

**VIRTUAL TEAMS- BUILDING BLOCKS OF ORGANIZATION LEARNING**

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ABSTRACT

Virtual teams are the latest addition to the new management trends that have resulted due to globalization across the globe. It has become a necessity for companies to have people from two different areas (regionally/globally) to work on the same project based on the expertise the people provide to achieve a common goal together. There is a constant knowledge flow from these virtual team members to each other as they work on a single project at a time.

This article focuses on virtual teams and their management in a noted IT company. The virtual teams here specifically refer to the group of people here as well as in US who corroborate together to work on a development of a product, i.e., a mobile application with the use of information technology. The study focuses on understanding whether the information is shared between the team mates cross country and if shared how much is it retained. A small sample is chosen to understand the above.

A standard structured questionnaire is used to know the opinions of the employees in the company and thus the results are interpreted.

Keywords: *Virtual teams, management, effectiveness, learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

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Information technology has brought together organizations which are physically far from each other. We have seen in many news channels that whatever happens in the other part of the world is reported in the span of minutes to all over the world with the advance technology like video conferencing, web conferencing, instant messaging and other online communication tools. A similar technology is being used by the companies all around the world for smooth functioning of their companies. Instead of physically moving all over the globe to complete their operations, the companies are using technology to transfer the technical know-how of one area to the other to achieve their objectives. All this technology has helped people to work from whatever location they can work with the new flexible hour jobs, work from home jobs thus benefitting a lot of people who are able to achieve a work life balance which they wouldn't have done if physical relocation of the team members is mandatory to accomplish their work objectives.

Not only the employees are benefiting from this but the organizations also can save their expenses and time in relocating the candidates to the client location or where ever they are needed.

Virtual teams are teams of people who primarily interact electronically and who may meet face-to-face occasionally. Examples of such teams are people who are working for the same company at different geographical locations. The main characteristic of virtual team is the individuals work across time, space and organizational boundaries with links strengthened by websites of communication technology.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A brief literature review is done to know if the virtual teams positively affect learning or not. Many articles have focused on the functioning technicalities of the virtual teams and their effectiveness and management, but much less research is done on whether they



are enabling the learning or not. A few below articles focused on the theoretical view of virtual teams and their benefits.

(Vicente Penarroja, 2015) This article throws light on the effect of feedback on team learning through group information elaboration in virtual teams with a high level of team trust. The findings suggest that team feedback is effective to improve group information elaboration and learning in virtual teams when team trust is high.

(Ferrazi, 2014) in his article titled "getting virtual teams right" narrowly focuses on the effectiveness of the virtual teams with respect to learning and he gives the entire credit to the hiring process of the virtual team members. He places great importance in hiring the right people for proper information sharing through the group. The characteristics he mentions are good communication skills, high emotional intelligence, an ability to work independently and a resilience to recover from the snafus that inevitably arise. He suggested the team lead to encourage the team members to coach each other and consider reassignment for those who don't make progress.

(White, 2014) in his article has explained the benefits of virtual teams, i.e., reduce travel and related costs. He also explained the dynamics of management of virtual teams with particular reference to effective management of language, cultural, time and location aspects of virtual teams and virtual meetings.

(Skyrik, 2010) in his article studied the management and development of virtual teams has mentioned that the virtual teams have aroused in response to the various organizational challenges faced by the organizations in the 21st century and also due to the globalization of the market place. A pilot proposal of a model of "Virtual Development Management System" (ViDeMaS) was developed. He has concluded that building of trust, cohesion and strong team are the hardest challenges faced by the managers of virtual teams.



(Serrat, 2009) in his article has ventured further above on how to trust the virtual team members and gain knowledge. He mentioned the fundamental determinants of which as open expression, information equity, and performance reliability. He also mentions that to build trust it is necessary to ask effective questions, generate clear and concise objectives, including project implementation plan, talk the talk, build tell-and-ask patterns to enable the free flow of data and information from one source to another. He also mentions the development of the communication and meetings protocols and to diagnose problems early and act on them to grow the virtual team's own culture and the promotion of virtual socializing skills

The main objective of this article is to know whether the virtual Teams are building blocks for Organizational Learning

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

An IT company using virtual teams is chosen as per convenience sampling. A team is randomly chosen from the company which has both face-to-face team as well as team members in the group. The team composition is 56 members, out of which one is the team leader, 10 senior application engineers, 25 software engineers, 8 senior analysts and 12 analysts or testers. A standard questionnaire containing 24 questions is given to the team employees and asked them to rate it as best to their knowledge. A five point rating scale was used where applicable.

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This article majorly answers the following objectives

1. To study how the virtual teams function
3. To analyze whether the virtual learning is prevalent or not.



Based on this, a null hypothesis can be framed as

Ho: The virtual teams do not promote learning among the team members.

Dependent Variables that are used in this article are Information acquisition, Information interpretation, Information distribution and the independent variables are Amount of time spent in virtual teams, Communication skills, Management of the team. A total of 24 items standard questionnaire is created under these variables. The questionnaire is then administered to the employees which have been collected the next day.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

After doing the survey, the results are transferred into the SPSS 20 software, where reliability analysis is done to test whether the data is relevant or not. The Cronbach's alpha came at 0.839 which is good value indicating that the standard questionnaire chosen is apt for the study.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.839	24



Table 1

A brief overview of the descriptive statistics of the employees

Age

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	3	5.4	5.4	5.4
2	17	30.4	30.4	35.7
Valid 3	33	58.9	58.9	94.6
4	3	5.4	5.4	100.0
Total	56	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

It is seen majorly that the team consists majorly (58.9%) of employees who are in 31 to 35 age group

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	18	32.1	32.1	32.1
Valid 2	38	67.9	67.9	100.0
Total	56	100.0	100.0	



Table 3

The Female employees consist of 67.9% of the total percentage based on gender.

Experience				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1	6	10.7	10.7	10.7
2	11	19.6	19.6	30.4
Valid 3	26	46.4	46.4	76.8
4	13	23.2	23.2	100.0
Total	56	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

46% are the employees who are in 5 to 10 years of experience group who are into the virtual teams.

Correlation and multiple regression have been performed to see if any relationship exists between the virtual teams and organization learning.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.961 ^a	.924	.903	.378

Table 5

The correlation statistic R square shows that the predictors are able to significantly explain the independent variable upto 92% which clearly indicates there is a strong relation between the virtual teams and organization learning.

ANOVA^a



Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	73.200	12	6.100	42.700	.000 ^b
	Residual	6.000	42	.143		
	Total	79.200	54			

Table 6

A regression equation is formed based on the coefficients and t values seen in the next table

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.929	.898		5.486	.000
	the amount of time in the virtual team as opposed to physical team	.009	.127	.009	.068	.946
	communicate with the team members	.218	.108	.257	2.031	.047
	Virtual teams tend to be poorly managed compared with physical ones	-.485	.202	-.310	-2.405	.020

a. Dependent Variable: Organization learning

Table 7



Seeing the above table, it can be framed that

Organization learning =0.68 (amount of time spent in the virtual team) +2.031
(communication with the team members) -2.405 (poor management)

V. CONCLUSION

Communication skills, amount of time spent and management of the team are the important variables of the virtual teams that show an impact on the amount of learning that the team mates achieve which indirectly helps in organization learning. It is seen that the amount of time spent in the virtual team is affecting only 0.68 times towards the learning whereas the communication skills of the virtual team members plays a major role in determining the learning of the team. The article thus proves that the virtual teams which are majorly formed to unite the talent pools across geographic span towards each other are definitely helpful in improving organization learning.

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