Leveraging Teams
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01/29/07

Bibliography Abstract

Citation:	Jim Suchan; Greg Hayzak, "The Communication Characteristics of Virtual Teams: A Case Study", IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, Vol. 44, No. 3, September 2001
Keywords and Teaser Statement:	*Keywords:* Communications, media choice, organizational learning, organizational systems, Virtual teams
Who Should Read this Article?	Project Managers and managers who have responsibilities for people who are in different locations, those dealing specifically with customer support teams. This article also assist in media choice for virtual teams.
Abstract	This paper reviews the communication technologies used in virtual teams. It is a case study on an International consulting system. The paper is divided into four sections 1) A definition of virtual teams. 2) An overview of the International Consulting System (ICS) and the transition that it made into a virtual team. 3) An analysis of the extent that ICS supports the virtual team. 4) A study of the electronic media that was used and the effectiveness that it was used.
Type of Study Context of Study	Quantitative
This paper is a case study of one particular virtual team. Members were interviewed through three different **The teams studied were physically located in different countries, interacted through the** use of computer mediated communication technologies only (email, chat rooms), and had no prior history of working together. The experiment employed 350 Masters students from 28 different universities representing every continent except Antarctica. Cross-cultural teams were created with the objective of experiencing collaboration in a virtual environment of international exposure. Two voluntary assignments and one final project were expected from the teams. Data was provided by the team members email message archives, demographic questions and responses to two questionnaires. Measures of trust, culture and international experience were ascertained using specific tools cited in the study.
Main Theory and Resulting Research Question(s) and Propositions/Hypotheses	Much of the theoretical and empirical literature on interpersonal and organizational trust suggests that a lack of shared social context – such as global virtual teams would result in a negative response. Media richness and social presence theories also question the possibility of relationship development in virtual teams since computer-based communication eliminates the types of communication cues needed to convey trust, warmth and other interpersonal affections. Absent of these cues individuals build stereotypical impressions of others based on limited

information. Furthermore, cross-cultural variabilities such as individualism-collectivisim suggest different needs, values and goals for the team resulting in potentially differing levels of trust. Finally, the report discusses the theory of "swift" trust in global virtual teams versus temporary teams.

Key Findings   Communication behaviors that facilitated trust early in a group's life included social communication and communication of enthusiasm. Communications of behaviors that help maintain trust later in a groups life were predictable communication and substantive and timely responses. Member actions that facilitated trust early in a group's life included coping with technical uncertainty and individual initiative. Member actions that helped maintain trust later in a groups life were successful transition from social to procedural to task focus, positive leadership and phlegmatic responses to crises.

The report suggests the trust created during the study was probably more of "swift", depersonalized, action-based trust. Trusting behavior may itself have provided the cognitive and emotional basis for the trust that was then captured by self-reports on trust.

The adage that "you can never give a second first impression" seemed to apply to electronic impressions as well.

When faced with technical/task uncertainty early in the group's life, teams high on trust were able to solve problems and resolve conflicts in an environment where they were limited to electronic communication. Teams that did not become strongly focused in their communication on the task reported low levels of trust at the end, yet the task focus in communication could coexist in parallel with the social focus (provided not at the expense of the task).

Another finding was the importance of the response to computer-based communication – especially given the greater uncertainty than face-to-face. There tends to be an intense need for response. A response is an endorsement that another person is willing to take the risk of interpreting the first person's message and if necessary, supplying the missing elements to make it understandable. A response can also be interpreted as a trusting behavior suggesting involvement which conveys attraction, intimacy, attachment and affection.

Cultural effects were not evident in perceived levels of trust. This suggests that electronically facilitated communication may make cultural differences in-salient: the lack of nonverbal cues eliminates evidence of cultural differences, such as different ways of dressing, greeting and others. Asynchronous mode of communication gives individuals more time to process messages making cultural differences less noticeable.

Implications and   Suggestions for managing/participating in virtual teams include:

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Applications for Practice	o Early defining of team member roles and responsibilities to minimize confusion, frustration and disincentive o Provide guidelines on how often to communicate and suggest regular frequency to create predictability to reduce the uncertainty of the team's co-ordination o Address conflict immediately as negative comments in a virtual environment are difficult to resolve asynchronously o Address conflict with the individual versus the team o Although it is not necessary to meet in person, it is critical to engage in an open and thoughtful exchange of messages at the formation phase of the team o Participants need to provide thorough feedback on the contributions of others. Additionally, it's not quantity, but the quality and predictability of their communication that is most critical to the effective functioning of the team.
Caveats about Applications	Disingenuous enthusiasm or concern for others perceived by the team will impact the ability to develop trusting relationships.

Connection to Readings and Practice