

Leading Virtual Teams, Globally: Virtual Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Virtual teams allow professionals to work across boundaries, borders, cultures, and time zones. A number of companies across the globe have adapted to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020, using platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, Skype, and Microsoft Teams. Due to the pandemic, most professional organizations were forced to utilize virtual platforms to communicate because of the worldwide stay-at-home orders. These platforms allow professionals across the world to connect instantly. Within that context, a virtual team's leader has a significant responsibility for leading the virtual team to success. The purpose of this study was to explore how to lead virtual global teams successfully. The study examined 25 global leaders' lived experiences utilizing qualitative research methodology and explored the phenomenon of leading virtual teams effectively (and successfully) through using the input and process outcome framework. Findings included an effective virtual leadership approach.

KEYWORDS

Competencies, Cultural Intelligence, Effective Communication, Global Leadership, Global Virtual Teams, Leadership, Telecommuting, Trust, Virtual Leadership, Virtual Teams

INTRODUCTION TO VIRTUAL TEAMS

Virtual teams are defined (Powers, 2018) as any team collaborating to accomplish a set of objectives from various types of geographical locations (Brake, 2006). If you have ever worked on a team in a different location or geographic region, you have been part of a virtual team. Virtual teams have been around for decades (Powers, 2018). "In the early 20th century, widespread electricity and public transportation separated work and home even further by driving workers into offices equipped with telephones, telegraphs, and the typewriter" (Powers, 2018, p.2). This was just a precursor to virtual teams and collaborations. As technology advanced and the cost of transportation increased, organizations began utilizing employees to work remotely to advance professional growth and organizational revenue (Cascio & Shurygallo, 2003). Furthermore, telecommunicating exploded due to the Clean Air Act of 1990 and the OPEC oil crisis (Powers, 2018). J.C. Penny was one of the first organizations to deploy the telecommuting framework by hiring home-based call center employees (Powers, 2018).

In the 21st century, virtual teams gained more popularity due to cellular devices, email communications, computers, and the worldwide web (Powers, 2018). Fast forward to 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, employees were forced to shut their offices to slow the spread of the virus and had to create new plans to work remotely. Hence, the phrases work from home, and virtual teams gained immense popularity. To further extend this point, organizations recognized by working remotely can enter multiple markets and expand their global reach (Guerin, 2017).

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Leading virtual teams has been at the forefront of nearly all organizations, both local and global. Virtual teams allow professionals to work across boundaries, borders, cultures, and time zones (Hunter, 2004). Several companies across the globe have adapted to remote work, although they have been presented with challenges such as lack of connectivity and face-to-face interactions (Kegeyan, 2016). To remedy such issues, virtual platforms such as Telephone, Email usage, social media, Zoom, WebEx, Skype, Microsoft Teams have been prominent in the workforce, especially since technology's advancement. Furthermore, educational institutions have utilized remote online learning methods in the past ten years to offer education worldwide and make education cost-effective and accessible (Guerin, 2017).

Due to the pandemic, most organizations were forced to utilize virtual platforms (listed above) to communicate because of the worldwide stay-at-home orders. These platforms allow professionals across the world in an instant moment to connect. (Frisch & Greene, 2020). With the increased use of virtual teams (to almost 100%) in the year 2020, the importance of virtual leadership and teams is paramount. They are prominent because of its flexibility and allows organizations to enter various international markets and expand branding across different nations (Hunter, 2004).

Importance of Virtual Leadership

Creating globally competent virtual teams capable of thriving is no longer an expectation but a necessity for multinational and local corporations (DasGupta, 2011). Working in a virtual team is the norm for most professionals. For virtual teams to thrive, team members need proper leadership (DasGupta, 2011; Fierd, 2013). What is a virtual leader? Virtual leadership or a virtual leader can guide team members to work effectively and timely to produce results from a virtual location. Leading virtual teams is similar to leading multinational corporations; the best types of virtual leaders have in-depth skill sets comprising directive, authoritative, affiliative, participative, mentoring skills, and cultural intelligence (CQ) (Clark & Cohn, 2020; Early & Mosakowski, 2004).

It is essential to understand how to lead virtual teams successfully. Leadership skills that may be effective in a traditional work setting may not be transferrable in a virtual environment. Why is that? One of the reasons is that you are unable to see the person physically; therefore, rapport building takes time and dedication (Frisch & Greene, 2020). Leaders who understand the differentiation will be able to adjust their leadership styles accordingly. Leaders need to understand the challenges and navigate those challenges to thrive in a virtual space to lead virtual teams. Navigating challenges requires much deliberation and patience to adapt to online settings; leaders need to be aware of this challenge when leading a virtual team (Fried, 2013).

This journal discusses the importance of leading virtual teams globally, managing different virtual teams, developing trust, competencies needed, and motivating employees on a virtual platform. Further, 25 global leaders were interviewed from around the world, representing multiple organizations, and they've shared their lived experiences of leading successful global teams. From their experiences, the most effective methods of leading virtual teams will be identified in this journal. Lastly, the journal will provide a framework for how to lead effectively.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research is to provide context about how to be an effective virtual leader and the dynamics of leading virtual teams. This study will expand our comprehensive knowledge of leading virtually. Furthermore, the study explores the current literature about leading virtually and adds to the existing body of literature (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, the study seeks to provide additional methods to utilize effective leading (virtual) principles. In doing so, the study aims to fill the gaps in the literature on how to work well in a virtual team collectively and how leaders need to lead virtual teams. This study explores the following research question and the following sub-questions:

RQ1: How to Lead a Virtual Global Teams?

1. How have you participated in a global virtual team?
2. How do you develop trust with a virtual global team? Please name three key items.
3. What are the specific competencies that are needed to lead virtual teams?
4. How do you keep your employees motivated in a virtual platform?

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