Virtual Development Teams

By,

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Why virtual teams?

- Technology and globalization now have created an environment in which teams communicate and collaborate virtually, across boundaries of time, geography, and organizations.

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- To gain competitive advantage, organizations are continually reshaped to maximize strengths, address threats, and increase speed.
- Form teams that draws together talent from different functions, locations, and organizations.

Complexity of Virtual Teams

- As the distance between team members increase so do differences in time zones.
- Complications because of different languages, culture, and access to technology.
- Challenges of integrating work methods, organizational cultures, technologies, and goals.

Virtual teams differ from traditional teams in several dimensions, such as:

- Geographical distribution

  ➢ Questions of availability

- Temporal distribution

  ➢ Reliance on asynchronous communication tools

  ➢ Meetings outside working hours

- Cultural distribution

  ➢ Language skills

  ➢ Cultural differences

- Organizational / functional distribution

  ➢ Members are experts in their respective fields

Interaction challenges

- Interactions fall into four categories

➢ Same time, same place (like face to face)

➢ Same time, different place (like video conf.)

➢ Different time, same place (like chat room)

➢ Different time, different place (like email, voice mail)

Factors affecting virtual team success

- Human resource policies
- Training and on-the-job education and development
- Standard organizational and team processes
- Organizational culture
- Leadership support of virtual teams
- Team-leader and team-member competencies

Human Resource Policies

- Career-development systems address the needs of virtual teams
- Reward systems reward/recognize
- working across boundaries and virtually
- Result are what is rewarded
- Nontraditional work arrangements, such as telecommuting, are actively supported

Training and Development

- There is access to technical training
- Continual and just-in-time learning is available as needed
- There are mechanisms for sharing lessons learned so that experience is not lost

Collaboration and Communication Technology

- Consistent standards for electronic communication and collaboration tools
- Resources to buy and support the technology
- Equal access to and skilled in using the technology

Organizational Culture

- A culture of trust within the organization
- Culture of trust between the organization and its partners
- Teamwork and collaboration are the norm
- People from different cultures are valued

Leadership

- Leading a virtual team is highly challenging.
- Four types of skills and qualities were considered as important in leading virtual teams:

  1. Motivating the team members
  2. Giving support
  3. Giving guidelines for the use of communication technology and CMC (Computer-Mediated Communications) practices
  4. Setting clear goals for the future

1.Motivating the Team Members

- If members do not know each other's competencies and roles very well, it is crucial that the team leader motivates the members to contact each other frequently and tries to activate their collaboration.
- If team leader communicates and takes initiative actively, it enhances the team members' collaboration as well.

2. Giving Support

- Members in virtual teams are often experts in their respective fields

  - They do not expect the leader to give them much professional guidance

  but

  - they anticipate to gain support and feedback from the leader.

- The support given should be informative, instrumental or emotional in nature.

3. Guidelines for the Use of Communication Technology and CMC

- It is crucial that the team leader provides different kinds of communication tools and possibilities for the virtual team members.
- If the team leader had offered communication tools to the members and given guidelines for their efficient use, the team's communication and collaboration in general was seen to be improved.
- Furthermore, guidelines for effective computer-mediated communication are needed in the teams.
- Shared practices and rules for communication are seen as crucial as most of the communication is computer-mediated

4. Setting goals for the future

- Setting clear goals is the most challenging leadership skill in virtual teams.

- The difficulties in setting goals can be due to four factors:

  1. the goals were not discussed in the team

  2. the goals were not set on a concrete level

  3. there was a lot of cross-functionality in the team, or

  4. the team had undergone organizational changes.

Team Member Competencies

- Project-management techniques
- Networking across functional, hierarchical, and organizational boundaries
- Using collaborative technologies
- Setting personal boundaries and managing time
- Working across cultural and functional boundaries
- Using interpersonal awareness

Benefits of Virtual Teams for Organizations

- Greater flexibility
- Saves time and costs
- Increases communication and learning across organization
- Encourages appreciation of diversity

Benefits of Virtual Teams for Workers

- Schedule and geographic flexibility
- Increased number and types of learning opportunities

- Much improved access to valuable information
- More opportunity to network, meet, and become friends with colleagues

Conclusion

- Challenges in virtual development team are partly similar as challenges in traditional teams.

- However, some of the qualities needed in virtual team leading stem from geographical, temporal, cultural and organizational dispersion.

- Challenges rise, because

  - members may join the team from different organizational units
  - they may belong to many different functions and projects at the same time
  - structure of the team may change due to changes in organizational environment.