of the late 1990s is differences in culture between Europe and the North America (Lewis, 2016).

What is more, the fact that the design and procurement office will have to be established overseas increases the multicultural dimension of the Century Power project. Daewoo, which won the contract for the Procurement Office, may set up the office in London because the distance between Korea and

Nigeria is huge. To establish the procurement office in Seoul will escalate the cost in a way which stakeholders are likely to reject outright.

Likely Challenges to Face Century Power in the Use of Virtual Teaming in the Near Future

As Century Power increases its use of virtual teaming for its on-grid electricity supply project, it will face three major categories of problems, namely, natural, technical and cultural.

Natural Challenge

There is a difference of eight hours between Nigeria and South Korea. This means that as the Asians are getting to their workplaces, Nigerians would be going to bed. The big difference in time zones is a veritable source of concern, all the more since some project members are from cultures where punctuality is taken less seriously than in some others.

Technical Challenge

The technical problems will be in forms of poor electricity supply and low broadband Internet penetration in Nigeria.

Nigeria has a population of approximately 182million, yet the highest quantum of power it has ever generated is 5517MW, and this was in February, 2015. Worse, its transmission and distribution networks are in a deplorable state (Nnaji, 2012). All this means that power supply is irregular and the quality often poor. Individuals and organizations rely heavy on self-generation which, according to the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), produces a little over 4350MW (Nnaji, 2011). Self-generation is expensive, pollutes the environment and the carbon monoxide from it causes illnesses and in some cases instant deaths. Century Power unfortunately has to rely on self-generation a great deal in order to build its plant. Poor electricity supply will affect its use of virtual teaming because information and communication technology runs on electricity.

Century Power's employment of virtual teaming will also be affected by the country's low broadband Internet penetration (Okonji, 2016). Much as telephony has increased dramatically in the last decade when the country liberalized its telecommunications sector and introduced mobile telephony on an unprecedented scale, Nigeria's Internet connectivity is poor. Leading multinational firms like Addax, Shell, ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco and the rest have their own communication infrastructure backup, but most people and

businesses like Century Power rely on Internet service providers (ISPs) like the MTN, Airtel and Glo whose services are not always efficient.

Cultural Challenge

Like most problems confronting virtual teams, cultural challenges are likely to be the most difficult in the Century Power's establishment of a major power generation facility. Here are some of them.

- I. English is the medium of communication for all the project team members. But most members use English as a second or third language. This means that many are not likely to be proficient in it. There is the additional problem of acute differences in accent which could affect understanding (Brett et al., 2006).
- II. Different attitudes to time are a significant factor. Whereas the Asians and Europeans observe punctuality, Africans, like South Europeans and Latin Americans, (Mead and Andrews, 2009), are hardly punctual when they make appointments. Considering the huge difference in time zones between, say, Japan or South Korea and Nigeria, any failure to keep to time could have serious consequences.
- III. Africans gesticulate a lot and speak loudly, unlike Asians and Europeans who are reserved. This could make non-Africans working on the project think that their African partners are upset whereas they are not.
- IV. The fact that Asians are reticent and send out plenty of signals through the body language may cause serious communication problems, all the more so when face-to-face contact is minimal.
- V. When Asians speak, the meaning is highly contextual (Ardichivii et al., 2006) while Africans, like westerners, speak directly. The Asian members could be upset several times by this cultural habit.
- VI. Another key area of conflict is likely to be the level of trust in the team. Nigeria unfortunately is a low-trust society, unlike South Korea, United States, Switzerland and France which have high-trust cultures (Fukuyama, 1997). Trust is a key critical success factor in virtual teaming (Lee, 2009; Siebradt, Hoegl and Ernst, 2009; Ebrahim, Ahmed and Taha, 2009; Ferrazzi, 2014; Jones and Graham, 2015). Nigerians are noted for low social capital as evidenced by the advance fee fraud (Nartey, 2015; Ndemo and Mureithi, 2015) which Nigerians call 419 because Section 419 of their country's criminal code forbids the practice.

- VII. Since a number of firms will be involved, there are bound to be organizational or corporate cultural differences.
- VIII. There could be the problem of dual reporting by some members.
- IX. In addition, Western members may be struck by the Asian members' high uncertainty avoidance index which is prevalent in their regional culture, just as they could be taken aback by the Asians' proclivity towards group harmony, rather than individual's recognition (Hofstede, 2001).
- X. Western team members, particularly Americans, may provoke their Asian colleagues with their confrontational communication and management style which may make the latter "lose face", a serious issue among Asians (Mead and Andrews, 2009). Ferrazzi (2014, para. 7) notes: "Awareness of and sensitivity to other cultures is ... important in global groups".

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is important that steps are taken to reduce the problems that will affect the implementation of the Century Power project of building a power plant to generate some 1500MW in Nigeria, a country which is energy hungry and has been starved of electricity for decades, thus adversely affecting its social and economic development. Given that the project is being implemented substantially through virtual teaming, here are some of the measures which may be considered.

- (a) An early face-to-face meeting and team building event with all project members, or at least with the leaders (Ferrazzi, 2014; Brett et al., 2006; Ebrahim, Ahmed and Taha, 2009; Siebdrat, Hoegl and Ernst, 2009).
- (b) An early managerial intervention so as to set the norms at the beginning like participative management and the creation of a culture of high accountability and other social values (Lee, 2009).
- (c) Early orientation training on differences in cultures and societies, which should include information on the absence of basic infrastructure like public electricity supply in some developing nations.
- (d) An early creation of a leadership style which stresses positive developments like commendation of team members who make proactive and brilliant contributions (Ferrazzi, 2014).
- (e) Hiring of only those with team spirit, as lone rangers will definitely be misfits, no matter their individual technical competencies (Siebdrat, Hoegl and Ernst 2009).

- (f) Deliberate, sustained efforts to maintain regular and prompt communication.
- (g) Fostering in the team members the belief that their contributions will not go unrewarded, given that, as Aguinis (2014) has pointed out, the concept of “what is in it for me?” is key in performance management.
- (h) Engendering in the members the can-do-spirit in the face of all kinds of challenges, citing examples of how some team members have accomplished more difficult tasks in the past and/or how some rival teams have delivered on projects in similar circumstances (Ferrazzi, 2014), thus embracing a culture founded on stretch and deliberate practice which drive great attainments (Heskett, 2008; Aguinis, 2014).
- (i) Restriction of team members to not more than 10 persons at any point in time because research has shown that team members are less productive when they feel less responsible for output (Ferrazzi, 2014).
- (j) Century Power’s acquisition of its own communication infrastructure as Nigeria’s leading firms have done.

Despite obvious challenges, virtual teaming has come to stay. It is increasing in popularity throughout the world because of the numerous advantages. According to Jones and Graham (2015), 50% of companies and 66% of global businesses which participated in a 2012 survey confirmed using virtual teams. The numbers must have changed radically in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Most educational institutions across the globe have now gone beyond using virtual teaming to deliver mostly MBA programmes to now use it various kinds of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Its use has grown so much so that the Donald Trump Administration did ask foreign students in the United States whose programmes could be taught online to return home and complete them via the Internet, an action which prompted Harvard, Johns Hopkins University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to sue the administration; Columbia University joined as a friend of the court. From the look of things, therefore, Century Power can only use more of virtual teaming, not less. Indeed, experts have long predicted that virtual teaming would be employed more in the future (Cascio, 2000; Ferrazzi, 2014). Yet, the facts above should not be construed to suggest that virtual teams will replace traditional teams. Despite the growing number of big digital organizations like Uber, the point has to be stressed that virtual teams are small and temporary, as Bal and Teo (2001) as well as Ebrahim, Ahmed and Taha (2009) have stated. They are used mostly during the early stages of a project.

They have limited use, as in manufacturing (Time-Management-Guide.com, 2005), despite the emergence of the Internet of things or even the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Ex-American Donald Trump's National Security Adviser has provided an interesting example of how the use of ICT cannot be an adequate replacement for in-person meetings. His regular telephone conversations with two key cabinet members were not as productive and enriching as their physical meetings, according to him. Bolton (2020, pp. 37-38) states: "Mattis suggested that he, Pompeo, and I have breakfast once a week at the White House to go over pending issues. Although we were all on the phone with each other several times most days, the breakfasts proved to be a very important opportunity for the three of us alone to discuss issues".

Steve Jobs, co-founder and chairman of Apple who is regarded by many in the computer world as a genius, made what may be considered a compelling contribution to the conversation on whether the virtual way of doing business could someday replace the conventional method. Isaacson (2013, p. 431) has reported:

Despite being a denizen of the digital world, or maybe because he knew too well its isolating potential, Jobs was a strong believer in face-to-face meetings. "There is a temptation in our networked age to think that ideas can be developed by email and iChat", he said. "That's crazy. Creativity comes from spontaneous meetings, from random discussions. You run into someone, you ask yourself what they are doing. , you say 'wow', and soon you are cooking up all sorts of ideas'.

So he had the Pixar building designed to promote encounters and unplanned collaborations. "If a building doesn't encourage that, you will lose a lot of innovation and the magic that is sparked by serendipity", he said. "So we designed the building to make people get out of their offices and mingle in the central atrium with people they might not otherwise see".

In March, 2022, Parag Aggrawal, Tweeter chief executive, announced that employees could work from anywhere, as he put it, forever. In contrast, in June, 2022, Elon Musk, the Tesla chairman who was on the verge of taking over Tweeter, directed workers at the office of the foremost electric car company to resume in-person work or lose their jobs. According to Isidore (2022):

"Anyone who wishes to do remote work must be in the office for a minimum of (I mean a minimum of) 40 hours per week or depart Tesla. This is less than we ask of factory workers," Musk wrote, adding the office must be the employee's

primary workplace where the other workers they regularly interact with are based—"not a remote branch office unrelated to job duties".

Musk believes that his having to practically live in Tesla's factory in Fremont, California, in 2017 and 2018 when Tesla was struggling was responsible for the company's survival. It would appear then that remote working and the traditional way of managing organizations will continue to reinforce each other. It will be hybrid all the way.

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