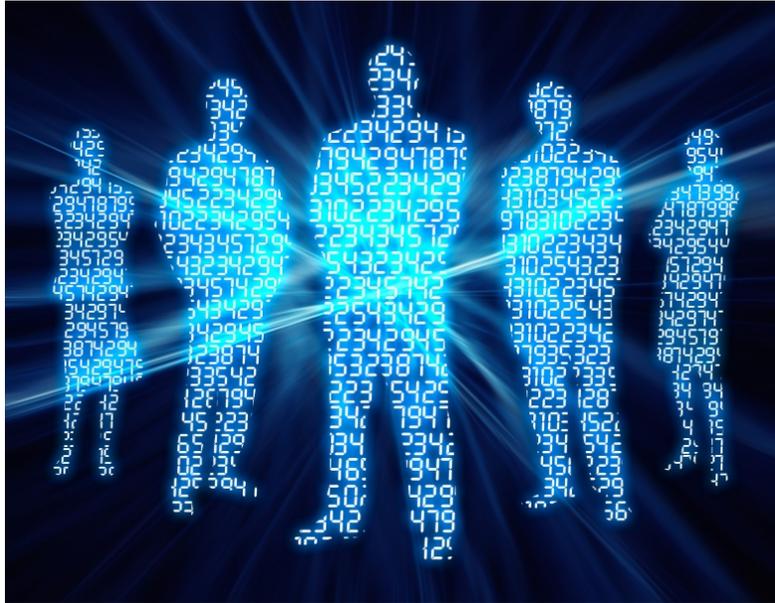# Building Trust in

Virtual Teams

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Introduction / Problem Statement

Virtual teams can consist of team members from all different departments, regions, or parts of the world. A virtual team can be defined as members, whether in the same building or across continents, who interact primarily through electronic communications (BusinessDictionary.com, 2010). The team members in virtual teams usually have to put forth more effort to make the team successful. These virtual teams need to create the same atmosphere as a team working in one remote area location.

Establishing trust among members of a virtual team is a prerequisite for being able to work as a team (IBM Corporation, 2004). Individuals can build trust in a number of ways, such as clearly communicating with each other, demonstrating commitment, meeting team expectations, and eliminating any problems before they become too big to handle (IBM Corporation, 2004).

With every interaction between individuals a sense of trust is formed. An organization does not have the capabilities to form trust between employees or individuals. Trust is built through shared experiences and interactions with one another. Organizations can put individuals on a team. With the formed bond encourages some sense of trust because those individuals are all working together to complete a common goal.

The more a person has at risk, the more the person needs to trust in those around them (IBM Corporation, 2004). And in today's world, people are asked to trust their careers to people they have never meet face-to-face (IBM Corporation, 2004).   When in a virtual team, there is minimal face-to-face interaction with team members. While it can be argued that trusting relationships are needed by all teams, trusting relationships are even more important to virtual teams because of a lack of face-to-face time (Geisler, 2002). There are ways to ensure trust is built in virtual teams, but each team member has to put forth effort to ensure the team is working at its full potential.

Virtual teams have many benefits in bringing together people of talent, providing international perspectives while saving money for companies (IBM Corporation, 2004). Unfortunately, the thought of a successful virtual team is much similar than the reality of it. A team cannot work as a team unless trust is established (IBM Corporation, 2004). So, how does a virtual team build trust when a person will never get a chance to look the other team members in the eye or shake their hands?

Possible Solutions

Virtual team members can build trust through a variety of ways. Each team member needs to know that each member of the team can be reliable; complete the intended tasks, stick to commitments, or get the job done the right way.

When virtual teams are initiated, many managers try to build team spirit by getting the team together and organizing a social event (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited,

2009). A tool that is used to host these social events is through video conferencing (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2009). Even though meeting in person has a greater impact on the team to build trust and respect, the virtual interaction still helps build positive team moral (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2009). The most important part is that the teams get to meet and learn about each other prior to working on a project or task.

Prior to working on a virtual group project or task, group members should get in contact with other group members. The first conversation is important because this is where qualifications are discussed, such as resume information or where to find a personal web page (IBM Corporation, 2004). In addition, a picture may be sent to group members to help them visualize who you are and help them know you (IBM Corporation, 2004). The credentials that you give to the team about yourself will help the team get to know one another without the face-to-face setting. The first conversations are important, but remember to continue to make an effort to grow as a team. Trust amongst team members tends to be lost quickly if effort is not put forth (Egea, 2006).

Communication is important when a person wants to gain trust with someone else. Conservations help build a sense of community and trust (Egea, 2006). Creating solid, reliable methods of communication is critical to the success of a virtual team (Mann, 2008). Some ways virtual teams can communicate effectively with one other is through phone, e-mail, video or phone meetings, in person, or a shared network (Mann, 2008). To get the full potential from these tools is by making sure to have an agreement with the team when or what tool should be used to communicate with the virtual team.

Another way virtual teams can communicate is by "creating a virtual water cooler opportunities for team members" (Mann, 2008, p2). A virtual water cooler will allow team members to get to know each other on a personal level, which will establish the face-to-face meetings individuals would get in an office setting (Mann, 2008). The virtual water cooler could be a discussion area for the team to go to express what is on their minds, fun facts about themselves, what is going on in the world, and so on and so forth. The more conserving between the virtual team the more trust and knowledge of one other will continue to grow.

Trust is formed when people show commitment to the team. When on a virtual team, there is not a person looking over your shoulder or bugging you so make sure you are dedicated to your work (IBM Corporation, 2004). Due to people not seeing you, make sure the virtual team members know how much time you are putting into the project or task (IBM Corporation, 2004). By keeping in contact with team members ensures they know what you are doing and you know what they are doing (IBM Corporation, 2004). A tool to help individuals keep in contact with one another is through a shared calendar that is visible to all team members (IBM Corporation, 2004). Otherwise, make yourself available through messaging tools in case a team member needs to get into contact with you when not available to view their calendar (IBM Corporation, 2004). The more ways the virtual team can get in contact with each other the better because you would not want a person to think you are not pulling your own weight.

In real life, things go wrong. Virtual teams can come across a number of setbacks. To ensure that the team is hit with the least amount of setbacks is through open discussions. Individuals can learn to trust one another through these open discussions because this shows that you are willing to tackle the situation immediately before the problem gets out of control (IBM Corporation, 2004). A way to build trust with group members is through double checking each other's work, work through constructive criticism, and follow up with the tasks at hand (IBM Corporation, 2004). Plus, if a person is unsure about an item call up other team members to get their input (IBM Corporation, 2004). By getting the team's input will show that you are willing to hear their side and you are showing you want to include all involved in the process (IBM Corporation, 2004).

With the combination of all of these items, remember that virtual teams are not only and always virtual. Trust can be gained through interactions in a face-to-face setting if and when possible (Mann, 2008). The virtual team should create regular opportunities to converse through telephone interactions as frequently as possible (Mann, 2008). Face-to-face interaction does not always apply to all virtual teams, due to certain circumstances or deadlines (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2009).

When in a blended team, members are in house and virtually, there are additional challenges (IBM Corporation, 2004). Trust can be harder to overcome due to the face-to-face setting and the virtual setting. In this situation, team members need to work especially hard to give equal respect to all team members (IBM Corporation, 2004). Some tools that the team can use to gain trust with one another is through instant messaging, bulletin boards, shared workflows, web-conferences, phone conferences, or phone calls (IBM Corporation, 2004).

When all participants in the virtual team figure out a way to stop judging or arguing and start coming to an understanding, then that is when the virtual team will start trusting one another. By having the trust built, the group will start seeing success and a forward movement for the group. With this bond formed, individuals will be able to make great strides into their projects. These projects will then be able to get accomplished in a timely fashion and accurate.

Recommendations

There are advances in communication technologies which have dramatically changed the nature of teamwork.   In the work environment, organizations have created a team based work structures. Individuals still have to be knowledgeable in their specified area, but have to understand how to use their expertise with a group of knowledgeable individuals. These groups that are formed within an organization will need to collaborate the knowledge, skills, and abilities of each individual to ensure the group is working to get the most out of their team development. Being able to collaborate everyone's opinions, knowledge, skills, abilities, or ideas the team need to trust one

another and be willing to be open minded. Trust is important when working to establishing a well rounded, successful team.

A way an organization or a team can create trust with individuals can occur through the process of communication. This seems like an easy procedure, but reality is it is not. Communication with team members will build trust.

Once trust is established within a virtual team, all the team's benefits can be realized (IBM Corporation, 2004). The team will run smoothly and those involved will have a positive attitude about working with a team (IBM Corporation, 2004). Most of all, the team will get the opportunity to be more productive, respond to more significant opportunities or problems, the group will grow and learn, and gain confidence in the virtual team which in turn will all create additional trust in the team.

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