Meta-Analysis of Virtual Teams

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ABSTRACT

Growth in technology has brought the world economy on a single platform which has deeply impacted the working pattern of organizations. It is the increase in usage of internet technology which facilitated the process of bringing individuals across the globe together and forming teams to help them achieve defined tasks. This change in corporate scenarios and shrinking of location barriers has led to the formation of special kinds of teams: virtual teams. The challenge before organizations is to effectively manage these teams because of their negligible physical contact. This research paper attempts to collect and analyze the literature available on the role played by trust in building an effective virtual team. A review of literature presented in the paper deals with the origin and working of virtual teams. This manuscript explores how trust has emerged as an important factor for the appropriate functioning of a virtual team and helps managers and employees in understanding the role of trust in the success of their team. The findings of the study are directed towards benefitting organizations who are involved in planning, developing, and administering programs for the smooth functioning of employees using a virtual paradigm to enhance employee productivity.

Keywords: Communication, Information Sharing, Issues in Virtual Teams, Trust, Virtual teams

INTRODUCTION

Gaining competitive advantage in a global virtual environment means continually reshaping the organization to maximize strengths and address threats. For organizations to be successful and competitive, a continuous development in its trends and mode of working is a necessity now. The use of virtual teams has become a common way of achieving success in market. It was reported that 137 million workers worldwide are involved in some form of remote electronic work (Solomon, 2001). These changes are the result of the dynamic and ever growing international market (Doucet, 2000). It is the result of developments in internet technology, computer science, electronics and communication that has radically transformed the business community along with their styles of working in and across the globe. To overcome the effects of this changing environment is the biggest challenge before organizations. Globalization has enhanced the need for companies to synchronize events that stride across the geographical boundaries, as shaping an organizational structure with its inter-organizational alliances has become a necessity (Townsend et al., 1998), leading to the need for formation of virtual teams. It is the virtual organizations and their respective teams which set trends for today’s world of business. In recent decades, corpora-
tions opted for virtual teams as a means of connecting and engaging geographically distributed individuals, lowering the costs associated with international association, and supporting greater range of flexibility.

Virtual teams have gathered significant consideration over the past decade from academicians and scholars in the fields of management and information systems. Before moving to the discussions pertaining to a virtual team, an individual must be aware of the definitions of a team. A team is described as “a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries” (Cohen and Bailey, 1997). Now considering virtual team, Lipnack and Stamps (1997) defined them as, “Teams that work across time and space as well as organizational and cultural boundaries with links strengthened by webs of communication technologies”. In a virtual team, people with different languages, backgrounds, geographic locations and cultures come together for the completion of a particular task. This task can be as per the needs, demands and requirements of organizations or the business associates of the same. Since virtual teams use modern technology to communicate, share and transfer knowledge, this gives the organizations cost benefits and space efficiency. Virtual team is the combination of people who possess diverse knowledge, skills and abilities. This variation amongst the members is both a boon and a bane for the team. Boon, because different people, varying ideas, diverse abilities and changed ways of working, lead towards the completion of predefined, specified goals. This boon turns to a bane when misunderstandings are created out of a difference of opinions which further turns to conflicts and trust deficit. A virtual team cannot afford trust deficit as trust is the only and important factor that binds the diverse people who had never seen each other. Trust is the basic ingredient for the effective creation and development of any new work team (Glacel, 1997; Awe, 1997; Senge et al., 1994). Many researchers have termed trust as a critical factor for the success of a virtual team in an organization

LITERATURE REVIEW

Virtual Teams

In a virtual environment, having collaboration in working across boundaries is a difficult task (Larsen & McInerney, 2000). In today’s global economy, virtual teams help organizations to become more responsive and adaptive towards the business environment. It is the result of the swift development in the field of electronic communication and information media, in the past times, virtual work has become a trend and is much easier, quicker and more effective (Hertel et al., 2005). Creating virtual work is beneficial, but the challenge lies in building trust and developing communication among its members as chances of face to face interaction among team members are very rare. Solomon (1995) concluded that basic fundamental practices for the success of global team is not very different from that of the traditional domestic team instead there are more variables involved, such as diverse cultural behavior and expectations on the roles of communication, team leadership and group dynamics. Davenport and Pearlson (1998) have characterized virtual work as “working from home, satellite offices or as ad hoc groups of professionals who team across the Internet around a common topic”. Frankie S. Jones (2008) A virtual team is an interdependent group of individuals who predominantly use technology to communicate, collaborate, share information and coordinate their efforts in order to accomplish a common work-related objective. Some define virtual teams as “groups of geographically and culturally dispersed co-workers using a combination of communication and information tech-
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