

The Pros And Cons Of Virtual Teams

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Introduction

A virtual team, also known as a virtual workgroup, is a group of people that is formed over technology (internet) and does not interact face-to-face. The people on the team make combined efforts to achieve the shared objective of the group. Virtual teams perform their job in a virtual network, which is created by IT and software technologies. To simplify, virtual teams are online teams that interact over the internet to achieve a shared goal (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014). This paper discusses the pros and cons of virtual teams and what factors are important to creating effective virtual teams.

Virtual Teams

There are two types of virtual teams: global and local virtual teams. In a global virtual team, members might be from different countries or cities around the world. These members might be from one organization or different employees from different companies collaborating together to achieve one goal (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014). Global teams are mostly formed by multinational firms, which have a huge workforce and try to organize their activities by making virtual teams. These groups also have a multicultural approach, where people might be from different cultures around the globe. At the same time, a local virtual team is based on a local or domestic level and is mostly formed by one company. This company can be big or small, having enough resources to manage its operations. Creating a virtual team at a local level helps the company utilize its resources and employees to develop productive groups (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014).

There have been discussions in the past about the effectiveness of virtual teams and how they impact the overall growth of the company (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014). Every team/group is an inimitable combination of people, tasks, procedures, and environment where they do not share their positive aspects depending on the complexity of the group. There should be conditions set by the virtual groups in the initial stage to produce positive performance. As virtual groups have to work in complex settings where they might not have the comfort zone to work, companies should make efforts to make their virtual groups advanced in performance to overcome these obstacles. Mostly, in a virtual team setting, there is a problem with interpreting a task. People over the internet perceive their tasks differently, and it leads to disruption of the group as the goals are perceived differently in the group.

Characteristics To Acquire By Virtual Teams

There are some characteristics of a virtual team that should be taken into account by the virtual leader and tried to impose on the group. These characteristics are:

Team composition: virtual teams need to have the right combination of people and skills among the group members. This combination depends on the technical skills, functional knowledge, tasks, and objective-oriented knowledge to manage the operations of the team (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014). Studies have suggested that having diversity in the chosen members and their characteristics will help the company produce innovative and quality decisions. However, most of the company's virtual teams are formed on convenience (what is available) instead of the required skill combination (how it will be effective).

Roles Definition

Roles are described as responsibilities given to the group members to complete a specific task. When in a virtual team, the tasks are huge in quantity and of different diversity, so defining roles in a team makes it easy for the group to undertake them effectively (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014). In a virtual team, there are different departments and people working together for a goal. For a smooth way of process, it is important to assign roles depending on the hierarchy and skills of a person. Mostly, virtual teams are made with people who have not worked together before, and managing such a group has its complications, which are made easy by defining certain roles for everyone.

Communication

It is important to have a good level of communication in a team. Having different people in a group requires a great level of communication; otherwise, it will be disruptive for a team. For example, in a virtual team, there might be IT specialists, support executives, quality assurance personnel, and research executives. All these people work together to achieve a given task, and it is important to have a positive way of communication in the team in order to avoid any mistakes in accomplishing a task (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014).

Conflict Resolution

The impact of conflicts on groups/teams is very complex, where a conflict can affect or help the performance of virtual teams or hurt them. In a virtual team, conflicts can arise from having different mindsets about a task to achieve, thinking that the person I'm communicating with is some other person who was communicating with me before or any conflict that can create problems for the group. Conflicts sometimes create obstacles for the team to achieve a task, and they usually harm

the virtual group by delaying the time to meet those needs (Lane, Henry, and Martha, 2014). It can usually come from a technical error or any person trying to solve any online situation and results in making an error.

Challenges In A Virtual Team

The most important challenges faced by the virtual teams are dispersed configuration and diverse composition. As virtual teams are mostly global and require a lot of potential from every individual, these challenges are to be catered by a team accordingly.

Dispersed configuration requires a virtual team of individuals who are not affected by the different timezones of the world and different infrastructures of the country or the company (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014). The foremost challenge for a virtual team is to have a good base of infrastructure where the communication of a team is not affected by the different network systems. It means that having a bad way of communication, like poor internet connection and poor network conditions, makes a virtual team have bad communication and leads to negative results of the task which the group is working on. Configuring dispersion in a global virtual team also faces the challenge of overcoming the legal, social, political, and economic conditions of the area (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014). For example, there a virtual team working from UK, USA, Australia, and Canada. There are people sitting in their countries and communicating over a network medium, trying to work on a construction business plan. Every country has legal standards and different laws regarding the construction business. So, the team has to find certain ways to overcome these legal issues in order to achieve the desired task.

This challenge becomes a problem when there is a lot of demand from the clients, and the team has to manage its processes to achieve the task in time. When a team is dispersed, it is important to have strong coordination and precise process decisions (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014). It becomes a huge challenge for the virtual team to manage the people if coordination is not set by the team. If the team is not organized, it becomes a problem for the team members to work in coordination, resulting in a negative side for the team. In some cases, virtual groups work 24 hours a day, and there are different people doing different time shifts (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014). If the information is not provided for each time shift, it will reduce the quality of the team, and ultimately, the efficiency of the team in producing results will decline. In a global virtual team setting, there are some implications and challenges which are important for the team to keep in mind, otherwise the challenge will become a threat to the operations of the team. Collaboration and coordination in a virtual team are most important, as networking teams require a high level of communication and coordination between the team members (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014).

Diverse composition in a virtual team setting means that a team has different people based on their culture, organization, gender, nationality, etc. These may be intended (envisioned by the company) or unintended (generally made). However, when a team performs as a virtual team, they need to make

their focus on accepting the diversity in a team and how to manage that (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014). Different people from different countries follow different mindsets, and when put together in a team, they need to have open thinking to accept changes and differences. These differences in a virtual team include language as the foremost challenge to be faced. A person interacting with a client on a voice call, and the client speaks Spanish only. It will make the process slow if the team member does not know how to speak Spanish. Keeping in mind the cultures, every country has a different business culture. Some tend to have authority in the workplace, while some want to be given guidance about a task.

When forming a virtual team, the management needs to focus on what type of people should be formed so that diversity can be observed in the team and any future challenges are avoided. According to previous studies, people in a virtual team expect to have diversity regarding the tasks to perform and the results to be delivered. If a team overcomes its cultural and language differences, it can create innovative and quality-based results (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014). However, composing a diverse virtual team is often not possible in local cases, but from a global perspective, it becomes easy for the company to make virtual groups because they have enough resources to back up their task objectives. Having a less diverse virtual team also makes the functioning of the team more difficult as the members are not capable of settling into the processes in the organization of the team (Hoch, Julia, and Steve, 2014). Based on these differences, the teams face challenges and try to overcome those challenges that can be of a different nature.

The Triple Challenge

Based on the challenges of diverse composition and dispersed configuration, virtual teams face a collaborative challenge which is known as the triple challenge. Triple challenges include three differences, i.e., invisibility, restricted channels, and complexity.

As there are more dynamics to cater, virtual teams are more complex to manage than the face-to-face interaction groups (Gilson et al., 2015). Virtual teams face physical invisibility, as there is no physical interaction, and every member interacts over the internet and in the network. There is no verbal communication in the team, and affects the whole organization of the virtual team. Apart from this, the team members also face emotional and mental invisibility. It is increased by the obstacles in the environment, where the members cannot talk to each other directly and create different perceptions about others in the minds of the team members (Gilson et al., 2015). Also, the team is restricted to technology channels, as there are a limited number of networks in which to communicate with each other. The language barrier comes into play, which affects the team as a whole, and in some cases, it is difficult for the team to look into it. A person might think that it is difficult to communicate with the other members in other countries as they might not know English, which will restrict the team from performing well. It is also termed as a complexity, where the team finds it almost impossible to manage the processes in these circumstances. Complexity can be a cultural difference, lack of technological skills among the members, and wrong association of team

formulation (Gilson et al., 2015). Associating a team that has no collaboration can have different complexities, where decisions might be made wrong, and operations can be affected by it.

However, the inability of visibility in the team creates hindrances to a lot of things, which can create a big challenge for the team. The complexity of a virtual team can also be defined as a situation where the team is not sure about everyone being committed to the work and playing their role for the team (Gilson et al., 2015). In such situations, it is hard for the team to perform well and produce accurate results. As everyone communicates over the network technology, it is impossible to analyze the commitment of every person in a group. Being unable to communicate physically with everyone creates problems with the identification of tasks wrongly, and as a result, leads to wrong decisions.

Joys In A Virtual Team

Where there are challenges, there are solutions to them as well. Virtual teams have challenges, but they also have some positive things that make a good virtual team. By applying these factors to the team, it becomes easy for the team to accomplish tasks and produce great results (Wadsworth, Marla, and Anita, 2015). Having a virtual business or team setup reduces the costs of putting up offices, daily expenses, and other incurred costs, which are mandatory for a physical office setup. But, in a virtual setting, there is less cost put up for the team, and the budget is available to apply to other areas of the business (Wadsworth, Marla, and Anita, 2015). It also increases the ability to hire more talented individuals, and there is a big talent pool to hire. In the modern world, every person loves to work in a home-based setting, and being in a virtual team provides the flexibility to work from anywhere a person wants to (Wadsworth, Marla, and Anita, 2015). This also makes a team member more committed and motivated to work. In an office-based team, there are more meetings being attended almost every day, which might reduce the time to produce results. However, in a virtual team, there are fewer meetings, and the time is utilized for working on the specified task.

Most importantly, a virtual setting enables more flexibility in the workforce. Being a virtual team means there are employees working on flexible hours that might be 24 hours a day. It creates flexibility in the team members to choose whatever time they deem fits their needs and ultimately increases the team's workforce. It also opens up new markets and geographical areas to get into while the cost remains the same. For a multinational, it might be a cost-incurring method to open an office in an area that is far from the headquarters of the company. Virtual teams provide the method to enter new markets and set up a team based on the technology, which allows different people from different cultures to be a part of the team and ultimately enter new markets without heavy costs (Wadsworth, Marla, and Anita, 2015). Virtual teams also improve the productivity of the task at hand, as the tasks are done with great care, and it increases the overall profits of the firm. A company that runs solely on virtual networking or a company that makes divisions for virtual teams in their process (Wadsworth, Marla, and Anita, 2015). In both cases, the profits are maximized because virtual groups focus on completing a task on time and on hand.

Virtuous Cycles

Virtual teams focus on creating a cycle of processes which helps in overcoming the challenges and risks to the team. There are three components of this cycle i.e. trust, shared knowledge, and ongoing communications. When at a starting point, teams start from a basic understanding of the cycle, which is acquired or destroyed with the time (Wadsworth, Marla and Anita, 2015).

Shared Knowledge

Most of the virtual teams start from the initial stage of shared knowledge. At this stage, the basic steps of the team processes are taken into consideration to avoid any future risk or challenge. It may be the agreement on the goals and tasks that each person needs to perform, which might be given from the description of each individual's job. The knowledge of everyone's contribution is declared to the team depending on the job titles of every individual. Implementing this step helps the team to have clarity on what every person needs to do and what skills are needed to overcome it. Based on the diversity and dispersion taken into account by the team, every individual evaluates what knowledge is clearly instructed and which type of data is to be taken into account in any cultural or dispersed situations. Sharing the job roles and knowledge at the start of the team formulation also helps in making good decisions, and it also helps the overall profit to increase. With the phase of time, if the processes of the team are taken in the same way as they were from the start, the team acquires it has a business strategy, and the operations of the virtual team are enhanced.

Trust

In every aspect of a business, trust, and honesty are very important because a business cannot run on the basis of a lie. As discussed previously, virtual teams mostly rely on reliability. The team members try to give others the benefit of the doubt, which is backed by trust from the members. Trusting the team members to complete a task and any information that he/she won't leak is important in a virtual team. Collaboration amongst the members needs to be developed to trust each other. Thus, building trust in a team enhances the capability of the team to execute good results and achieve consistency in the process of the tasks. Trust in a virtual team can also be defined as a team member trusting the other one to make decisions on his/her behalf and valuing the priorities of the others. Building trust in a virtual team eliminates a lot of challenges and risks that might affect the team in the near future.

Ongoing Communication

As a starting point in a virtual team, communication is backed by the knowledge shared in the group and trust, which surpasses the communication process effectively. Being able to respond to emails,

messages, queries, and errors by the team members, a high level of communication is observed at this point, where the knowledge is shared on a priority basis with the team. Communication in a virtual setting can be Word files, PowerPoint presentations, notes, query remarks, faxes, emails, and any other source from which the workflow is enhanced. Being clear in communication requires in-depth knowledge of the topic and the history of reliability within the team.

Conclusion

Virtual teams are a modern trend that is increasing every day and providing researchers with more context to talk about. It is vital for every virtual group to eliminate the challenges coming in their success way and to acquire any necessary tasks that can make the workflow more effective. Looking into the negative aspects of virtual teams will help avoid any obstacles in the team processes and form a team that ultimately overcomes the risks associated with them. Thus, virtual teams need to be considered an important aspect of a new trend in the modern world of business.

References

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