VIRTUAL TEAMS AS IMPLICATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN PERIOD OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract: Virtual teams represent a growing response to the need for fasting time-to-market, low-cost and rapid solutions to complex organizational problems. Virtual teams enable organizations to pool the talents and expertise of employees and non-employees by eliminating time and space barriers. Nowadays companies are heavily investing in virtual team to enhance their performance and competitiveness. Companies are realizing that virtual work is one the important implication of human resources management in period of globalization, which brings many changes in domestically and internationally. The paper provides a theoretical-analytical view of the issue of virtual teams as one implication of human resource management. Part of the article are the results of research, which deal with the following key topics: how often respondents worked on projects with other people using the telephone, email or an online tools, how respondents conduct their virtual work, differences between virtual and co-located teams and technologies used to communicate in virtual teams.

Keywords: Virtual teams. Globalization. Global virtual teams.

JEL Classification: M15, M21

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, companies have increasingly turned to virtual teams as a means of connecting and engaging geographically dispersed workers, lowering the costs associated with global collaboration, and enabling greater speed and adaptability. These teams have shifted the way in which organizations traditionally form, manage and evaluate team performance. Virtual teams, although offering many benefits, also pose a number of challenges. Developing effective global leaders, keeping remote employees engaged, forming and developing global teams, monitoring and evaluating distance employees, and developing a global mindset are all areas that companies are working to better understand.

2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON VIRTUAL TEAMS

Organizations are currently facing important and unprecedented challenges in an ever dynamic, cons tantly changing and complex environment [10]. Economic activity of all types is moving in the direction of globalization. Virtual teams are growing in popularity [4]. Literature related to virtual teams revealed a lack of depth in the definitions. Although virtual teamwork is a current topic in the literature on global organizations, it has been problematic to define what 'virtual' means across multiple institutional contexts [6]. The concept of a "team" is described as a small number of people with complementary skills who are equally committed to a common purpose, goals, and working approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable [11]. The term "virtual team" is used to cover a wide range of activities and forms of technology-supported working [1]. Virtual teams are comprised of members who are located in more than one physical location. This team trait has fostered extensive use of a variety of forms of computer-mediated communication that enable geographically dispersed members to coordinate their individual efforts and inputs [11]. A team will become virtual if it meets four main common criteria and other characteristics [11] that are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Criteria of virtual teams

Characteristics of virtual team	Descriptions
Common criteria	Geographically dispersed (over different time zones) Driven by common purpose (guided by a common purpose) Enabled by communication technologies Involved in cross-boundary collaboration
Other characteristics	It is not a permanent team Small team size Team member are knowledge workers Team members may belong to different companies

Source: [11]

Virtual teams are comprised of individuals that are separated geographically or organizationally and that rely primarily on technology to complete tasks [11]. It permits organizations to attract and retain top talent because workplace flexibility is increasingly seen as a crucial aspect of job satisfaction for many employees [3]. Virtual teams are also valuable to many businesses because team members commonly focus their interests on tasks instead of shared social or cultural environments, which often impact the dynamic within conventional teams [9].

Authors have clarified the difference form of virtual team by classifying it with respect to two primary variables namely, the number of location (one or more) and the number of managers (one or more). There are four categories of teams [5].

1. Teleworkers: A single manager of a team at one location.
2. Remote team: A single manager of a team distributed across multiple locations.
3. Matrixed teleworkers: Multiple manager of a team at one location.

4. Matrixed remote teams: Multiple managers across multiple locations.

Challenges of Virtual Teams:

- *Unique Characteristics & Challenges of Virtual Teams*

Research suggests that virtual teams possess several unique characteristics that distinguish them from conventional, face-to-face teams [2]. Two main characteristics classify teams as virtual-physically distributed members and communication through a number of synchronous (simultaneous) and asynchronous (delayed interaction) methods such as phone, audio and video conferencing, and e-mail.

- *Dynamics of Global Virtual Teams*

Global virtual teams span time zones, geographical boundaries and are frequently composed of diverse members representing different disciplines, functions, professions, business units, organizations, countries and cultures. In general, the greater the number of differences among members, the greater are team barriers to effectiveness [8]. This is especially true when virtual team members are composed of members from different countries and cultures who face pressure to pursue local priorities rather than team objectives.

Competencies for Managers of Global Virtual Teams:

- *Cross-Cultural Leadership*

Undeniably cross-cultural leadership is an important competency of global mindset. Among other things, effective cross-cultural leadership has implications for developing trust and building relationships, facilitating communication, encouraging collaboration, and managing conflict.

- *Cultural Intelligence*

Cultural intelligence is the ability to interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds [13]. Possessing cultural intelligence enables individuals to recognize cultural differences adjust to new cultures and situations, understand local practices and behave appropriately and effectively [7]. The culturally intelligent person suspends judgment until information beyond the other person's ethnicity becomes available [14]. To be certain cultural awareness and sensitivity are critical to shared understanding and virtual team effectiveness.

- *Communication & Interpersonal Skills*

The characteristics of global virtual teams make the mastery of communication and interpersonal skills even more important. By their nature members of global virtual teams are not native speakers of the same language even if they all use a common language to communicate in the team [8]. Because of time and distance, communication is generally limited to relatively short episodes. In addition, research suggests that the greater the cultural differences are between sender and receiver, the greater is the expected difficulty in communicating [12]. Between four dimensions of effective virtual team leadership belong [11].

- Communication (the leader provides continuous feedback, engages in regular and prompt communication and clarifies tasks);
- Unders tanding (the leader is sensitive to schedules of members, appreciates their opinions and suggestions, cares about member's problems and expresses a personal interest in them);
- Role clarity (the leader clearly defines responsibilities of all members, exercises authority, and mentors virtual team members);
- Leadership attitude (the leader is assertive yet not too "bossy," caring relates to members at their own levels and maintains a consistent attitude over the life of the project).

While virtual teams have many advantages, they frequently struggle to establish a strong sense of trust between individuals, frequent team member intercommunication, and effective leadership; all of which are necessary for team success.

3. METHODOLOGY

The object of the research is the issue of virtual teamwork as implication of human resource management in period of globalization. Primary data collection was done through a standardized questionnaire which was distributed electronically to employees of international companies operating in the Slovak Republic. We assume that employees who work in international companies use virtual teamwork more often than employees of companies that operate only domestically, because they have not opportunity of personal communication in handling different tasks. Total 300 questionnaires were distributed and their return represents 22.33%. We can say that research sample consists of a total of 67 employees working in an international company.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

We have examined the following key topics:
- How often respondents worked on projects with other people using the telephone, email or other tool.
- How respondents conduct their virtual work?
- Differences between virtual and co-located teams.
- Technologies used to communicate in virtual teams.

1. *How often respondents worked on projects with other people using the telephone, email or an online tool*

We asked participants how often they worked on projects with other people using the telephone, email or an online tool. Sixty one percent (61%) of respondents reported "very often" and only 11% reported "hardly ever." In addition, 53% of respondents indicated that more than 50% of their productivity was dependent upon working virtually by telephone, email, chat or an online meeting platform.
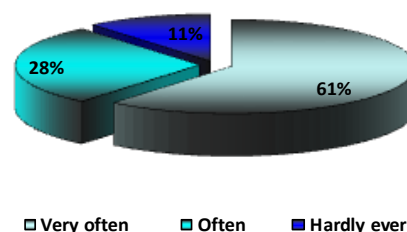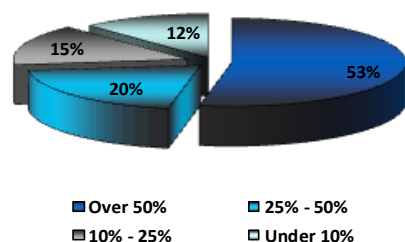

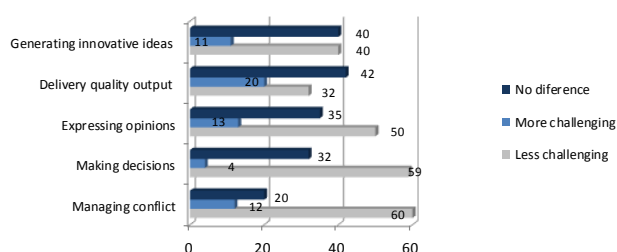**Figure 1** How often you work by phone or email
Source: author

Between tools for virtual teams we can include telephone, email, web conferencing, file transfer, instant messaging and other. In our survey reseach we focused on technologies used to communicate in virtual teams that are part of figure 3. When we asked which technologies were used to communicate with virtual teammates, 41% of respondents reported using email, 24% the telephone, 15% instant messaging, 9% text messaging (SMS), 5% web cams, 5% Skype or 1% other technologies.

Figure 2 Percentage of productivity dependent on working virtually
Source: author

2. How respondents conduct their virtual work

Virtual team allows organizations to access the most qualified individuals for a particular job. Seventy one percent (71%) of respondents reported that they conducted their virtual work mostly with individuals who were based both domestically and internationally. Another 19% indicated working mostly with internationally based individuals, and 10% reported working mostly with domestically based individuals.

3. Differences between virtual and co-located teams

For teams moving from co-location to virtual environments, an ability to adapt and change can be a long process riddled with trial and error scenarios. The survey results point to the fact that virtual teams were most different from co-located teams in three areas: managing conflict (60%), making decisions (59%) and expressing opinions (50%). They were subsequently analyzed items such as making decisions and managing conflict. The results are part of the Figure 3.
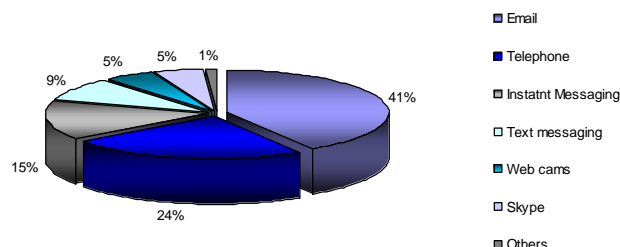
Figure 3 Differences between virtual and face-to-face teams
Source: author

4. Technologies used to communicate in virtual teams

Virtual teams are technology-mediated groups of people from different discipline that work on common tasks.

Figure 3 Technologies used to communicate in virtual teams
Source: author

5. CONCLUSION

Virtual teams are important mechanisms for organizations seeking to leverage scarce resources across geographic and other boundaries. This paper with a comprehensive review of literature and realized survey find answers on question: how often respondents worked on projects with other people using the telephone, email or other tool and, how respondents conduct their virtual work? This paper has identified differences between virtual and co-located teams and technologies used to communicate in virtual teams. This contribution identifies the following findings: respondents very often worked on projects with other people and are using the telephone, email or other tool, that virtual teams were most different from co-located teams in areas managing conflict, that most of respondents conducted their virtual work mostly with individuals who were based both domestically and internationally and the most commonly used technology in virtual teams is email. Unlike a traditional team, a virtual team works across space, time and organizational boundaries with links strengthened by webs of communication technologies. However, many of the best practices for traditional teams are similar to those for virtual teams.

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