Chapter 9
Organizational Success and Failure Criteria in Virtual Team Maturity

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ABSTRACT

As global projects get more complex, virtual teams are established to bring together experts from different fields and cultures. Challenged by different work habits and communication patterns, these teams need fast and effective assessment of their teamwork to install efficient adjustments. In this chapter, the authors introduce an assessment for virtual teamwork based on the virtual team maturity model (VTMM®). The model focuses on internal team processes necessary to compensate for missing face-to-face communication. The VTMM® model defines meta-processes that help create a highly motivated virtual project team, leading to trust, cohesion, and consequently, an improved team performance. In a case study, the authors examine the effects of an VTMM® assessment and implementation of corresponding measures for improvement on virtual team performance. The outcomes are compared to the results of a recent survey on success and failure in virtual team maturity implementation, where project managers from different backgrounds and experience reported their practical observations.

INTRODUCTION

Virtual teams play a key role in business productivity as more and more activity is dispersed across geographically distributed teams (Lockwood, 2010; Leonard, 2011). Teams are established in organizations to achieve specific tasks which cannot be carried out by individuals alone. The tasks need to be

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completed within budget, meet stakeholder’s expectations and frequently have tough deadlines to meet (Chudoba et al, 2005; Philip et al., 2013; Ivanow & Cyr, 2014). Normally experts are located in many different spaces (Beyerlein et al., 2015). Business needs require these experts working together through computer-mediated communication. Organizations expect that these experts perform effectively and efficiently on virtual teams to achieve task completion as described above. Early research notes that virtual teamwork practices require different competencies and skills from team members (Wong & Burton, 2000; Curlee, 2008). Piccoli and Ives (2003) showed evidence that management principles successfully applied in co-located teams lead to negative results regarding trust in virtual teams and that leaders are facing a dilemma, when applying behavior control in virtual teams (Piccoli & Ives, 2003).

Usually such a project team is mainly focused on producing deliverables for stakeholders (Duarte & Snyder, 2006). With limitations on time and budget, there is not much room to evaluate internal processes and the different competencies and skills that are required from members of a virtual team. But having even a minor impact in the performance of a virtual team should have a major impact on productivity. As all these challenges cannot be captured in a single function and as the challenges address completely different elements and disciplines, Nemiro et al. (2008) suggests a process model as a promising approach to successful virtual team performance (Nemiro et al., 2008). Therefore, the Virtual Team Maturity Model (VTMM®) was developed to provide a reference model against which virtual teams can be assessed whereby gaps in the performance can be identified and closed.

Besides its thorough academically proven theoretical foundation the VTMM® was tested in a real work environment. A case study in 2015 proved the concept of VTMM® to be considered meaningful by the team leader and the team. The improvements brought positive results on the team performance (Friedrich, 2015).

In our recent survey of 2017, various project managers of virtual teams are questioned on their experience with virtual team maturity development. Their observations on factors determining success and failure of virtual team maturity implementation are compared to the concept of VTMM® and the findings of the case study implementing the VTMM® as a pilot. As a result, we will see how well the VTMM® provides a solution for incorporating factors of success into virtual teamwork. We will also see how well VTMM® addresses risks of failure in virtual team maturity implementation or deals with obstacles preventing success factors to be incorporated.

Finally, we will compare the critical success factors of the VTMM®, which are the inputs, methods and outputs of the processes, with the elements contributing to the factors of success and failure of virtual team maturity implementation. This will show us if the VTMM® is a representative model for virtual team maturity development.

VIRTUAL TEAM MATURITY MODEL TO IMPROVE VIRTUAL TEAM MATURITY

The VTMM® tool sets about to enhance the efficiency of virtual teams by assessing and improving performance across 11 different dimensions. The model focuses on internal project team processes, which are necessary to compensate for critical factors such as the lack of face-to-face interactions in virtual teams, challenges in imparting tacit communication, building trust, giving feedback, establishing work rules and offering rewards and recognition (Gibson & Cohen, 2003; Rosen et al., 2006; Olson et al., 2012).