# EFFECTIVENESS OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

## Introduction

A virtual team is also known as a geographically dispersed team, distributed team, or remote team. It refers to a group of individuals forming a team, only that they work from different geographical locations. The only contact that the members of the team may have is via communication technology. In most cases no physical contact is ever employed. Communication technology in the form of faxes, emails, calls, video conferencing, and such other means of communication are of vital importance when it comes to virtual teams because it is about the only means through which the members share information and relay the feedback to the command centers (Pauleen, 2004, p.5). Most of the people comprising of a virtual team are known as knowledge workers. These are workers who are mainly employed for their vast array of knowledge. Examples are architects, physicians, engineers, academics, lawyers, economists, pharmacists and such professionals.

## Effectiveness of Virtual Teams in Product Development.

Virtual teams are considered rather effective when it comes to achieving organizational goals. Organizations come up with different products. These products are created in very diverse ways and processes ranging from organization to organization. All these product ideas should be born, chosen, developed, tried and tested and then launched by different platforms into different markets. Thus, firms find the need to employ virtual teams to be able to reach different geographical regions and cultures and expose their product simultaneously without necessarily spending a fortune while at it. The effectiveness in virtual teams lies in the proper employ of information and communication technology infrastructure, agility and flexibility in the delivery of products and services and the use of talent across international borders (Duarte & Snyder, 2013, p. 9).

More and more organization ranging from multinational corporations to small and medium sized enterprises are making use of virtual teams to achieve their objectives. The large corporations use the teams to improve on service delivery and increase their productivity, for the benefit of their already established clientele. The smaller corporations use virtual teams as an almost sure way to improve on their product quality as well as their productivity, both of which are of vital importance to give the firms a competitive edge over other firms. The virtual teams are made use of across all sectors of the economy from health, construction, finance, law, transportation, communication, even in the tech world (Duarte & Snyder, 2013, p. 16).

However, the use of virtual teams has had its fair share of complications. The members of the team comprise of totally different people from totally different backgrounds, cultures and time zones. Naturally, issues are bound to crop up. For instance, the level of trust between the members of the team is bound to be shaken at some point, if not at all times. This s because no one person may know the other, and the vital element of trust, physical contact, may not be at play here. Trust is vital for any team’s success, especially a virtual team.

Compared to the traditional co-located team, virtual teams may face a challenge when it comes to team engagement. Collocated teams have it easy here, seeing as there are daily encounters on a physical front. They face similar challenges together and they understand each other better. Virtual teams on the contrary, have no understanding of what the other member is all about. Their beliefs are totally different, and so are their cultures (Pauleen, 2004, p.42). Conflicts may arise and the team members may fail to collaborate. Thy may not even speak the same language, so barriers immediately arise (Duarte & Snyder, 2013, p. 56). Social isolation complicates virtual teams.

A problem of clarity of roles may also arise, where the individual team members may not have clearly defined roles and may end up doing recurring duties instead of each member taking a specific task. Due to absence of face to face contact the members fail to build a relationship which is so vital for information sharing and clear demarcation of duties. Also, since such issues are more often than not foreseen during the planning, the team leaders are not prepared before time to deal with such contingencies and others such as time zone planning. Also, the cost of technology makes virtual teams a challenge.

Virtual teams also have their advantages. They save the organization a lot of costs. The firms don’t have to deal with offshore offices, unnecessary leases or acquisition of buildings, utility bills such as fuel, electricity, water, travel, etc. the outsourcing of labor for some of their operations ends up being fr much cheaper than employing a full time team that will outlive its usefulness sooner rather than later, saving the firm a lot of resources (Pauleen, 2004, p.24).

Virtual teams also lead to increased productivity and maximization of profits, and have also reduced the time traditionally set to market products and services drastically. They have also widened the scope and number of opportunities created by the possibilities of a detached team.

Virtual teams, in conclusion, have come to stay. A suitable system, however, needs to be arrived at to make the whole idea beneficial to the firm. A capable and efficient time leader is vital for the team to function properly without hitches. The use of software specifically designed to aid with the functions, flow of information and intersection of team members is also heavily advised since it comes close to face to face interaction.

## References

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Duarte, D. L., & Snyder, N. T. (2013). *Mastering virtual teams: Strategies, tools and techniques that succeed.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.