

VIRTUAL TEAMS

4.3 Blog “Virtual Teams”

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VIRTUAL TEAMS

Welcome to my Week 4 Blog!

This week's topic deals with virtual teams, and is something that has been occurring whether we were aware of it or not. I must admit that when the topic of virtual teams first appeared in my studies, I hadn't realized that my past and present groups/teams were just that, a virtual team. I'm not saying the team was perfect, by any stretch, but it was an excellent exercise in understanding what was both good and bad about virtual teams. By definition, a virtual team is a team whose members are geographically distributed, requiring them to work together through electronic means with minimal face-to-face interaction (Lussier & Achua, 2013, pg. 292).

What do you see as being the strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and problems associated with a virtual team environment?

Strengths

Talent

Organizations can take advantage of just-in-time talent and, through technology, bring together people from wherever they are to wherever they need to be (Mattus, 2009). I work for Textron Aviation and within the organization exist multiple factory service centers and thousands of employees. This talent pool makes it possible to create a "dream team" so to speak when talent is needed to resolve an issue or create a new product or service.

Flexibility

Virtual team environments make it possible to add or subtract team members without the added costs associated with travel, lodging, and/or meals.

VIRTUAL TEAMS

Reduction in Cost

No longer required to travel, virtual team members are never further than their smart phone technology from one another. If a team member needs to be added in order to address a particular issue, he or she can simply join the team remotely, via which technology is in use, and begin contributing immediately. Saving time and costs associated with travel both add up to reduced operating cost.

Weaknesses

Trust

Perhaps the hardest thing to develop is trust, especially in someone we don't know. When face-to-face with someone day-in and day-out, building the type of social connection and professional respect make overcoming trust a little easier. When facing virtual team members, especially those members you've never met or worked with, it is very difficult to trust without the same type of connection. As members of academic teams, we are often assigned a portion of a team project in which each member must participate. Entrusting others with, what is essentially, our grade is very difficult and often times very stressful.

Challenges & problems

Virtual teams are confronted with two key challenges & problems when working together. One is communication and the other is physicality.

Communication is key to ensuring everyone is on the same page and working towards the same goal. Luckily, technology is making it possible to virtual team members to communicate face-to-face and in almost every corner of the globe.

Physicality brings into play where each team member is standing in world when it comes time to meet and discuss. Varying time zones contribute to the difficulty in bringing the entire

VIRTUAL TEAMS

team together. As part of the Peace Dragon team in Baghdad, Iraq, we had two scheduled meetings with Wichita, Kansas each week. The 10-hour time difference made it difficult to meet without some team members having to stay up late in order to conduct. When problems would arise, we would often lose an entire work day waiting for the home office to open before we could reach out for direction and support.

What suggestions do you have to improve working in organization virtual teams?

Organizational Suggestions

- Begin with an open video or teleconference where everyone can meet and introduce themselves, explain their experience level as it relates to the project at hand, discuss when, how often, and by what method, the team will meet.
- Encourage team socializing to help build team unity and focus
- Identify team leadership and assign responsibilities
- Establish a regular meeting schedule and stick to it.

What suggestions do you have to improve working with virtual teams while taking courses in this degree program?

Virtual Team Suggestions

- Treat the academic virtual teams as if they were real world. Assign leadership and responsibilities.
- Utilize various methods of interaction, and don't rely solely on utilizing the academic home page. While the home page is nice, there are other methods of interaction and collaboration which might be more beneficial based on team composition.

VIRTUAL TEAMS

- Keep using teams during each class and by the time you reach the end of your academic goal, you will have discovered what is good and bad, what works and what doesn't, and most importantly, you'll learn from each other.

VIRTUAL TEAMS

References

Lussier, R. N. Ph.D. & Achua, C. F. D.B.A., (2013). Leadership Theory, Application, & Skill Development. Mason, OH, South-Western

Mattus, T. (2009). The Challenges of Managing Virtual Project Teams. Retrieved 8 November 2016 from <http://www.pmi.org/learning/library/challenges-managing-virtual-project-teams-6762>

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