A Study on Challenges And Future Prospects in Managing Global Workforce With Reference To Virtual Teams.

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Introduction

Business are accelerating at a fast pace in the ever changing global environment and it becomes tremendously important that decisions and working environment need to be built according to the constraints of time and space, this is where the virtual teams show their very importance. Virtual teams increasingly use information and communications technologies (ICTs) to communicate beyond locations and time-zones in achieving the interrelationship tasks and objectives of the organisation (Cramton, 2001; Lipnack & Stamps, 1997; Maznevski & Chudoba, 2000). It is necessary for efficient working of virtual teams to prioritize on skills and expertise. (McDonough, Kahn, & Barczak, 2001). With the advancement in information technology and internet becoming accessible readily most of the organizations today, employs virtual teams to some degree (Hertel et al., 2005). Virtual teams of talented people can respond effectively to changing business environments and those with good and efficient virtual teams form a competitive advantage over others. (Bergielet et al., 2008). On-line chatting, sharing blogs, and playing on-line games are commonly used by virtual teams as face-to-face meetings are not feasible in virtual teams. (LuoLu, 2015)

What is Virtual Team?

It has become quite difficult to determine what virtual teams means as virtual teams across multiple institutional contexts is a current topic in the literature on global organizations. The team’s members are linked primarily through computer and advance telecommunications. (Chudoba et al., 2005). The team members who reside at different physical and geographical locations but work together or communicate via email, fax or any other technology medium are called Virtual Teams. These teams are formed of members who are located at divergent physical locations. This team trait has empowered geographically scattered members to coordinate their individual working and performance by using enormously the use of various information technology mediums. (Peters and Manz, 2007). The goals and objectives of the virtual team members are the same but instead of meeting in person at a common place they use internet technologies get in touch with their team mates.

Objectives of Study

1. This study explores the issue of effectiveness within virtual teams in the ever-changing competitive environment.

2. To explore the challenges and opportunities in managing and leading virtual teams.

Literature Review

In all circumstances it is not possible to conclude that virtual teams are appropriate for all working arrangements. (Nemiro, 2002). Hossain and Wigand (2004) conclude that virtual teams would be effective with the support of ICT-enabled as compared with face-to-face communication and would lead to greater levels of satisfaction in collaboration. Much of the literature review points out that cultural differences create barriers to effective communication among virtual team members (Kayworth & Leidner, 2000; Sarker & Sahay, 2002; Van Ryssen & Hayes Godar, 2000). Geister et al.
(2006) highlights four major elements of motivation in Virtual team performance: valence, instrumentality, self-efficacy, trust (system/person). Geister et al. (2006) concludes that feedback is an important factor which has a positive impact on motivation, satisfaction, and performance in virtual teams and specially for the less motivated members feedback is important for increasing the morale. Pauleen and Yoong (2001) highlight that establish personal relationships with the rest of the team members is very important for the smooth working of the team. Watkins (2013) concludes that if you are succeeding a team, as a leader you should take the time to understand how your predecessor led it. Whether a team is virtual or traditional it is important that newly appointed leaders need to understand their team members. It becomes even more important to do this analysis when you lead a virtual team, because the structures and processes used to manage communication and coordinate work have such an important impact on team performance. Deloitte interviewed Dr Wil Felp and MBA student, Virginia Kane, both from the University of New South Wales, Australia, about their recent research on best practice in leading virtual teams. The researchers found that the management practices managers apply to traditional teams cannot be applicable to virtual teams. When it comes to managing virtual teams, managers must have a different set of skills. Tackling different time zones, language barriers, cultural differences are the many challenges that are encountered while leading the virtual teams. Theory developed by McGrath in the Time-Interaction-Performance theory research that an organization needs to provide for supportive group climate and group well-being are important in developing relationships in virtual teams.

Model of Virtual Teams

1. Why

The very purpose of virtual teams is determined by defining intended objectives with an alignment of the team's objectives with enterprise goals. All the decisions are driven with purpose in mind.

2. Who

A manager is more adept at finding ways in managing a team of members situated in different physical locations these virtual leaders are able to juggle multiple responsibilities and priorities at the same time. The managing is extremely important in virtual teams as leading a virtual team is a true balancing act.

3. How

The use of technology with the enterprise level support is a pre requisite for virtual teams. A virtual team can do their work from any location they want and use technology to ensure they are working as efficiently as possible.

Source: Hudson Research Consulting
Benefits of Virtual Work Teams

Flexibility: Virtual teams offer greater flexibility in terms of workplace schedule, where the best employees may be located anywhere in the world and work from remote places.

Freedom to travel: People have the freedom to choose their physical work space and can access their virtual office from basically anywhere in the world.

Spend less money: The organization saves money as by not having a physical location they save themselves from infrastructural requirements.

More comfort: People experience comfort as they get the privilege of working from home or wherever a person chooses offers them greater comfort with their own schedule.

Better work-life balance: Virtual organizations offers people with greater flexibility as they can strike a good balance between their work lives and personal lives.

Key Features of Virtual Teams

1. Trust

Any successful relationship is built on the foundation of trust and it becomes more important when collaborating relationships in virtual teams as they hardly meet each other for face-to-face interaction. Research has been conducted to examine the relationship between trust and integrity, benevolence and abilities of team members (R.C. Mayer, J.H. Davis, and F.D. Schoorman.). In the absence of face to face contact virtual teams have to focus more on the element of building trust, as four main elements: dependability, competence, care, and integrity. The trust element between virtual team members can be enhanced by displaying capabilities in their responsibilities, sincerity in their actions, developing cordial relationships with team mates, and dependability by following through on commitments.

2. Communication

Communication is the main key of leading virtual teams. Virtual teams which are successful perceive the importance of meaningful communication between members of a team. As Thomas, Kellogg and Erickson (2001) observe, instrumental communication can be achieved by expressive communication and it improves the overall human capital. It becomes extremely important for maintaining the standards of communication, work dedicatedly on their tone of communication, critical moments are monitored regularly to communicate with each other, and improve upon the perception of the emotional content of communication. For communication to be effective it's important that there should be regular communication for reporting both achievements and likely dangers to the team.

3. Powerful Conflict Management

Conflicts are an inevitable part of any organization. Conflicts arise among team members and solving conflicts in virtual teams becomes a challenge especially because members do not know and understand each other very well, there is a large probability for miscommunications while dealing a virtual team. Time, effort and energy that is invested in resolving the conflicts, can be saved if it is invested during recruitment & selection of virtual team members. Hiring right people with right attitude along with knowledge and skills is very important. There is difficulty of forming emotional connections between team members without any face-to-face contact which adds up to conflicting situations in virtual teams.
4. Political Influences

Team decisions are influenced by members of virtual teams who adopt different influence tactics to make their presence felt as all the team members are working in different geographical location with different culture and understanding of a particular project. For virtual team members it becomes difficult to understand the communication patterns and behavioral norms of other cultures therefore they apply political influences and power tactics to succeed in the teams.

5. Cohesion

Group cohesion refers to the extent to which members of a group express their desire to remain in that group and resist separation from the group. (Balkwell, 1994). The feeling of working with a team member whom you have never met personally is like just an interaction with an unknown person in a social situation. There may be similarity in attitudes which may help to foster interpersonal rapport building which is believed to rest on two psychological mechanisms. First, there is a longing for consistency between an individual’s, attitudes and perceptions. Team members want the similarity of their perception matching with the perception of other team members. If a team member has a positive attitudes towards certain objects, events or situation and discover that another member too has favorable attitudes towards the same objects, events or situation the cognition will be consistent if at all there is liking for that team mate(Newcomb, 1971). The standards of quality, excellence and expectations from your team members are important elements to be discussed for building team cohesion.

1. Virtual Teams are different from traditional teams
2. Many organizations position managers with leading the virtual teams who previously used to lead manage traditional or same locations. For many managers hiring a virtual team is a crucial decision and they go extra cautious to hire best global talent. For these managers virtual team members should only be task centred but in reality it doesn’t happens so as team members are not machines or robots. The use of Technology like web conferencing, emails etc is given more weightage by a large number of managers for the success of virtual Leadership Style

Another common notion that many managers believe that virtual teams are independent and self-reliant. They believe that the virtual teams are self-managed and they function best when left on their own. The presence of a strong leader with strong communication skills, patience and team dynamics is essential for the success of virtual teams. There is a dire need of strong and dedicated leaders in order to ensure positive results from the virtual teams and that they have the ability to put their focus on the project.

6. Cultural Barriers

Not only the team members differ in the degree of virtuality, but also in context of their national and cultural backgrounds which are as distant as the team members physically are. As such, a virtual team is considered global when backgrounds are culturally diverse, and members are able to think and work with the diversity of the global environment (De Sanctis & Poole, 1997; Jackson, Aiken, Vanjani & Hasan, 1995). For global team members from cultures that value direct communication and informal communication, the use of information and communication technology can encourage dialogue since it is similar to their own cultural framework. Virtual team members who give mileage to collectivism may be willing to work within a team setting and for them strong relationship building is crucial part of working in a team. But a feeling of isolation may creep in the ideology of
collectivism since team members are geographically separated and the inputs may not be getting frequently. (Zakaria, Amelinckx, Wilemon, 2004).

7. Managing Conflict

When technology rules the work environment being conscious of the existence of conflict is not so easy. Global virtual teams need to be aware of the fact of existence of conflict due to differences and opinion and promote protocols that effectively respond conflict or pre-conflict situations. The misunderstandings, inconsistencies, communication barriers are more prone to the virtual teams as there is a lack of well-defined structure compared with the traditional teams which have clearly defined mechanism for resolution of conflict. “When there is lack of information, when people are uncertain about why someone has disagreed with them more probability of taking the disagreement on a personal level. (Lindred Greer) When appropriate tasks are matched with team members, goals are clear and rewards are given to teams the chances of conflict become low. In virtual teams, the achievement of the solution-orientation of compromise and collaboration behaviors should be associated with task centered behaviour, congruence of goal among members, enhanced participation, and therefore, accelerating quality of team performance (Townsend et al. 1998).

CONCLUSION

With the advent of globalization the future holds an important place for virtual teams. Efficient and effective management practices will help ensure they live up to their potential. Despite potential managerial challenges, virtual teams have become paramount structure for the modern organization, and those companies who can manage virtual teams will be having a competitive advantage. In spite of having many advantages of virtual teams, a study conducted by the Aberdeen group has found, that software projects accounting for 50% to 80% executed by virtually teams fail to reach their objectives which is quite alarming. For successful virtual organizations it is of utmost importance to have the elements of trust, collaboration, and cohesion among individuals. Cost reduction, improved morale, shorter cycle times, pool of talented workforce and work-life balance are the by-products of virtual teams if used in the correct manner. In order to have effective virtual teams, the managers of virtual teams need to address the challenges and understand the differences in managing virtual teams and co-located teams such as those highlighted in this paper.

REFERENCES


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