Managing performance in virtual teams
A multiple case study of esport organizations
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Abstract

Background
The growing phenomenon of esports during the last decade have sparked the rise of a billion dollar industry. Professional esport teams are now competing in arenas with an audience of millions watching at home. Virtual teams have been used actively since the 1990’s and are now the standard structure in esport organizations.

Problem
Most of the organizations in esports are based virtually which means that the team members act and communicate in a virtual environment. The explosive growth of esports have resulted in an industry with limited managerial experience. This have resulted in increasing difficulties managing and maintaining teams in esports organizations.

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to explore how an esport organization can manage processes to achieve effective performance. This study is conducted to expand the knowledge on the role of a manager in esports organizations.

Method
The empirical data in this study was gathered using a qualitative approach. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with a managers and two players in two different esport organizations. The empirical data was complimented and compared with previous literature on virtual team performance.

Results
The empirical findings together with previous academic literature was analyzed to form several processes and implications that ultimately can lead an esport organization to better performance. The academic literature on virtual teams mostly match the empirical findings with a few important differences. The results offered an insight into the processes that an organization can utilize to achieve better performing teams.
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1. Introduction

Electronic sports or “esports” is a rapidly growing form of entertainment built on the passion of computer games. In the early 2000s, communities of enthusiastic gamers were arising and thereafter established local area network (LAN)-parties which involved competitions in multiplayer games. Over time, the LAN’s grew with corporations offering sponsorships and prize money in exchange for advertisement; this led to the creation of esport organizations, an esport team with professional gamers representing their logo and sponsors (Steinkuehler, 2019).

Fast forward to 2019 and esports is a two billion dollar industry with a massive following (Bernardich, 2018). In the midst of serious competition with thundering chants of the fans throughout the arena, the competitors are in the last game of the final and the commentator is shouting this:

“Soo (a player) is just standing his ground and fighting, is this it? I think he’s done it! That’s gonna be it. Stats (a player), you attacked yourself into a corner. GG! Soo’s done it, the curse of coming 2nd place has been broken here in Poland. In front of thousands here in the arena, in front of tens of thousands viewers back at home. We have seen magic happen here on the stage in Poland. What a final and what a showing from Soo. He is walking up to grab the trophy, Soo has made it happen, here at Intel Extreme Masters 2019 in Katowice”

The excerpt above is from the last moments of the grand finale at the 2019 esport tournament Intel Extreme Masters (IEM) Katowice 2019, where the Korean player Soo was able to defeat the top-rated Korean player Stats in the final, winning a price of $150 000. Intel Extreme
Masters is an annual esports event attracting the most talented players in a variety of games, including Starcraft II and Counter Strike: Global Offensive (CS: GO). The major tournament offered a total prize pool of $1 000 000 in CS: GO and $400 000 in Starcraft II. The Intel Extreme Masters is one of multiple annual events that reflects the world of esports (IEM, 2019).

In the last decade, esport have established itself as a global phenomenon. The public knowledge about gaming in general, has for a long time been plagued by a prejudiced view. Interest in computer games have been associated it as an immature activity, practiced by children and teens in their childhood rooms (Seo & Jung, 2016). However, during the last decade, the esport scene has experienced a great transition, not only in the public eye but also as an industry. Today, esport is a billion dollar industry with tournaments held in large arenas, with millions of spectators and followers worldwide (Seo & Jung, 2016).

The growth has made it possible for people to transform their passion of gaming into professional careers in esport organizations, with serious training and competitions all over the world. As a result, the teams in esports have emerged with a variation of a traditional sports team structure (Tang, 2018). Organizations with millions of dollar in revenue require managers and administrative personnel to handle the different tasks that exists besides practicing and competing. Management in esport organizations is increasingly important, covering a wide aspect of responsibilities, including schedule handling, coaching and communicating with stakeholders. Esports is already an established industry and requires successful management in order to solidify effective performance in the esport organizations.

1.1 Problem

Research have identified the importance of social dimensional factors, task related factors and effective communication in virtual teams (Lin, Standing, & Liu, 2008). In the context of virtual teams, these factors can provide a stable virtual environment for effective performance. Depending on the focus of the research, the literature identifies the importance of the factors differently. Some studies features a focus solely on social dimensional factors, such as relationship-building, trust, team cohesion and communication. On the flipside, some studies examined task dimensional factors such as coordinating goals as primary performance measurement. Virtual teams have historically been deployed as dispersed task-based teams, focusing on various projects (Lin et al., 2008).
In recent years, information and communications technology (ICT’s) have become widespread and integrated to most people's’ daily life with computers and phones. In esports, the majority of people involved in the industry is knowledgeable and well adapted to the usage of ICTs as the main form of communication (Wagner, 2006). Numerous managers who work for esport organizations used to be pro gamers themselves before they got the opportunity to move their career into a coaching and managerial role (Redbull, 2014). Michael O’dell, the general manager of Team Dignitas, one of the highest rated European organizations, described his journey from pro gamer to manager as something that just happened:

“So I was playing and then turned into the manager just because I was the eldest in the team! I had a real job managing people in sales and marketing and then literally just because I was the oldest in the team, the guys put me in charge of managing and marketing our stuff and I kind of just took over, so it wasn't planned, it just happened.” - Michael O’Dell (Redbull, 2014)

Stories like O’dells are common in the world of esports, where talented players take on management roles, often including coaching for different teams in a variety of games. Tiffani Lim, manager of esport organization Titan explains that her role as a manager often include administrative objectives such as scheduling, handling prize money awards as well as communicating with sponsors, tournament organizers and fans (Redbull, 2014).

The primary goal of an esport organization is for the players to perform well in tournaments and managers and coaches are essential to the team’s performance. In the hands of the manager are aspects that also constitute to an esports organizations success, which includes: team development, sponsorships, marketing and coaching.

Esport organizations reside in a virtual and hyper competitive landscape which may be difficult for a manager, especially if the organization is young. As a result, problems related to team miscommunication, trust issues and difficulties in decision making occur frequently (Redbull, 2014). Maintaining a healthy and balanced organization throughout while still progressing and achieving results is a complex task. This thesis aims to explore how an esport organization can manage the processes to achieve effective performance. The processes that are utilized and affect performance are analyzed from an organizational viewpoint. The influence a manager
can have on these performance processes may create room for understanding that can lead to developing effective processes for improved performance.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how an esport organization can manage processes to achieve effective performance. This study is conducted to expand the knowledge on the role of a manager in esports organizations. The research question that this thesis intends to answer is “How does a manager in an esport organization manage performance processes?”

In relation to the research question, there are two sub questions that this study aims to address:

1. “How does an esport organization manager strengthen drivers of team performance?”
2. “How does an esport organization manager overcome barriers to team performance?”

1.3 Intended Outcome of the Study

The intention of this study is to be useful for esport organizations that are looking to develop effective processes for improved performance.

1.4 Delimitations

In this study, several delimitations have been established. The first delimitation is the exception of technology as a factor of performance. This is because the esports industry, in general, are run by people who have a lot of expertise in computer-mediated communications (CMC). Moreover, technology as a performance factor is not relevant for this study since it is focused on processes to effective performance.

The second delimitation is regarding characteristics of a pro gamer. This study does not study the psychology behind pro gamer’s performance because it is focused on the processes to effective performance. It is only briefly described in the literature review as an overview of what it requires to be successful pro gamer.

The final delimitation is regarding the organizations involved in the study. By delaminating the scope to developing middle-sized organizations, more relevant findings regarding the development of processes, drivers and barriers for performance and common issues can be found and compared accurately.
1.5 Terminology

A list of terminology is written for the reader to have a brief introduction of the computer games mentioned in the study. Considering the field is rather new, a list of terminology that explains the fundamentals is necessary. Therefore, the authors of this study lists the games and abbreviations that will appear in future chapters.

- **Gamer:** A gamer is a hobbyist or individual that enjoys playing various types of digital or online games.

- **Pro gamer:** An abbreviation of professional gamer; a pro gamer is a full time player who is paid to practice and compete in a video game, either in a team or solo depending on the game.

- **Gaming:** The activity of playing video games using computers or game console

- **IRL:** An acronym of “in real life”, commonly used online.

- **Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS: GO):** A multiplayer first-person shooter (FPS) game published by Valve in 2012. The game is played five versus five. Its predecessor Counter-Strike released in 2000, was one of the first competitive esport scenes during the 2000’s (Mitchell, 2018).

- **Starcraft II:** A multiplayer real-time strategy (RTS) game published by Blizzard Entertainment in 2010. The game is played one versus one. It’s predecessor Starcraft I was one of the most popular esports during the 2000’s, especially in South Korea, before its successor was released and overtook its position (O’Keefe, 2018).

- **FIFA:** A series of football video games with a yearly version since 1993, released by Electronic Arts under the EA Sports label. The game is played one versus one on consoles such as XBOX or PlayStation (EA, 2018).
• **League of Legends (LOL):** A multiplayer online battle arena game (MOBA) published by Riot Games in 2009. Two teams, consisting of 5 players are playing against each other.

• **DOTA 2:** The successor to DOTA, originally a player-made modification of another game. DOTA 2 is a multiplayer online battle arena game (MOBA) released by Valve Corporation in 2013. Two teams, consisting of 5 players each are playing against each other.

• **Hearthstone:** A multiplayer collectible card game published by Blizzard Entertainment in 2014. The game is played one versus one.
2. Literature review

This chapter will present the theoretical background of our thesis. The literature review will cover the history of competitive gaming to esports and show an overview of esport organizations, pro gamers and the esports industry. Furthermore, the chapter will define what constitutes performance and discuss drivers and barriers for performance in virtual teams.

2.1 History of Competitive Gaming

A lot has happened in the field of video games since 1958, when the American physicist William Higinbotham publicly displayed his game-creation “Tennis for Two”. The machine became the first computer based game to display motion, using an oscilloscope and to feature handheld controllers for competitive play for two persons. The game became very popular with the public attendees during its display (Nyitray, 2011).

However, almost a decade and a half have pass since the first ever video game console for commercial and home use was introduced in 1972, the Magnavox Odyssey. This was a predecessor to Atari’s popular tennis video-game and console Pong, published only months after the Odyssey. The popularity of the Atari’s Pong, led to the appearance of arcade games in popular public locations, such as malls and bars in the mid 70’s. This resulted in a large growing market and by this time around 15 different companies were developing new video games and consoles (Chikhani, 2015).

Naturally, an increasing popularity in arcade halls led to an increasingly competitive nature surrounding the arcades. The early games put a strong emphasis on achieving a high-score, making the players strive to compete by breaking each other's high-scores. The most talented would be the ones to display their result and write their names on the top of the leaderboard (Chikhani, 2015).

An important event happened when a group of students at Stanford University hosted the “Intergalactic SpaceWar Olympics” in October of 1972. The SpaceWar tournament was popular and well-organized and is fifty years later recognized as the world’s first competitive video game tournament. Esport, as we know it today, had been born (Good, 2013).
2.2  Esports

With all social and cultural developments that can be related to the rise of the computer entertainment consumption, competitive elements of computer games is one of them. Esports is defined by Borries, Walz & Böttger (2007) as:

“An area of sports activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies”.

A pragmatic definition of esports by Whalen (2013) is:

“An umbrella term used to describe organized, sanctioned video game competitions, most often in the context of video game tournaments”

Esports is skill-based competition on a wide range of entertainment systems such as computers and gaming consoles. It’s competed in a variety of genres such as real-time strategy, first-person shooter, battle-royal, multiplayer online battle arena, fighting and sport-themed games (Seo & Jung, 2016). While competitive gaming has been around in arcade halls since the 1970’s, the phenomenon of esports have seen a huge increase in popularity during the last decade (Ingraham, 2018). The cultural development of esports grew with semi-professional and professional tournaments being held more frequently, attracting an increasing number of viewers and exposure (Seo & Jung, 2016).

The development and spread of greater internet infrastructure should be considered as an important factor in its growth (Llorens, 2017). With a growing audience of spectators, event organizers are able to attract significant sponsorships and media coverage, leading to large prize pools for players and deepening the cultural interest of the audience. A shift can also be seen in people's approach and perception of gaming as a cultural format and activity. Gaming has transitioned from being considered as a subculture, mostly practiced by young men into a pop cultural phenomenon transcending almost all demographics of people (Black, 2017).

The growth of esport has contributed to a large increase in viewership numbers. The audience of esport events in Europe 2017 reached almost 80 million unique spectators (Bernardich, 2018). The finals of the 2018 World Championship in League of Legends was watched by 99.6 million unique viewers (Goslin, 2018). This makes an esport tournament in parity with some of
the largest sport tournaments in viewership. The most watched sport event in the United States, the Super Bowl fell short when comparing its 2019 viewership of 98 million to the 2018 League of Legends finals (Pei, 2019).

With growing popularity comes an increase in economic growth. According to a market report conducted by the analytic company NewZoo in 2017, the European esport market alone is estimated to be worth $2.4 billion by the end of 2020. The growing popularity and audience of esports results in larger prize pools in tournaments as well. The International 2018, the World Championship in DOTA 2 had the largest esport prize pool in history. The original base prize pool set by the game developers Valve was $1.6 million (Dota2 Prizetracker, n/d). The developers offered the game community to voluntary purchase an in-game battle pass, a virtual goodie bag with limited edition items for $10 each. 25% of the earnings from the battle passes was added to the total prize pool of the International 2018. This resulted in the final prize pool of $24.8, with the winning team, European based OG taking home $11.2 million (Makuch, 2018).

In 2018, the most popular one versus one esports was Starcraft II and the card game Hearthstone. The most popular esports team games are first-person shooter (FPS) games such as CS: GO and Overwatch and multiplayer online battle arena (MOBA) games such as DOTA 2 and League of Legends.

2.2.1 Esports versus Regular Sports

Regular athletic performance- and/or competitive based activities are included under the collective umbrella known as sports. It has been actively debated whether esports should or could be recognized as a real sport (Hallmann & Giel, 2018). The Council of Europa’s European Sport Charters (Bogusz et al., 2007, p.161) definition from 1999 of activities regarded as sport is:

“All forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels”.

The lack of physical activity when competing is often brought up as one of the main arguments why esport could not be recognized as a sport (Hallman & Giel, 2018).
Nevertheless, there are similarities between regular sport and esport. Common for both is that team performance is directly linked to the dynamic of the team. A team’s ability to create and maintain a healthy cohesion among the members is one of the key factors to effective performance. The team member’s ability to work well together is what contributes to enhanced performance for the whole team (Tang, 2018).

However, there are some notable differences. Lee and Schoenstedt (2010) argues that the aspect of fan involvement and their significance in financial success works differently for esport teams. Regional supportive fan bases are not as common in esports, because esport teams lack the same ties to a specific geographical location as a football club could have to a certain city or area. Moreover, esport teams are playing on an online global stage, in contrast to most sports clubs which have a home field. If the performance is lackluster and the team is in a slump, an esport team cannot rely on loyal local fans to the same extent as many regular sports clubs can. As a result, it incentivizes the esport team to maintain frequent performances in tournaments to be able to stay relevant (Tang, 2018).

However, in recent years there have been a diminishing line between regular sports teams and esport teams. Szekeres (2018) describes that large sport franchises are starting to see the potential in the constantly growing esport scene. Therefore, regular sports teams are expanding their roster by purchasing or funding their own esport organizations to compete with. Szekers (2018) argues that most important point why regular sport teams are branching into esport is that it is seen as a rather cheap investment to acquire the eyes of global market, with an international young audience that lack the interest in regular sport. The regular sport teams also want a slice of the billion-dollar esport industry.

This have sparked a trend where large regular sports teams are looking to expand their organizations into esport. For example, The Philadelphia 76ers acquired Team Dignitas and Apex Gaming in 2016, to put two well-known esport organizations under their banner (FoxSportStories, 2018). Moreover, many world renowned football teams such as FC Bayern München, Paris Saint-Germain, Manchester City, Wolfsburg, Ajax and PSV Eindhoven and many more have already signed and established esport teams in FIFA esports to various degrees (888Sport, 2018).
2.2.2 Global Sport Organizations in Esports

Another important difference between esports and regular sports is the way governing bodies work and act in the industry. Global sport organizations (GSO) are used as a protecting governing body, e.g. FIFA that govern football and FIA that govern motorsports. GSO’s also exists in esports but the perspective of GSO’s differ greatly between regular ones and the ones involved in esport (Koot, 2017).

Game publishers, such as Valve Corporations for CS: GO, Activision Blizzard for Starcraft II and Riot Games for League of Legends are actively involved in the esports scene surrounding their respective game. Game publishers fund competitive leagues and forbid professional players from betting on professional matches. Each esport is governed individually by its game publisher because the game is their intellectual property (Koot, 2017).

A game publishing company has fundamentally different interests than a regular GSO, where they control the game at large, including the esport scene. Normally, a GSO employs the role of setting and enforcing the rules of a sport, developing the game both on a recreational and competitive level. In esports, the publishers control the game mechanics that are used in the current version of the game, which can be balanced and steered in different directions depending on the outcome of professional matches (Koot, 2017).

Attempts at institutionalized governance in esports have been of various success. Korean Esports Association (KESPA) and Electronic Sports League (ESL) in Europe have successfully created a foundation of a proper GSO, working against illegal betting and player protection (Seo & Jung, 2016).

In 2016, as a result of the increasingly global competition, World Esport Association (WESA) was created by ESL as well as various top esport teams, to set rules and regulations for esports globally (WESA, 2016). WESA aims to receive legitimacy by involving stakeholders from a variety of major esports brands but have had limited success in establishing a true esport GSO (Koot, 2017).

One of GSO’s primary missions is to protect players and ensuring competitive integrity. As mentioned in the problem discussion, many esport players are young and in a vulnerable
position to be exploited. A global GSO can ensure legal action being taken against esport organizations exploiting players. Common examples of exploitation of pro gamers are defective contracts, unhealthy practice requirements and withholding of salaries. (Koot, 2017) Exploitation negatively effects pro gamers performance and an esport organization should actively ensure player protection and legitimize their contracts to maximize the performance of their players.

2.2.3 Esport Organizations

An esport organization is a group of pro gamers that compete in esports, either alone or as a team, depending on the nature of the specific game. Esport teams are often referred to as “esport organizations” (Chapman, 2018). Esport organizations with teams in a lot of different games often have a global reach. Most games played have different popularity depending on region, so organizations with teams in a variety of games can compete and have exposure on all continents. An esports organization’s headquarters may be located in a single country with players and teams located across the globe. Most organizations operate in a virtual environment, with general communication and meetings being over computer-mediated communication (CMC).

However, there are exceptions when it comes to a handful of the most successful esport organizations. The American based Cloud9, with its current valuation of $310 million is considered as the world's most valuable esport organization. This substantial value has been achieved by being a multi-genre esport organization with multiple teams that competes in all of the most popular competitive games right now (Ozanian, 2019). Cloud9 is currently investing in a project of constructing a massive 3000m² training facility for their 92 players and the potential generations of young esport professionals (Ozanian, 2019). This facility will include space for all players to train, seek psychological and physical counseling and become home base for all managerial staff (Ozanian, 2019).

2.2.4 Professional Gamers

A study by Seo & Jung (2016) found that the primary reasons for gamers to pursue an esports career was the pursuit of self-improvement and mastery of the game. The ability to have a professional career provides the opportunity to achieve high self-esteem, achievement and social recognition. Nevertheless, many players still consider the professional computer gaming
activity as fun and self-motivating. A recent study by Himmelstein, Liu, & Shapiro, (2017) categorized factors that influence performance of a pro gamer. Some of the factors included are, (1) knowledge about the game, (2) strategic, smart and fast thinking, (3) staying motivated despite past performance, (4) separating daily life and performance in esports, (5) avoiding distractions and staying focused while practicing, (6) maintaining a positive attitude.

Team games require players with different skills, proper communication and trust in their skill to create strong team dynamics. If done properly, it’s possible to achieve a synchronized team performance that reach optimal competitive performance. Similarly to football, specific player positions are important and in team games in esport, each player specializes a certain position or role within the game. Moreover, pro gamers do regular physical exercise in order to be able to maintain the mental stamina and stress tolerance necessary to practice for many hours, every day (Shabir, 2017).

Most esports often revolves around strategic planning, quick reactions and flawless decision making. Real-time strategy games such as Starcraft II, require a lot of simultaneous actions throughout the game, where some top players execute more than an average of 350 commands per minute. The importance of players keeping to their top performance is crucial (Shabir, 2017). In all types of competitive play, a strong emphasis on being adaptive to changes is put on players, professional and amateur alike.

Unlike most regular sports that often have static rules that seldom change, the games in esports experience consistent strategic change. Most games are under regular maintenance and improvement where aspects of the game might be altered, removed or added by the game developers. This happens in the form of regular patches or updates. An esport athlete needs to be aware of the changes and practice for situations where new features have been added or removed. Patches keep the game interesting and challenging and makes pro players evolve and adapt to an ever-changing climate (Shabir, 2017). The dynamic and changing nature of the rules and playing field to a lot of games requires constant renewal and development of new playstyles.

2.2.5 Structure and Business Model

According to Patrik Sättermon, the chief gaming officer of the multimillion-dollar esport organization Fnatic, there are some significant differences the way an esport organization
makes profit, compared to a regular sports team (The Versed, 2017). The most noticeable difference is that regular sport teams have a venue where their matches takes place, which regular sport teams benefit from ticket sales (The Versed, 2017). During the last years, the major tournaments also take place in large venues which benefit from ticket sales. However, the hosts of the tournament or event are not the esport organizations so they do not benefit from the ticket sales like a regular sports team. The tournament organizers, often the game publishers, are the ones who profit from the ticket sales (The Versed, 2017).

Most esport tournaments are not bound by the physical boundaries that regular sport event have to account for. Tournaments could solely take place online. This minimizes the need for traveling expenses for the esport team, because online tournaments allow participants and pro players to compete without being located in the same venue (The Versed, 2017). Sättermon (2017) argues that it’s beneficial to lack the need for a physical arena to host a tournament, which makes esport tournaments able to run more cost efficient than a regular sport organization (The Versed, 2017).

According to Murray (2018), the four largest sport leagues in the US, namely the NBA, NFL, NHL and MLB generated 23% of their annual income from ticket sales in 2017. In contrast, the global esport revenue streams from arena ticket sales, combined with the sale of physical merchandise, arose to only 11% of the total revenue of the industry in 2018 (Newzoo, 2018).

Further, regular sport teams generate large profits through broadcasting rights to matches. According to a report from Business Insider, the estimated revenue for broadcasting rights will reach $22.8 billion by 2020, which amounts to 30% of the total sport revenue (Gallagher, 2018). In contrast, esports as an industry reported $160 million in profit from broadcasting rights, which leads esport organizations to rely more on different revenue streams (Newzoo, 2018). However, Sättermon further argues that a large obstacle and problem in today's esport scene is that all the broadcasting licenses and is owned by the game publishers themselves. This is not the case in regular sports, whereas anyone could start their own football league and profit from broadcasting it. Because of broadcasting licenses, esport organizations are prevented from collecting revenue that the viewership bring in (The Versed, 2017).

Sponsorships are essential to esport organizations, where 59% of the total revenue stream in esport organizations came from sponsorships or other types of paid advertising (Newzoo, 2018).
While regular sport events and teams might be sponsored by companies and brands that have nothing to do with the given sport itself, the sponsorship in esports works a bit different. According to Tang (2018), the majority of the audience in esports are playing video- and computer games themselves.

Naturally, it makes the esports market a hub of marketing campaigns, surrounding esport events and tournaments. This results in that almost all companies featured as sponsors at events are companies that offer products or services related to gaming (Tang, 2018). As esport continues to grow, meeting different audiences and getting more accepted by mainstream media outlets, this might change.

2.3 Virtual Teams

Virtual teams have already been a part of everyday work life for some time but are still considered a relatively new phenomenon. A general definition of virtual teams is uncommon since authors vary in their interpretation. Often, virtual teams are seen as a group of people contributing to a common goal, which is rooted in the definition of a normal team “small groups of interdependent individuals who share responsibility for outcomes” (Hollenbeck et al., 2012, p.82). The aspect that truly defines a virtual team is that the group is geographically distributed people who can work together for a common goal, through the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The expansion of the usage and importance of virtual teams has been emerging simultaneously as the development of ICTs (Powell, Piccoli, & Ives, 2004). A few definitions for virtual team offered are shown below:

Lipnack and Stamps (1999), define a virtual team as:

“A team where the members have complementary skills, working towards a common purpose, using technology to cross time zones, distance and the boundaries of organizations”

A more modern proposal for a definition is:

“Groups of geographically, organizationally and/or time dispersed workers brought together by information technologies to accomplish one or more organizational tasks”

(Nader et al., 2009, p.2654)
The latter definition identifies the assignment of the team as organizational tasks instead of a common purpose. This study will view a virtual team in esports through three main points. The team is geographically dispersed and uses ICTs as the main form of communication. Moreover, the team shares a common purpose of representing and competing for the organization. How a team performs eventually affects the success of the organization.

2.4 Performance

The word performance is used in a variety of situations. According to Corvellec, (1995) performance can illustrate both an act and the result of an act. In other words, performance can be defined both as a process and/or an already accomplished event. Corvellec (1995) further argues that performance within an organization can be viewed as the process of an employees’ work to achieving organizational goals.

Corvellec (1995) continues by claiming that performance can act as stories for organizations and sport teams, where tales are told about previous success with an aim to compare results and motivate future goals. Performance is an important factor in the stories of success told and narrated by an organization, which can be used to create further effective performance for the team (Algesheimer et al., 2010). This depicts the construction of hierarchies founded upon merits and abilities, where each participant distinguishes the other by comparing performance. Individuals can be either punished or rewarded depending on how they compare to one another. This makes performance an important dramaturgical factor in the stories of success told and narrated by organizations and sport teams (Corvellec, 1995).

Performance is a term that means different types of performance depending on situation. Most people have a subjective definition and that’s why the authors chose how to define it for this study. For the purpose of this study, the authors of this study consider performance to be the series of tasks to achieve a goal. In this respect, performance is considered a process. However, when a team wins or achieve a good placement in a competition, it can also be said the team have achieved successful performance. In this regard, performance can be considered an outcome. The authors of this study clarify that for this study, the focus is more on performance as a process, the process of developing drivers for performance that will boost the outcome of the whole organization and its teams.
2.5 Drivers for Performance

Szewc (2014) categorizes the four most important aspects to virtual team performance as team building, trust, communication and leadership with interrelated elements between the aspects. The performance drivers enhance each other, where successful communication affect team- and trust building positively. Algesheimer et al. (2010) present similar results using their “Input-Process-Emergent States-Output-Input” analysis framework. Their study stated the importance of intra-team communication and team cohesion and its effect on strategy consensus and expected performance. However, this study did not include trust as a factor to virtual team success but both studies identify the importance of team tenure and shared desire and goals and its effect on successful communication and performance (Algesheimer et al., 2010; Szewc, 2014).

A study by Lin et al. (2008) on virtual team effectiveness identified social dimensional factors as the primary drivers for performance. The development of trust, cohesion and relationship building are seen as vital to the early development of virtual teams. A team succeeding in developing interpersonal relationships can strengthen the sense of belonging and is strongly associated with improved performance (Lin et al., 2008).

Another study identified the most important factors for success in virtual teams: being openness for communication, trust between team members, fast feedback, as well as honesty and clearness of communication (Hejduk et al., 2008). Similar results were presented in a virtual team survey where team leadership (86%), trust (65%), team building and development (48%) were the three most important aspects (Hawkrigg, 2007, p. 16).

2.5.1 Communication

Successful communication is an important aspect of teamwork and the lack of face-to-face interaction differentiates virtual teams from traditional ones. Virtual teams are engaging in a lot of CMC, which require clear and specific interactions between the team members to avoid misunderstanding. The lack of face-to-face interaction and ability to observe body language and linguistic expressions makes it more difficult to establish a foundation of communication.

On the other hand, the nature of communication in virtual teams is asynchronous, that enables the team members to delay their response, reflect over the message and then respond accordingly (Lin et al., 2008). Stereotypes based on visual observations, as well as
generalizations of people’s opinions are less prevalent in CMC (Lin et al., 2008). Moreover, functional communication require successful introduction of team members in order to develop team cohesion and developing trust between members (Szewc, 2014).

2.5.2 Team cohesion
Team cohesion is defined as when the team members are satisfied with the group members and are having positive social interaction. Lin et al. (2008) concluded that social dimensional factors have a strong impact on task related factors such as coordination, which in turn directly influences both team- performance and satisfaction. Bollen & Boyle (1990) recognized similar results, where perception of cohesion influences members’ behavior and can be divided into two dimensions: sense of belonging and feelings of morale.

Naturally, relationship building strengthens the sense of belonging to the virtual team and leads to stronger team tenure, cohesion and trust. The importance of successful interactions and communications within the team may not be understated, where increasing group integration is positively related to team cohesion. Team cohesion is the foundation to functional group performance and satisfaction (Szewc, 2014).

2.5.3 Trust
Trust is a widely researched factor in virtual teams and trust building in virtual environments has been found to be problematic. The problem is related to team members not sharing a common past and lacking face-to-face interactions (Lin et al., 2008). As a result of the lack of physical greetings and interactions, team members often base their trust in others based on credentials and affiliations.

Trust in traditional physical teams is linked to better communication, cooperation, quality decision-making and risk-taking. Trust can be categorized at different levels (group, organization, society) (Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2002). Trust at a group level is referred to as interpersonal trust and is the most relevant element of trust in this study. Interpersonal trust describes an individual’s will and confidence to act on the words, actions and decisions of others (Mcallister, 1995). Interpersonal trust is multidimensional, with both cognitive and affective dimensions. Cognition-based trust is related to characteristics such as reliability, integrity, competence and responsibility and is developed through communication. Individuals build cognitive trust in order to reduce the complexity amongst the group and build better relationships (Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2002).
Emotional elements of trust are referred to as affect-based trust, including understanding and caring for other people. Affect-based feelings and trust are normally developed in close social relationships, essentially among family and friends. However, it has been found to have relevance even in working group environments. As mentioned before, virtual teams rely mainly on CMC as primary communication method and as a result, cognition-based trust have been found to be developed to a higher degree than affect-based trust (Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2002).

Szewc (2014) argues that trust works as a major control system in virtual teams. Due to the lack of an authority system and a supervising entity, both delegation and oversight is lacking. In a virtual environment, especially working from home as many pro gamers do, trust takes the position of an overseer, where employees put trust in each other to ensure working for a team interest.

2.5.4 Leadership
Leadership in virtual teams can enhance the team’s performance and facilitate team development (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). Shachaf & Hara (2005) identified communication, understanding, role clarity and leadership attitude as four dimensions to effective virtual team leadership. The first two dimensions refer to a leader who provides support and feedback on an individual level, as well as expressing interest in the team member’s opinions and problems. The two latter dimensions suggest the leader to clarify the responsibilities and meaning of the members work in a consistent and assertive way which lead to empowering the team members.

Virtual leadership eases when the team members stays together in the organization. The provided structure, norms and organizational goals created by the leader should be applied and understood by all team members. However, this takes time and a short life cycle of team members can result in the leader’s role changing and then focusing primarily on integrating the new team members and keeping them on track with organizational goals (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002).

2.5.5 Goals
Members in a virtual team will benefit from a leader who establishes objectives and goals by individual empowerment and delegation of managerial responsibilities. Furthermore, this allows members to work efficiently individually and as a team to achieve key performance
objectives. In a conventional work environment, direct leadership is common but the role of a virtual team manager could be more efficient through exhibiting coaching and moderating roles (Nader et al., 2009). Goal interdependence is the degree to which teams have clear goals and the extent to which members’ goals are linked to the team goals. Especially in virtual teams, it’s important that organizational goals don’t conflict with team members’ goals. It might result in low quality results and a short life cycle of team members (Hertel, Konradt, & Orlikowski, 2004).

2.6 Barriers to Performance

Virtual teams can maintain contact and communicate with the use of ICT’s, where the widespread usage of computers allows collaboration without physical boundaries. The main strength of the virtual team is that the place and time is configurable and optimizable for the team members. However, studies have shown that the lack of physical interaction could lead to a greater risk of miscommunication and trust issues which may result in conflicts and limited performance capabilities (Nader et al., 2009).

Another principal difficulty faced by virtual teams are time zones, which can make scheduling a complex task. The time differences cause delays when team members cannot proceed with their task due to colleagues being located in different time zones. To overcome the issue with time zones, the manager must identify the needs and plan in accordance to the team member’s time tables (Bergiel, Bergiel, & Balsmeier, 2008). Cascio (2000) categorized five inherent disadvantages to a virtual team: lack of physical interaction, loss of face-to-face synergies, lack of trust, greater concern with predictability and reliability and lack of social interaction. While there’s been great development in technology since 2000, the disadvantages identified by Cascio are still relevant (Nader et al., 2009).

Challenges for virtual teams have been linked to issues with initiative taking while working in a virtual team and contributing to the accomplishment of the whole team. While computer-mediated technologies ease the accessibility of communication, fewer non-work-related situations occur, e.g. coffee-break and small talks. This is an effective way of building relationships and trust with a location-based team. As a result, mutual trust is harder to establish in a virtual environment, especially in newly formed teams (Nader et al., 2009). Moreover, virtual teams may face conflict resolution issues since the team are dispersed and cannot solve issues in a practical manner. In contrast to solving a conflict face-to-face, a virtual team might
not identify a conflict between two members because of the virtual nature of conflict (Bergiel et al., 2008).

2.7 The Input-Process-Emergent States-Output-Input Model

Algesheimer et al. (2010) designed a revised model of the traditional Input-mediator-output-input model. The model studied virtual team performance, using their “Input-Process-Emergent States-Output-Input” (IPESOI) analysis framework. The framework was used to analyze 606 professional gaming teams in the European Electronic Sports League. All the teams were working within a similar competitive environment. The five categories (Initial inputs, team processes, emergent states, we-intentions to perform, expected team performance) and how they impact each other within the model are described in their respective order.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Model (Algesheimer et al., 2010)

The inputs to the model are include the demographic features of a team, such as size, tenure and heterogeneity, as well as the past performance of the team. Past team performance is an important factor that influences the mindset of the team members. The demographic features have an effect on team processes. In this model, team processes are developed by successful
intra-team communication and team cohesion. Team processes represent cognitive, motivational and affective states and impacts strategic consensus.

Strategic consensus is in this model described as an “emergent state” and is divided into shared goals to perform and shared desire to perform. Together, the shared desire and goals become the joint commitment to strive for performance. The shared desire to perform is affected by emotions and attitude, whereas positive emotions positively affect it and vice versa.

The teams shared desire and goals to perform leads to we-intentions to perform. It’s the goal to establish we-intentions, through social interaction and coordination. This is when the team works together for their goals and results in a positive impact on the expected team performance. A positive feedback loop can be established this way, fueling a shared desire for the expected team performance and to increase it further in the future (Algesheimer et al., 2010). Expected team performance is directly related to actual team performance, since a positive attitude towards performing will result in better performance.

The quantitative study found drivers for effective performance, including team cohesion, communication and past performance. The study shows that past performance of a team is essential in establishing an expected team performance, which is directly related to actual team performance.
3. Method

This chapter explains the research approach, methods and strategies involved in developing the study and answering the research question. Moreover, the case-selection and criteria and interview design will be explained. Finally, the data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations will be discussed.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The different philosophical approaches offer the possibility for the authors to establish certain assumptions for the topic. The assumptions are the foundation on where the authors select research strategy and the methods involved in the strategy (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

Interpretivism is a research philosophy which emphasizes the differences between humans as social actors, with differing opinions and views on how the world works. The social roles a person interpret is in accordance with the person's own set of meaning (Saunders et al., 2016). Communication is a tool people use that includes the exchange of meaning through language, symbols and text to form a social connection and understanding to one another (University of Twente, n/d).

According to Weber (2004), researchers following a positivist view tend to obtain a large amount of empirical data to be analyzed statistically, in order to detect similarities and differentiators. In contrast to this view, an interpretivist view of achieving empirical data is through e.g. case studies. Positivism requires a value-free approach which is difficult to obtain when conducting interviews, since the interviewer will express values through the conversation and by asking questions.

Conducting multiple interviews in a similar way without involving feelings is difficult in order to obtain relevant data. Moreover, business and management studies using a positivist view is often criticized for generalizing complex topics to definite laws, which is implausible to use when writing a thesis on management in virtual environments (Saunders et al., 2016).

The authors of this study believe it is important to embrace a subjective view of human action to generate any useful findings to answer the research question. In other terms, both virtual
teams and esports are complex worlds and relatively new fields of study, which demand an exploratory open mind. This in order to be able to distinguish the similarities and differences between the teams involved in the study. An interpretivist approach is useful in this study, since it aims to understand the reality of the participants in the study. Further, by doing qualitative analysis, the authors aim to be able to understand the influence of a manager on establishing processes that enables drivers for effective performance in esport organizations better.

3.2 Research Approach
The research approach is chosen and developed depending on how the theory of the subject is used. Research are built on methods called deduction, induction or abduction where the deductive approach is strongly rooted in scientific research, focusing on investigating and analyzing quantitative data. By building a solid theoretical base, the phenomenon or subject being studied can be anticipated and therefore, the outcomes can also be predicted (Saunders et al., 2016).

The deductive approach is not optimal for this study due to the nature of the research question and purpose; hence it can limit the study which is to explore qualitative aspects of virtual teams in esports. An abductive reasoning is in-between deductive and inductive, allowing the research to be done on both data and theory. An abductive reasoning is not suitable either for this study (Saunders et al., 2016).

Inductive reasoning is based on the observations of the research and allows development and change throughout the research process, which leads to a conclusion created by the observations. Moreover, an inductive approach complement a qualitative study with a smaller sample size. This study will be following an inductive approach due to conducting qualitative research and collecting primary data through semi-structured interviews (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.3 Research Strategy
The research strategy is the approach that determine in the way one conducts their research. The type of strategy that is most suitable for a specific research is determined by how the research question is formulated and what it seeks to answer. The type of strategy is also strongly influenced by the time limitation of the research and the existing previous knowledge within the specific research field (Saunders et al., 2016).
Saunders et al. (2016) argues that it is important to avoid being stuck in the labeling of one's strategy and advises to focus on the ability of the specific strategy to answer the research question. There is no rule that states that a sole strategy must be used throughout the whole process of answering the research question. Instead multiple strategies could be used to compliment or overlap each other, with the focus of answering the established research question.

The two different approaches for gathering data to one’s research are the qualitative and quantitative type of data collection. Quite often, a mixture of both, a mixed method approach, is used because combining the two methods are useful in a variety of ways. The use of mixed methods represent a blend of quantitative and qualitative methods in research. This type of method can have evolved from the tendency to triangulate information from different data sources (Saunders et al., 2016). The quantitative approach uses statistical analysis with a strong focus on the hypothesis and the theory used in the research. Qualitative research have a wider focus, searching for a sense of meaning and establishing a wider understanding by studying all the aspect of a phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2016).

The authors of this study decided to conduct this research in a qualitative manner with a focus on the interviewee’s subjective thoughts and experiences on processes that enables drivers and counteract barriers for effective performance in esport organizations. The approach is used to get a thorough understanding and could spark further exploratory discussion regarding the research subject.

3.4 Multiple Case Study
This study will include multiple cases. According to Saunders et al. (2016), a case study is used to generate a wide understanding about the specific research field. This may be done by seeking answers to questions such as “why?” and “how?” in a more in depth manner than a quantitative survey. According to Baxter & Jack (2008), the data gathered should not be tampered with because that would lose the contextual conditions of the situation or phenomena, which the study is aiming to research or answer.

A multiple case study is conducted because the aim of this study is to draw competitive or contrasting predictions regarding the results of the empirical findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008).
Because the field of study covers a fairly new phenomenon, a multiple-case study offers to seek insights and knowledge that can be used to develop the answer to the research question.

However, the multiple case study strategy doesn't come criticized. Vissak (2010) argues that many regard the case study approach to deliver unscientific results. The main argument for this being that it statistically takes hundreds of different cases to be able to construct any form of scientific model. Vissak (2010) continues to argue that because a case study often includes rather lengthy interviews with subjects. The time an interviewee has to put aside to be part of the interview could be off putting for some individuals. Especially when it comes to physical face to face interviews, the financial expenses and time it consumes to travel to different participants. This obstacle was avoided by doing all interviews over CMC.

3.5 Semi-structured Interviews
There are several types of ways to construct an interview. The style spectrum spans from strictly formal and narrow questions to an unstructured and informal interview (Saunders et al., 2016). A formal interview does not allow the interviewee much space to deviate with their own thoughts, while an informal interview does the opposite. In the middle the spectrum exists numerous types of interview designs that are a mixture of the both.

In this research, the interviews are conducted in a semi-structured way. This gives the interviewee room to elaborate on new ideas that might occur when being asked an open-ended question. Adams (2015) argues that the importance of a semi-structured interview is to be able to present the interviewee with follow up questions, such as “how?” and “why?” This allows an open discussion on the topic, while developing detailed and elaborated answers. By asking open-ended questions, the interview may take interesting turns, which could result in an addition of further unexpected questions (Adams, 2015).

3.6 Case Selection
A few aspects existed in the process of deciding which esport organizations to reach out to be a part of the study. Firstly, the focus was to select teams that are multi-genre organizations, with fairly similar organizational operations and historical performance. Thereafter, the authors looked to establish contacts with persons who hold managerial positions within the organization.
Esportearnings.com is a website collecting analytics on tournament winnings of esport organizations and players. The website was used to select organizations based on the criteria:

- The organization have teams competing in multiple games
- The organization is well-established and have experienced players and manager
- The organization is based in Europe or North America

Firstly, the reason for having a criteria on the organization having teams in multiple games is because there are one-game organizations that are very successful with a small staff and one competitive team. Organizations of this kind are not of interest due to having a different organizational structure and their team performance will not be subjected to the similar type of drivers and barriers.

Secondly, the reason for selecting organizations with a spread of prize winnings in different games is because having this diversity indicates a manager with knowledge and experience in different situations. The different configurations of competing teams (e.g. 1 vs 1 or 5 vs 5) may be managed in different ways.

Lastly, the decision to include only teams that are based in Europe or North America is to avoid language barriers or translation difficulties that might occur during the interviews. After contacting several esport organizations, only two managers from two esport organizations agreed to be part of the study. After establishing contact with the managers, the authors found two players in each team who agreed to be part of the study. Anonymous semi-structured interviews regarding the organization, the performance drivers, the barriers and general thoughts were then conducted.

3.7 Data Collection
The empirical findings generated from semi-structured interviews with managers and players in esport organizations is used as the primary data. The secondary data was collected from the academic literature on virtual team performance. Scientific literature related to management in virtual teams is fairly common but research in the field of professional esport organizations is scarce due to it being a relatively new phenomenon. Hence, the choice of including non-academic literature and articles, especially in relation to esports, was made to contribute in enhancing the literature review. Together, the data complement each other in this study of virtual team performance in esports.
3.7.1 Primary Data
The aim of the interviews was to explore the processes of managing performance. The main focus in the primary data was to explore the implementation of processes to overcome common performance barriers and to strengthen performance drivers. The primary data consists of perspectives from both managers and players. The player’s perspective was collected in order to avoid the possibility of biased data from only interviewing people in managerial positions. The interviews were semi-structured and past events of the organization was used to deepen the discussion regarding how the manager implemented processes before and which improvements can be made. The interviews were conducted and recorded online, through CMC such as Microsoft Teams and Skype.

The interviewees were informed that their answers and participation in the study will be kept anonymous. This was done in order to minimize the risk that the interviewee’s answers will be affected by fear of possible repercussions. This might be a threat, if not appearing anonymous in their position within the organization.

3.7.2 Secondary Data
Theories and academic literature have been collected from various search engines and databases, namely JU Library, Google Scholar and DIVA. In order to construct a relevant and up-to-date literature review, the publication year for the majority of the literature related to esports in this study was set to publications after 2008. This is due to the fact that the industry is a relatively new phenomenon. As previously mentioned, the inclusion of non-academic articles and papers was made to be able to construct a thorough literature review. The search words for the literature review revolved and related to virtual teams, esport and management. Search words or terms that were used to find relevant articles can be found in the summary that is presented in the table below.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Parameters (Table 1)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Database and Search Engines</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Types of Literature</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication Period</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Languages of Publication</strong></td>
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Virtual team performance is a research topic which has existed since the 1990’s and exceptions have been made to the original parameters, e.g. for the history and definition of virtual teams. In order to collect this specific information, the search range was increased to 1990. This is because the academic articles and journals still holds its relevance when this study was conducted and that’s why the table shows the publication period 1990-2019.

3.8 Ethical Considerations
During the past decade, there’s been an emphasis on the understanding and usage of ethical considerations in data gathering. Saunders et al (2016) argues that the consequences of this are that research from both primary and secondary sources have to put substantial weight on ethics. This is as important when gathering primary qualitative data in the form of interviews, as it is when conducting a quantitative survey.

There are several ethical codes that were taken into consideration when conducting this study and its interviews. An important factor was to be open and transparent with the interviewee regarding the reason of the topic of the study and their participation (Saunders et al., 2016). This information was important to communicate to the interviewees before they went through with the interview itself.
As none of the interviews were conducted in a classic face-to-face manner, but instead over CMCs, such as Skype, an emphasis was put on making the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible. To match the interviewee’s personal schedules, the authors had a flexible time approach to conducting the interview.

One of the authors used to compete semi-professionally in esports and was part of middle-sized esport organizations. In order to do this study unbiased, the authors used only the literature review as a base of the study. The analysis is based solely on the findings and have not in any way been influenced by his experiences. His involvement in esports was in 2012-13 and the esports industry was not as developed at this time. Therefore, the authors have been able to disregard from this data.

3.9 Discretion and Anonymity
The discretion of the people that took part in the research was handled with utmost care. The interviewee was informed during the first contact, as well as at beginning of the interview that the interview was being audio-recorded. The participants were informed that the reason the interviews were being audio-recorded was to avoid possible circumstances where the participants could be misheard, misunderstood or misquoted.

The participants were informed that the audio-recordings of the interviews would be discarded as soon as the necessary data needed for this research were decoded and extracted. The participant was informed that prior to analysis of the data they had provided, the data was to be handled with utmost care and stored securely. And that it under no circumstances was going to be shared or examined with by anyone besides the two authors of this research. The audio-recordings would then be deleted after the completion of this study, to respect the privacy of the participants.

Since all participants are in public positions within organizations, the discretions regarding their privacy is reasonable. The participants were informed that they would be anonymous in this research. The reasoning behind the decision was to firstly, make the participants feel safe to truthfully answer the questions and secondly, that they and their organization’s names were irrelevant to the purpose of this research.
According to Saunders et al (2016), one of the key principles of ethics in the context of research is the value of the people that participates in the research. Hence, an utmost emphasis was put on respecting and value the participant’s information. Every participant was informed prior to the interview that they had the full right to not answering a specific question and they can cancel the interview at any time.

3.10 Data Analysis

There are several different forms and ways the qualitative data could be processed and analyzed. The primary data collected through interviews are being analyzed through a thematic analysis. Goodrick & Rogers (2015) explains that a thematic analysis can be broken down into a list of steps that follows:

Step 1: Clarification of purpose
The reason behind the usage of the thematic analysis method was that the data gathered from these interviews would be overviewed easily when distributed in similar thematic categories.

Step 2: Familiarization with the data collected
This step involves organizing the data collected. In the case of this research, the data collected consists of transcripts from interviews that were conducted. The transcripts was thoroughly examined by both authors, in order to be sure that an understanding from the material was made. This was made to minimize the risk of possible misunderstandings that might occur.

Step 3: First level coding
This is the first step in the process of coding the data gathered. The process consisted of reviewing the data in order to assign it relevant labels for later categorization. This way of data reduction was made to make the data more tangible by extracting certain words of interest, used in the transcripts.

Step 4: Second level coding
In this step, the words and phrases in the previous step were further examined and similarities and differences between them were drawn. Several categories were formed to distinguish the coded data and to get a more structured overview of the material.
Step 5: Classify relationship
The data went through a process where possible connections and relationships were examined and distinguished. The different interviewee’s answers were compared to one another, to find possible resemblances between them.

Step 6: Thematic decision and naming
The thematic categories was limited to match the previously mentioned academic literature on the virtual team topic. Their names were consequently named thereafter as well. The decided categories were: “the role and importance of communication”, “developing team cohesion and trust”, “The manager role and organizational goals”, “Differences in management of team games and solo games” and “exceptions”.

Step 7: The writing process
Conclusively, the coded thematic data is approved by the authors. The writing process of the relationships between the thematic categories
4. Empirical Findings

This chapter presents the empirical data that was gathered from the interviews with two managers and four players from two organizations. The findings are compiled according to the structure of “Drivers of performance” (see chapter 2.5). This thematic coding is done to have a relevant overview of the gathered data.

4.1 Introduction of Organizations

Organization X is an esport organization with teams in a variety of games, including Street Fighter, League of Legends, DOTA 2, Starcraft II, CS: GO and Call of Duty. The organization started among a community of friends almost 25 years ago and later grew to a regional area in Sweden. Many years later, the team started becoming a well-known name online and attracted more attention. At its peak, the organization had approximately 60 players in different teams. Manager X works as esport manager with team tasks such as taking care of team issues, developing team cohesion,

Organization Y is a Swedish esport organization with teams in the following games: CS: GO, female CS: GO and Apex and a total of 15 players. From their founding days in May 2016, the organization have focused on long-term development and support of teams and individual players. Despite being newly founded, the management team have worked together previously in an older organization. Manager Y is one of the two founders of the organization and works as the organizational manager with tasks such as sponsorship acquisition, partnerships and contracts.

4.2 The role and importance of communication

The role of communication can be split into two different categories: Between the members of a team in a specific game, and between the organization and a team. The level of success of communication within a team is related to the degree of group cohesion and performance.

According to manager of Y, two types of communication issues exist. There can be communication issues within a team and between a team/player and the organization. The manager experiences communication issues to be more severe if the problem is between the management and a team/player.
“One issue is with players is that they having problems communicating with each other. Most of the time, it is not serious. It’s always like this in team games, even the most professional of player have communication issues. We also have issues between players and staff and those are more difficult”

Some of the players in Y felt that the vast distance between them and the manager accounted to a feeling of not being enough prioritized. They also experienced that they were not getting callback to eventual questions that arose.

“[...] we were low prioritized. Massive delays with answers and it was hard to get information and hard to hold them accountable for things they promised”

Manager X explains that one frequent problem in working in a virtual team seem to be that the members seem to be less likely to face to consequences of their own actions. Virtual environments gives the members with an easy way to blame each other and not focus on solving the real issue at hand.

“Normally a problem in virtual teams is that people just blame each other and don’t communicate their real issues as they’re protected by being online. “

Manager X encountered several times that the players overestimated their organizations financial assets. This was particularly noticeable when different teams within X were approaching the management with inquiries regarding possible monetary compensation for trips to certain events.

“We had many teams so it was difficult to manage the money spread out. Teams were telling me that they want to go to a certain event and I would respond: Of course you should go, but X won’t be able to support you fully financially. We may however offer your sponsorship gear and we can schedule and set up the travelling”

Manager Y is experiencing that many young talented players enter an esport organization with the attitude that they are fully molded professional players. Manager Y argues that there is much more to being a professional and successful esport player than just being skilled at the game. In
team games, the player have to be in symbiosis with his/her team and can’t solely rely on their own personal skill. Manager Y explains:

“People want to be treated as professionals but are not really professionals. You can’t be a professional person if you just play all day. Sure in terms of skill level but it’s more than that. In real life aspects also count as a player, not only your skill”

To be able to combat eventual communication issues that might occur, both organizations have planned meetings at least once a month. This is to thoroughly schedule practices, upcoming events and to present possible issues that might have troubled the players or management. Manager Y states:

“We have online meetings once a month online to discuss upcoming events, any issues overall, also planning”

However, there are still issues when it comes to scheduling. Some of the players and managers have jobs on the side of their esport careers. This can result in relative simple tasks such as scheduling a meeting, turning rather complicated. Manager X says:

“I know one of our teams had a small issue, where I set up a meeting with the whole CS: GO team and the head management of X. This was an online meeting from all over Europe, so it was really hard to keep this on a working schedule”

4.3 Developing team cohesion and trust

Successful communication is the foundation of building team cohesion and trust. Developing team cohesion can be difficult in virtual teams, since the members often lack a common past and don’t encounter face-to-face interactions in the virtual workspace. As a reminder, team cohesion is defined as when the team members are satisfied with the group members and are having positive social interaction.

Unanimous for all interviewees was that they stressed the importance of a foundation of dedication and passion. Manager Y argues that the esport teams and organizations is founded upon the same passion a football club is. Manager Y explains:
“You got to do it with love and passion and it's the same thing whether you look at football or floorball in Sweden. What are all the organizations based on in the beginning? Community and nonprofit workers, just people having passion for the game and team.”

One important factor for developing team cohesion and team spirit within the teams for both managers and players is IRL meetings. It’s possible to conduct regular physical meetings with players who are spread across Europe. However, it might be a financial impossibility for most medium-sized teams. Once, during events and tournaments – meeting everyone in your team is surely needed and appreciated.

“We tried to have physical meetings but it's so hard with international teams. It’s very expensive to fly people in. It was going to be too expensive. However, it’s very good with IRL events, such as tournaments, for organizational cohesion and team spirit in general” - Manager Y

“We used to have important LAN-preparations for Dreamhack, it was one of the rare occasions where all in X could have dinner and engage with each other. Normally you would talk online, play online and you’d get this virtual image of who the person is and it doesn't matter if you have seen a picture or not of him” - Manager X

Both managers explain that physical tournaments is an important meeting point for the whole organization where different teams that rarely interact online could get to know each other. Manager Y explains that tournaments are a great possibility for exercising team spirit:

“We talk to the teams and if you’re at the same event where many teams are playing, we encourage them strongly to hang out and cheer on your organization. We are proud of that team spirit, where rosters cheer on each other at events where they both play”

Almost all players voice the same opinion when it comes the feeling of community and inclusion. It is highly valued and the passion for the game and the connectivity they had with likeminded individuals grew their relationship beyond just the game. The feeling of team tenure was strengthened by the bond of friendship developed by the players.
we became good friends and we support each other no matter what was wrong in “our life”. It was added to our friendship that we could play under the same banner and fly and participate in events together.”

Players in the one versus one game Hearthstone are witnessing that the team are performing much better if all players are in the best possible state, mentally. They practice against each other and there is a strong incentive to reach out a helping hand to another teammate if they are feeling down. Despite being a one versus one game where the players don’t compete together, the individual player’s wellbeing are directly linked to how the team as a whole perform.

“You try to help out if someone is feeling down, you poke them and make sure you are there. Make sure they can trust you and things you can do to improve trust you should take them. It’s like a strong friendship and when everyone feeling well, practice sessions will be so much better”

Manager Y argues the importance that the players are feeling support from their own organization. He draws the comparison to sports at universities in the U.S, where all teams that represent the same school unite and cheer for each other.

“I studied in the states at a university and all the 40 sport teams at the university support each other, cheering for the teams to represent their school. This is kind of what an esport organization could do but after all core focus is on your own performance and results”

Developing trust in virtual environments is difficult, but manager X believes in having a clean sheet for every new member of the organization. Trusting people in the sense that they want to join a team and do their best is essential. Both the managers argue that they trust people because they wouldn’t be part of the organization if they didn’t want to.

“If you want to play the game, play the game. If I didn’t hear anything about someone, I believe that he has a clean sheet when he joins the organization. Personally and as an organization, I have always trusted our members“
Likewise, manager Y is confident that even his newest team members are going to do well. Trust does not seem to be a factor of worry in their organization. He explains:

“When we sign a team, they are already pretty good. I trust that they're going do their hardest to get as good as possible and achieve results. I'm not too worried”

A central point of a manager in esport organizations is taking part of the development of talented players into established pro gamers. To see the progression of a player is considered as one of the most motivating factors for both managers. This was expressed by both managers:

“We saw some success in Hearthstone almost from the start, but to build up a player who improve all the time, getting better and better, is the most important. Not winning large tournaments directly but achieving better results” - Manager Y

“It was more fun to see the young people who joined for fun and then evolved into really good players and went to events and won” - Manager X

By being community-centered in that way, the organization could be a catalyst for young talent. Both organizations express that their players need to feel a meaningful relation to the team and that if a team doesn’t work out - the players in the team needs to swap members.

“The team needs to be consistent. They need to win and need to be the same troop that fit together and that takes commitment. Team cohesion takes time and they will find their own aura, through practice and tournaments. It has to feel meaningful for the team and it's up to them” - Manager X

“We want the best for our players, so even if a players wants to leave or another team tries to get the contract, we try to make the player as happy as possible. They have to make the decision and it should be fair” - Manager Y

4.4 The manager role and organizational goals

The organization and managers support of their teams is very important in a competitive environment. The players are given the responsibility and decisions of their own careers. The main focus of the organizations is to develop a drive in the players. Manager X explains:
“I want to get the team driven in the way that they want to become better and actively participate in tournaments, online or offline”

The monetary winnings from tournaments are equally distributed to the team members. The players are encouraged to develop a responsible mindset, to invest the monetary means into means that furthers their careers as esport players. Manager X explains:

“X will pay it out to the team and distribute the prize winnings to the team equally and strongly encourage them to invest this in for further progress and competitions” -

“Give the responsibility to the team! You have this much to spend, what do you want to do? Try to get the people in the team to take the responsibility and plan their own future”

To make the teams engaged in their careers is a job with many responsibilities. Manager X was responsible for both administrative aspects and coaching of the organizations’ teams. His role was making sure the teams felt as good as possible:

“As esport manager, I was during events running around between all the areas where the teams were competing, keeping time of the schedules, scores, that everyone is ok and know what they’re doing”

Esport organization is like any other business organization oriented around goals. However, differences lies in the goals of the managers compared to the ones for the players. The managerial goals are centralized around the progression of the organization as a whole. While the player’s goals are more performance oriented.

“We have goals, at different levels, where goals at management level is totally different than the teams. We are looking at the large scale in how the organization is developing to the next level” - Manager Y

As a player, you want to win and do your best, not only for you but also for the organization. However, sometimes you can have a bad day, be unlucky or the opponent just playing better. A player explained it like this:
“You always have hopes on getting better and practice more [...]. I did my best but sometimes things just don’t work out in tournaments, you have a bad day or whatever and you’re out”

The organization have goals when recruiting teams, with specific focus on, for example, enabling the team to perform well in tournaments and achieving certain international rankings.

“It’s more like business goals, but we also have team goals that we want to achieve. For example, we want to have the Counterstrike team to be ranked top 10 in the next 6 months and we set the goals together with the teams.” – Manager Y

The organizations encourages the team members to engage themselves, associating themselves with the team and to be great figureheads for the organization. The players are encouraged to wear the organizations own branded clothing when they are partaking in public activities, to maximize the promotion for the organization. Manager X explains:

“The goal for X was that every pro player should always be representing the organization, wearing their team jerseys. And always try to promote the top players and the ones who engage themselves extra. That's how we encourage people, people should be proud and happy about being in X”

4.5 Differences in performance of team games and solo games

Most organizations have teams in games that are played in 1 versus 1 as well as 5 versus 5. The two categories have different challenges and issues. The manager of X explains the difficulties with finding suitable players for a 5-player team.

“Initially for teams with a roster of 4-5 players, it always the main goal to find a stable team. A serious team that stick together, it’s the key would not otherwise work. If you don't fit in this team, you don't fit in this team, even if you are better. Because a team can do so much more than one good arrogant player”

The difficulties and conflicts are more difficult in team games, simply because there are many different needs. It can be really hard to satisfy the wills and needs of all players in a team.
be able to make all players accommodate to changes could be a tricky situation and this problem is easier to solve when it comes to one versus one games.

“I would say that solo players are easy-going, easier to talk to and discuss with. But in team games, there are 3-7 players that have a voice and you try to satisfy the whole team. That's the difference is It's much easier with a solo game players”

Utilizing a team captain, working both as a coach and contact person. In solo games with many players, it can be a good way to resolve issues quickly.

“In terms of a 1 versus 1 game, it's easier, since e.g. in the game StarCraft II, we had a team captain who initially tried to resolve any issues with one of “his” players. That’s an easier way to solve it 1vs1”

He continues to explain that in team games, scheduling problems occur frequently and may result in larger issues such as loss of team cohesion and trust, and members quitting the team.

“We have had teams with scheduling problems related to one player and everyone was contacting everyone and in the end, it just resulted in more issues. It results in a team trust issue, where the rest of the players are mad at one player which affects all of them.” - Manager X

4.6 Exceptions

One of the reasons that this study had semi-structured interviews was the idea that there could be interesting findings that are exceptions to the initial interview questions. These exceptions will be shown in this chapter. An exception to the results is that manager X felt that some players were only members in the team for their own benefit and had no interest in the organizations goals or future.

“To manage the organization was difficult, because I felt that some teams had no interest in giving back to the organization. Some were only interested in the community, the X tag by their name in the game, getting recognized and getting money to events from the organization”
Another interesting finding is related to tax laws in Sweden and according to manager Y, that’s the reason for a low amount of large esport organizations in Sweden.

“But having an established organization in Sweden because of all the tax laws is difficult [...] and then you try to compete with organizations globally where in other countries, esport organizations don’t tax sponsorships. It's hard to be competitive from Sweden but on the other hand, there are contributions and programs you can seek to get support from government. “

The esport industry is harsh and money is often an issue. It is possible to receive funds unrelated to sponsorships, but is according to manager X really difficult. The governmental support was mentioned by both manager X and Y during the interviews.

“If you need to get funds, there are governmental support. Then you can apply for funds for sport organizations in Sweden but applying there as an esport organization is really difficult. “

Sponsorship in esport organizations is crucial for financial sustainability and consistent exposure. According to Y, the last years brand sponsorship deals have changed and it’s difficult to attain long term partnerships with companies. He explains:

“By sponsoring esport teams, you're going with the branding on jerseys and that doesn't convert customers to the sponsor brand immediately. [...] It takes years of
branding exposure to convert customers and that’s too slow. Because of the fast paced world we live in, people do it less nowadays. “
5. Analysis & Discussion

In this chapter, the analysis of the research is presented. The chapter is introduced with a summary of the empirical data on the drivers and barriers for performance. The authors analyze the findings by comparing them to previous research, and then propose one main process in each performance factor to focus on as an esport organization looking to achieve better performance at large.

5.1 Summary of the Analysis of the Findings
After interviewing both managers and players in two organizations, it can be found that the findings of the data collected recognize both similarities and differences in comparison to earlier studies on virtual team performance. The empirical findings was structured and collected based on five drivers for performance, discussed in the literature review. Empirical data on barriers to performance was also collected. The results from the study provided the authors with a description of a variety of common problems in esport organizations. More importantly, the data presented an insight into processes that can be utilized to develop esport organizations with coherent and performance driven teams.

The drivers for performance have all been identified in the context of esports but in different ways and for other reasons than previous research. However, literature on virtual teams are mostly based on projects teams, working to complete a project and disband the team and move on. Contrary to this, esport organizations are looking to maintain, develop and have a consistent team of players that will stay and facilitate a healthy environment for effective performance. Conclusively, previous research on virtual team performance recognized barriers to establishing trust and leadership roles. Previous research vary from the esport industry and both trust and leadership factors have an interesting difference in its role for performance. The three other aspects of virtual team performance are of similar importance in esport organizations.

5.2 Communication
Communication is the performance factor with most problems and therefore also has the most development potential. From the literature, one of the fundamental problems with virtual teams was the lack of face-to-face communications and the introduction of new members in a virtual environment. This issue is not as prominent in esport organizations. Instead of focusing on face-
to-face interactions, talent and passion for the game is the foundation of relationship building and successful communication.

Both organizations mentions communication issues inside teams as minor problems that tend to solve themselves. However, it happens that players are unable to face conflicts, the conflict worsens and consequently end with the member leaving the team. Comparisons can be drawn to what manager Y had observed, that some players are “being full of themselves”. Manager X brought up the tendency of players blaming each other and not communicating the real issues with team members or the organization. This problem could if untended increase and ultimately lead to fragmentation of the team.

The intra-team communication is a crucial aspect of the IPESOI-model, and is directly linked to creating team cohesion and the desire for the team to perform. The misunderstandings have a tendency to become more frequent with the lack of clear communication. The problem is exemplified when manager X told about a player that had asked for financial assistance for an event. Here, the communication have not been sufficient enough from the managerial perspective, which ended up in false expectations among the players. These types of unclear communication may result in possible damage to team cohesion, which will result in worse team performance. Time-zone based difficulties regarding scheduling and general planning is also common.

Both organizations talked clearly about the importance of regular online meetings to greatly reduce the issues with team communications. Moreover, goal alignment, scheduling, suggestions can be discussed and solved in a professional manner through monthly online meetings. Despite being online, seeing the face of members in the organization through CMC is valuable.

5.3 Team Cohesion
The players involved in this study expressed a genuine family feeling for their team members. This feeling was largely based upon based on sharing a passion with likeminded individuals, but developed further as the players played alongside each other. The players experienced that even though they might not have met each other in real life, they still developed a connection on an emotional plane. The importance of the connective bond among the players was a reoccurring theme. The results are similar to the IPESOI-model where the input of positive
social interactions leads to the strengthening of team cohesion, which ultimately results in better performance.

The players understand that the attitude of their team members is crucial for their future performance, which also is a part of the IPESOI-model. An example of this is the time invested by players in the wellbeing of the team members. The counsel and support given to a team member is not solely related to the individual’s wellbeing, but also to the team’s future performance.

The empirical data indicates that team cohesion appears strongly in esport organizations, regardless of the physical interaction between the team members. An important factor of forging the team cohesion is still to physically meet at tournaments and events. The managers experience consequences when it comes to the nature of the virtual working environment, which could impact team cohesion in a negative way. It happens that members start to feel too comfortable and protected when the only channel they use to communicate and interact with their team member is through CMC. This alters and hardens the jargon of how they communicate, which results in that players are far more likely to develop a harsh tone towards one another.

Another managerial experience is that team members are less likely to be cooperative and adaptive if they have never physically met. The problem can be combatted by engaging the whole team at tournaments, encouraging teams to cheer for each other if they’re not playing themselves. This gives the opportunity to improve team tenure and players association with the organization. Moreover, boot camps can be hosted to have team members gather and practice IRL to almost instantaneously soften the jargon and reduce the blaming. Finally, an additional way of establishing early team cohesion is for the organization to routinely meet new teams IRL when the initial signing happens. Normally, this procedure is done online but it seem like an expendable but highly valuable procedure to meet teams IRL when signing contracts.

It seemed at first in one versus one games such as Hearthstone that it would not require an effective internal team spirit since it’s a game where you compete individually. However, the empirical data shows that practice partners in one versus one games are as important as the team members in a team game. Therefore, it is advised to try to recruit all members of practice group to maintain the knowledge of the game within the organization. Also, by doing so the members
of the team have already developed, to some degree, aspects such as effective communication and team cohesion

5.4 Trust
The empirical findings are very different than the research on trust in virtual environments. The scientific literature on virtual team management emphasizes that trust is difficult to develop in virtual team environments (Nader et al., 2009). The empirical data gathered from the managers suggests that trust comes naturally, even with new players. No problems regarding elements of trust was identified in any of the empirical findings. The reason being the management believing that players joins esport organization with an incentive to “do well”. The reasoning is based on the idea of passion and a pro gamer, well established or upcoming, joins an organization because they want to progress in their career and wear the team jersey with happiness.

Esport managers rely on players practicing and preparing the required training before their tournaments. Due to the fact that the manager is not involved in the training process, they use trust as a type of overseer, in the absence of their own control. The manager’s notion that their players always have an incentive to “perform well” is here trust being utilized as self-responsibility.

However, the managers are not naïve when it comes to possible backfires that putting absolute trust in someone could have. The managers have encountered trust issues with some players, which have negatively affected the trust aspect in the whole team. Legal contracts are used to officialize playing signings and to prevent both player and organization from take advantage from each other. These actions also contradicts the manager’s words that “trust is not problem”. Clearly, it still has an impact on the organization, regardless of what the managers are explaining.

5.5 Leadership
Shachaf & Hara (2005) identified communication, understanding, role clarity and leadership attitude as four dimensions to effective virtual team leadership. In terms of communication and understanding in esports, virtual leadership requires direct support and feedback to individuals and the ability to solve problems effectively in variety of teams. Despite having a large team size spread in many games, manager X tried to support on an individual level and expressing interest in team’s ambitions and goals. Manager X described his leadership primarily by
empowering and encouraging the team to play, making the players driven themselves and striving to improve and actively attend tournaments.

It is difficult communicating and keeping up-to-par with many players, especially in international teams with different attitudes and in other time zones. Identified in the empirical data is the utilization of a team captain in games with many players. Having team captains is an effective method and process of collecting coherent information from a team. This strategy enables an effective communication channel to the management and the organization. The team captain takes on the individual level support and feedback of his team and provides information regarding anything related to the team, such as results, plans and especially problems.

The foundation of an organization require the development of team tenure which will stabilize the organization and once teams are integrated, they require less maintenance than new teams. Team tenure takes time and there are no shortcuts to building it. It requires effective leadership to create a relation between a newly signed team and the organization. If an organization have changes in their teams consistently, the leadership role will be mainly focused on integrating the new team members. Failed development of team tenure is detrimental in team games, such as in CS: GO teams. Manager Y explained that it is a big issue that team changes occur frequently due to internal conflicts and incoherent team feeling. The team has to find a new member for their team and integrate the person to the team and organization. With teams that stays together, the organization can focus on establishing long term organizational goals and team goals for upcoming tournaments.

The literature identified clarification of responsibility and meaning of the team members. This suggests that the team members have unidentified roles and meaning before starting to work in the team. In esports, the empirical data suggests that most of the responsibility and interest of the pro gamers in their work and professional career is their own decision. This leadership aspect can be seen through another point of view in esports. The primary aspect of leadership in esports is enabling the teams and players to develop in a professional environment and attend significant events to compete is the most important aspect from an organizational leadership aspect. This may be done through empowerment and official contracts including all aspects of responsibilities from the side of both organization and player/team.
5.6  Goals
Goal alignment have been found to have an important effect on team tenure. Establishing goals before signing a team to the organization can be a way of improving team tenure and tournament results. Aligning organizational goals to the team’s goals can be done in two ways. An organization should preferably align the motive and goals behind signing a specific team with the teams own goals. If an organization put too much pressure in its goals of achieving tournament results with a specific team, it will most likely result in a short life-cycle of team members or whole teams. On the flipside, if an organization have smaller goals than the team and cannot support their journey to the fullest due to financial means or focus on other teams – this will likely result in disappointment and conflicts that also will cause a short life-cycle of team members. To align goals successfully is crucial for team tenure and successful tournament performances.

As an organization, establishing and aligning goals with teams should be integrated into the recruitment process. Before signing a team, it could be beneficial to explicitly discuss and plan the major events the team is going to attend and the funding that it will require. Even better would be including aligned goals and agreed funding in the team/player contract so that there is an obligation from both sides to follow up on the agreed goals. It’s important as an organization to believe in your teams’ ability and that they’re doing their best, since the work task for a team is to achieve good placements in tournaments and it’s a task you can’t control to the extent of a regular project or job.

Sometimes, low quality results in a tournament can be the result of the opponent playing better that day, or even just bad luck, and this is something that has to be understood by both the organization and the competitor. Nevertheless, the other four drivers for performance and their processes are what enables an organization to build up the best possible environment for their teams and players to achieve good outcomes at tournaments. Forming fair and achievable goals together is a process that should regard both organization and player demands and is a simple but effective way to work against the common goal misalignment problem in esport organizations.
6. Conclusion

This purpose of the study was to explore how an esport organization can manage processes to achieve effective performance. This study was conducted to expand the knowledge on the role of a manager in esports organizations. To summarize it all, virtual teams are a broad phenomenon used in various ways and in a variety of industries. The empirical data gathered by the authors together with the analyzed literature formed several factors with processes and implications for performance. The five identified performance drivers identified in the literature were in many ways agreed upon but some differences were observed.

The main findings are the esport organizational viewpoints on the performance drivers of trust and leadership and the barriers related to trust. This difference is mainly due to the literature on virtual teams being developed on virtual project groups and esport organizations existing due to different reasons. Trust was found to be of little importance in esport organizations, where it was argued from an organization standpoint that there is no reason to distrust team members in doing their best possible work. Organizations have to assume that the player is trustworthy in doing his absolute best to perform and there is no significant development of trust among team members and organization.

“How does a manager in an esport organization manage performance processes?”

A manager in an esport organization should manage communication by acting proactively and making sure that team members are getting along. General online meetings is a great way of planning goal alignment, scheduling and other suggestions. Team cohesion develops with team tenure so it’s very important to have teams staying in the team. Team tenure can be developed through aligned goals and that the organization empowers the teams by believing in the teams’ ability and that they’re doing their best.

This is an effective and truthful way to manage performance processes in esport organizations. Lastly, the primary aspect of leadership in esports is in managerial aspects. This includes enabling the teams and players to develop in a professional environment and the ability to attend important events to compete is the most important aspect from an organizational leadership aspect.
In relation to the research question, there are two sub questions that this study aims to address:

1. “How does an esport organization manager strengthen drivers of team performance?”
   In short, actively enabling processes to establish an effective virtual environment with a focus on team feeling and personal responsibility over practice.

2. “How does an esport organization manager overcome barriers to team performance?”
   In most aspects, overcoming barriers to performance are wrapped into the strengthening of the drivers for performance. Some notable important processes are effective scheduling, letting people decide over their own career with fair contracts that emphasize an even contribution of workload and aligned goals from both organization and players.

6.1 Contributions to Theory
This study has contributed to the theoretical perspective by fortifying the understanding of the management of performance processes in esport organizations. The study have contributed by highlighting the importance of five performance drivers in virtual teams and related barriers in the esport industry. The study have also contributed to IPESOI model by showing its aspects also having qualitative elements with performance processes to improve communication, team-cohesion and goals.

6.2 Contributions to Practice
This research could be relevant to upcoming and medium-sized esport organizations that are experiencing difficulties in maintaining a coherent and consistent team. This study contributes by providing advice and applicable processes to strengthening drivers for performance while also working towards limiting barriers to performance. This research help contribute organizations with understanding the importance of how performance processes effect the actual performance of the team in the.

6.3 Future Research
Due to the reason that this study is made on a relative small sample size, the possibility for a replicated future study with an increased sample size is definitely appreciated. Another aspect of the research could also focus on the motivational drivers of the players joining an esport organization. There might be interesting to understand if the motivation is driven by seeing the development of the organization, self-development or a reason of a more tangible nature, such
as financial gain. Since the empirical findings in this study is gathered from individuals that roughly could be categorized in the same demographical box, another potential future research could structure their study to include a more diverse demographic.

6.4 Limitations
Empirical data was collected through six semi-structured interviews in order to establish a foundation to the relatively new field of both virtual teams and esports. However, due to the fact that it proved be rather difficult to get esport organizations to participate. Some had policies to not be a part of any studies conducted by students and some basically did not have the time to be a part of this project. The small sample size creates a limitation to the study and it could have contributed with a larger amount of organizations. This would have resulted in a further developed and diverse view of different processes that contribute to effective performance. Moreover, the contribution to practice and theory would have been able to be more accurate with a larger sample size.

The validity of the research depends on the authors and the interviewees. The authors covered the performance drivers and barriers in the semi-structured interviews equally. Transcriptions were for further analysis and validity. However, effective performance depends on the person's’ own performance and is subject to comparison. Moreover, trust and goals are emotion-based and the interviewees might have personal definitions on these aspects.
7. References


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Appendix

Interview Guides

Manager Interviews
1. What is the size of team, including players and staff?
2. What games are played and competed in by the organization?
3. What is your role in the organization and for how long have you been working there?
4. Can you tell me more about the history of the organization?
5. Since the start, the organization have had some significant performances. Could you mention a few and describe what they meant for the organization?

Communication
6. When it comes to online communication within the team, what would you say are the some of the common communication issues that arise?
7. How and why do you, as a manager, engage with the rest of the team and rosters?
8. How do you personally handle conflict as a manager?
9. What is the main differences when it comes to communication and management between a solo and team game? (such as Hearthstone and CS: GO with a team of 5)

Cohesion and Trust
10. What are the main challenges when it comes to developing a team feeling in virtual environments?
11. How do you make sure that everyone feel equal and cared for?
12. Can you tell me more about IRL events the organization meet up at? (LAN, boot camps, tournaments)
13. How do you exercise trust as the manager of the team?
14. Do you assume your (new) players have good intentions and are trustworthy from the beginning? Why?

Leadership and Goals
15. In what ways is the manager involved in improving the performance of the team?
16. In what way does the organization encourage its team to perform/strive to get better?
17. What do you do to help and advice when members of a team isn’t feeling that they can solve conflicts?

18. What type of leadership behaviors have you found to be the most useful in a virtual environment and why?

19. Do you have organizational goals relating to your players or are the rosters responsible for their goal setting themselves?

20. What is your vision with the organization for the future?

Player Interviews

Communication

1. What was the main reason you were part of the organization?

2. When it comes to online communication within the team, what would you say are the some of the common communication issues that arise?

3. What type of communication did you use to engage with the rest of the team and organization?

4. Did you encounter any difficulties when it came to contacting e.g. management or other team members?

5. Did you contact the team captain or solve it yourself regarding eventual issues or conflicts you had?

6. What is the main differences when it comes to communication between your own team and management?

Cohesion and Trust

Team cohesion, “team feeling” is really important, boosting morale and belonging to the team. So from that perspective,

7. What do you do to help and advice when members of a team isn’t feeling that they can solve conflicts?

8. Did your relation and tenure (want to stay in the team) with team members increase when you met at IRL-events? In what way?

9. Did you ever think about your own role in the organization, in the sense of what you could contribute with?

10. Did you trust the organization that they were supporting you players to the extent they could?
11. Did you experience trustworthy intentions from the management of the organization? And in which situation?

Leadership and Goals

12. In which ways are you involved in improving the performance of the team?
13. In what way did the organization encourage you to perform/strive to get better?
14. Did the organization have goals related to you or did you set your own goals with your playing?
15. What goals did you have with being in the organization?