Chapter V

Creating Positive Attitudes in Virtual Team Members

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ABSTRACT

Patterns of what is required to enhance a virtual team member’s satisfaction with their work and with being part of the team, their commitment to the team, and their motivation with the project were identified via case studies of six employee virtual teams. Positive patterns were found between two or more of these outcome attitudes and the following input variables: significance of the task, task autonomy, interpersonal skills, team potency, and team spirit. Managing these input variables well would be important for organizations with virtual teams, because doing so could positively affect the team members’ attitudes toward the work, leading to enhanced productivity and effective behavior. Implications for practitioners and researchers are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Groups and teams in organizations have been formally studied for over half a century, resulting in thousands of studies and a huge body of literature (Guzzo & Shea, 1992). Virtual teams, or teams with geographically distributed members,
have been growing in popularity over the last decade or so but have not yet been extensively studied. Although working in geographically distributed teams is becoming more widespread in organizations today, how to do it effectively is not yet fully understood. Typical team effectiveness models (e.g., Cohen, 1994 — see Figure 1) are based on colocated teams and usually assess two main groups of effectiveness outcome variables: performance outcomes, such as quality, productivity, and controlling costs; and attitudinal outcomes, such as satisfaction with the job, satisfaction with the team, motivation, and organizational commitment. The focus of this chapter is on the latter, examining the factors and processes that affect attitudinal outcome variables of virtual team members. Concentrating on attitudinal outcomes will add to our understanding of how to make virtual teams effective. To accomplish this, attitudinal outcomes in six case studies of existing virtual teams are examined.

This chapter is organized as follows. The research framework used to guide the case studies is presented in the second section. The following section discusses the methodology used in the case studies and describes the characteristics of the teams studied. Then, in the next section, the results of the analysis are presented. Finally, discussed in the last section are implications for practitioners and researchers, and suggestions for future research are provided.

**Figure 1:** Virtual team effectiveness model.

**Inputs**

**Group Task Design**
- variety of skill, identifiable
  objective, significance, autonomy,
feedback, interdependence

**Group Characteristics**
- a: Composition
  technical skills, interpersonal skills, size,
  stability, IS skills, degree of virtualness/isolation
- b: Group Beliefs
  norms, group efficacy
- c: Group Process
  coordination & caring, sharing of expertise,
  implementation of innovations

**Organizational Context that supports Employee Involvement**
- power, information, rewards,
  training, resources, IS resources

**Encouraging Supervisory Behaviours**
- self-observation, evaluation, goal-
  setting, criticism, expectation

**Outputs—Effectiveness**

**Team Performance Outcomes**
- quality, productivity,
  controlling costs

**Attitudinal Outcomes - with Quality of Work Life**
- satisfaction with job, team,
  social relationships, growth
  opportunities
- trust in management & team
- organizational commitment

**Withdrawal Behaviours Outcomes**
- absenteeism, turnover

**Source:** Adapted from Cohen (1994).
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