

STREAM: Professional Development and Training

PD11: Working in a global team

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AIM

The aim of this presentation will be to discuss global working. I will discuss the issues that are faced within teams and some considerations when working in a global environment.

INTRODUCTION

Many people work in virtual teams, some work in different departments, some work in different buildings and some in different countries. This can raise a number of issues over communication, cultural understandings, time zone differences, technical issues and a host of other considerations.

One of the main challenges we face in this environment is how best to promote close team work and collaboration.

I hope to discuss a number of the challenges that global teams face, including:-

- Leadership
- Trust and collaboration
- Exclusion
- Perception
- Forming a productive team
- Conveying messages without face to face interaction

WORKING IN A GLOBAL TEAM

We are all now used to working in an office environment, working within varied teams made up of colleagues with very different skills and backgrounds. Whether we consciously realize it or not we all have a number of methods of working with our team mates which have developed over time. We have a number of different personality types within the team and very different methods of communicating with each of them tailored to their and our personalities. Working in local teams can be challenging but forming this healthy way of working in a globally dispersed team becomes even harder

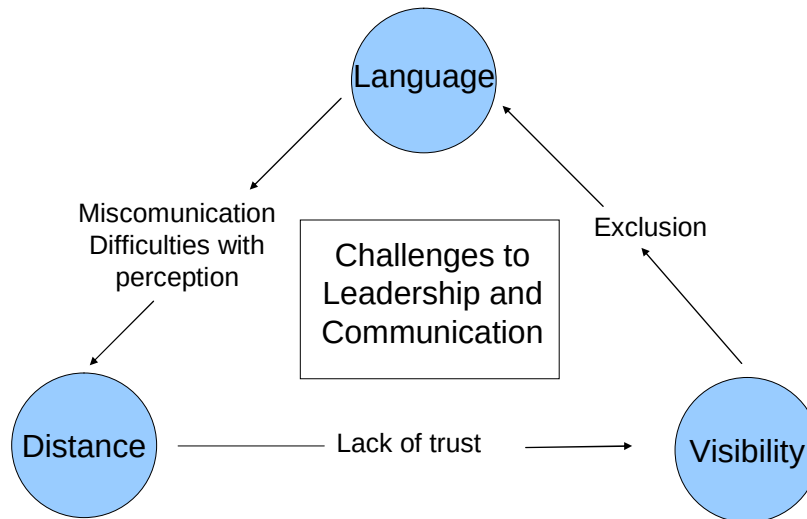
Global cross site working and virtual teams is an emerging feature of global organizations. Virtual teams are flexible and versatile in many companies but they have their challenges. Globally dispersed teams and projects must be supported with strong leadership and good supporting infrastructure to be effective.

One of the main challenges we face in this global environment is how best to promote close team work and collaboration. Many people work in global teams based in a number of different countries, this can raise a number of issues over communication, cultural understandings, time zone differences, technical issues and a host of other considerations.

A number of the challenges found when working in global teams that I will be focusing on are:-

- Leadership of the team
- Design of the team
- Building and maintaining trust and collaboration
- Cultural differences
- Effective communication without face to face interaction
- Exclusion
- Perception
- Forming a productive team

Challenges



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LEADERSHIP

Leading a globally dispersed team is no easy challenge. There are a number of challenges:-

How do you make a collection of physically remote individuals into a high performing team?
 How do you set up infrastructures to support that team?
 How do you gain buy in?
 How do you promote Trust?

This is just to list a few.

Most large organisations are now spread across numerous locations, with cross matrix management structures on the increase. Many managers are now responsible for global teams dispersed across different sites.

Managing a global team is considered to be one of the toughest tasks in today's working world. In addition to the usual challenges of managing a diverse group of individuals, the manager of a virtual team can be faced with further challenges including different time zones, managing at a distance, lack of communication technology, lack of team unity. There are a number of key stages in building a strong global team

- Hiring the right people
- Building team unity
- Building trust and maintaining motivation
- Ensuring clear and effective communication
- Making remote meetings a success
- Ensuring a common goal with clear markers for success

The leaders job is to establish a common team framework. It is vital to spend time at the beginning of team formation ensuring that all team members have the tools they need to perform their work, the tools needed to communicate and that all parties understand the team goals and their roles within them. Regular team meetings will help to ensure quality, progress and promote a level of trust. Although care needs to be made that these meetings are an effective use of time and that they add value.

Leaders have to gain buy in from their team, this is vital for people to feel valued and effective in their roles and to ensure that they are as productive as possible. They need to empower their team members, ensuring that the

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infrastructure is there so the team can communicate effectively with one another and manage tasks independently of the managers guidance.

Whilst it's easy to list the activities that need to occur and many seem straight forward, this is a tough task for any manager. With all leaders, the true test of the success of the person in the role is not just what they can do but also what their team can do, with them at the helm or independently.

TRUST

One of the key aspects mentioned above is that of trust. Trust is a fundamental component of any team, a lack of trust hinders collaboration and results, whilst an abundance of trust allows for team unity and a greater sense of purpose and belonging.

In small colocated teams trust comes through conversations, including those of a personal nature. The characteristics and ethics of a person are easier to grasp and relate to when you see them daily. Once a team is completely dispersed all informal contact disappears and the teams trust and collaborative nature needs to be formed in different ways

Part of the issue is simply in the physical proximity of the team members, or rather the lack of it. When groups are located in the same site they interact in an informal way, get to know each other and build trust and an effective way of working together. Once team members are not working at the same site the informal building of trust becomes harder. It is far easier to work with somebody at the desk next to you as you are more likely to have had positive formal and informal interactions with them. You are aware of their culture and their ways of working and you are able to utilise face to face meetings

Good leadership will build trust through merging individuals from different regions into small well balanced teams. Only through working experience will team members give and gain trust from their colleagues. Trust can be formed from reaching milestones and targets and ensuring that the work provided is of quality. It is the role of the team leader and all team members to communicate as much as possible with other team members and where possible form these informal relationships to compliment the trust built in the working day.

EXCLUSION

Teams start to suffer when team mates are not colocated, face to face meetings go a long way to ensuring that progress and communications are understood and that team buy in is achieved. Once a team is completely dispersed all informal contact disappears and the teams trust and collaborative nature needs to be formed in different ways.

It is far too easy to exclude a person at a remote site from a meeting. This can be done in a conscious or unconscious way. If you exclude them from an email it is a conscious decision which I'm sure we would all try to avoid. If we set up a meeting at a time which is well outside of working hours for one team member it may be subconscious but we are still in effect excluding that persons contribution to the team. This is far too regular an occurrence when working with team mates from different time zones.

It is again the responsibility of the lead that wherever possible exclusion is avoided and if in some instances decisions need to be taken when all team members are not available it is their responsibility to disseminate this information and gain full team buy in later, keeping all team members informed.

Whilst it is the leads responsibility to ensure that their team members are all included it also falls on each of the individual team mates to ensure they do all they can to enhance team unity and avoid exclusion. This relates to communication, ensuring that everyone is included and also when you find yourself removed from an email chain, speaking up and asking the relevant people to include you in future correspondence.

PERCEPTION

The quality of the interactions between team members affects the quality of the team as a whole.

One of the key issues when working remotely from the rest of the team is perception to team members. We have all had days where we have spent the entire day in meetings or responding to emails. What happens when the team lead then asks what you have done that day, what is the perception to your team effort? Are you viewed differently

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when working remotely? Do you have to be more goal orientated to show to the rest of the team what you are achieving?

Perception is a key issue and a real challenge in globally dispersed teams. This challenge can most effectively be managed when you have clear goals, timelines and tasks. You can then work to these and ensure that communication channels are kept up throughout, hence reassuring the team of your work ethic. This obviously works both ways and as well as perceptions of workload and performance people need to be aware of team members perceptions of inclusion or lack of it.

COMMUNICATION

Groups that are always colocated can cope with less support and formalised communication channels. When the team works to clearly defined goals which the whole team has buy in on and they have clear communication channels they can also work well remotely.

Nothing replaces face to face meetings or interactions. You can however do all you possibly can to ensure that the levels of communication are as high as possible

Be thoughtful of peoples cultural differences. Be aware of the way that they work and ensure that you are polite and that your contact is pertinent.

Always consider who you are sending your messages to, if emailing ensure that only the people who need to know are copied on the email. Nothing is more likely to get a negative response or diminish trust than an email copying all of the team members senior managers.

EMAIL

Benefits

- Can give detail
- Record of what decisions have been made (transpose to issue log)
- Can correspond in own time (regardless of time in other location)

Negatives

- Hard to get tone across
- One way conversation
- Lag in response

MICROSOFT OFFICE COMMUNICATOR (MSN OR EQUIVALENT)

Benefits

- Instant response
- Can correspond in real time and discuss more informally
- Easier to get emotions across than emails, gauge response and if needed readdress

Negatives

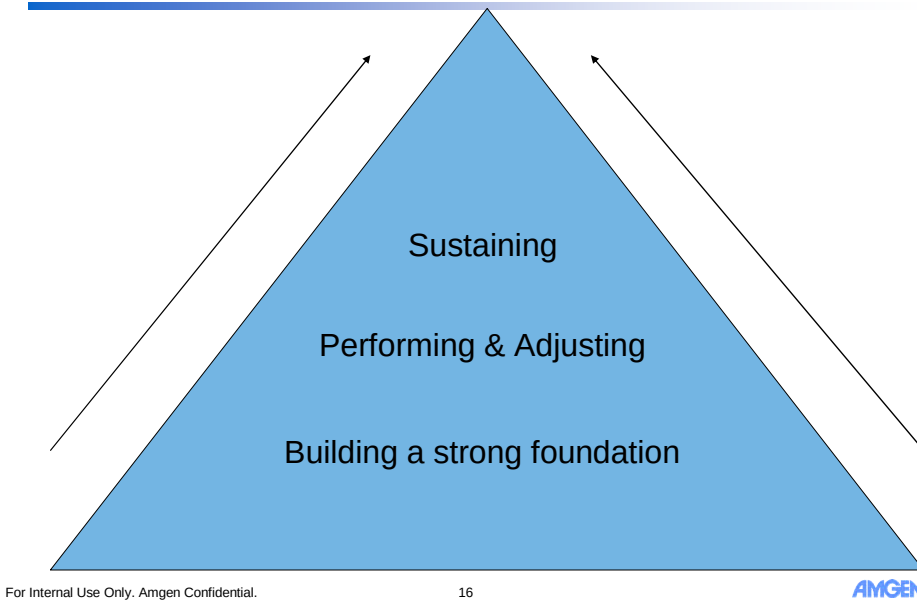
- Harder to give detail
- No log of communication

In conclusion nothing replaces face to face interactions. If you can't meet face to face pick up the phone

Use email to follow up meetings with details or discuss more intricate issues that need detailed examples

Use msn or equivalent as a more informal communication system where you want direct responses

The Journey to High Performance



A team doesn't become productive overnight, it is a journey and whenever someone new joins the team you have to start the process again. This also won't happen without considerable effort and leadership to ensure that the team as a whole buys into the goals and objectives of the team.

The method needs to evolve rather than coming from a preconceived plan as it will depend on a number of factors, the team members themselves, cultures, workload, complexity of the work and the teams abilities to name a few.

Through careful planning and monitoring you can form a flexible, close and productive team

CONCLUSION

In conclusion working in a global team requires flexibility, understanding and a sense of awareness. The leaders of globally dispersed teams need to ensure that clear and definable goals are set, that they have team buy in on these and that all suitable technology is made available to work and communicate effectively.

Wherever possible introduce one face to face meeting of all team members at the start of a study so that people can meet face to face and form clear roles, goals and ways of working can be decided up front. Where this is not possible ensure the meeting goes ahead via VC or TC and ensure that full buy in is still attained from all sites.

Global working is a flexible and beneficial approach when it is done correctly however teams will always need to consider exclusion, cultures, time zones, personality types and trust.

RECOMMENDED READING

Gary Hearfield - "Managing and Working Effectively in a Globally Dispersed Team"

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