Chapter 1
Virtual Teams:
Profiles of Successful Leaders

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ABSTRACT

As the use of virtual teams becomes increasingly more common in all types of organizations, those involved must have the knowledge to operate efficiently and collaboratively and communicate effectively, particularly the virtual team leaders. Virtual teams will not succeed without strong leadership. Many traditional leadership principles apply to virtual teams, but virtual team leaders have additional challenges. This chapter examines the role of virtual team leaders and determines what characteristics and behaviors are exemplified by those leaders, using an instrument developed by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) identifies five practices and behaviors of successful leaders. Additionally, embedded in the "Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" model are behaviors that serve as the basis for learning to lead, called "The Ten Commitments of Leadership."

INTRODUCTION

The modern world now lives and works in cyberspace. Geography, borders, and time zones are rapidly becoming irrelevant in the way today's business and people's personal lives are conducted. As the use of virtual teams becomes increasingly more common in organizations, those involved must have the knowledge to operate efficiently and collaboratively and communicate effectively, particularly the virtual team leaders. Virtual teams will not succeed without strong leadership. A new paradigm for leadership is emerging; the modern virtual environment is changing leadership roles. Many traditional leadership principles apply to virtual teams, but virtual team leaders have additional challenges. This chapter will examine the role of virtual team leaders and determine what characteristics and behaviors are exemplified by those leaders.

Problem Statement

As the use of virtual teams becomes more prevalent in both business and education, those involved must have the knowledge to operate efficiently and effectively, particularly the virtual team leaders. Virtual teams will not succeed without strong leadership. There are still some constants in good leadership regardless of the environment, but a new paradigm for leadership is emerging. The virtual environment, defined by Merriam-Webster (2015) as "existing or occurring on computers or on the Internet," is changing leadership roles. Just because a particular leadership style is effective in a face-to-face environment does not mean it will work in a virtual setting. Many traditional leadership principles apply to virtual teams, but virtual team leaders have additional challenges.

What characteristics are demonstrated by a virtual team leader? What behaviors contribute to the successful leadership of a virtual team? Do leaders in a traditional face-to-face environment demonstrate similar leadership traits in a virtual environment? These are questions that need to be answered as the use of virtual teams becomes more and more prevalent in the modern way of doing business.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this chapter is to examine if people identified as leaders in a traditional (face-to-face) environment and in a virtual environment (an online MBA) demonstrate leadership characteristics as originally developed by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner (1995, 2002, 2012) using their instrument, The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Based on their research, the "Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership" model was developed, which identifies five practices and behaviors of successful leaders: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. Kouzes and Posner also identify behaviors, the "Ten Commitments of Leadership," embedded in the five leadership practices that serve as the basis for learning to become an outstanding leader.

Research Questions

Specifically, this chapter answers the following research questions:

1. Are there similarities or differences in the leadership profiles of identified leaders based upon whether the interaction occurs in a traditional environment or a class-based virtual environment?
2. Are there similarities or differences in the leadership profiles of identified leaders based upon whether the interaction occurs in a traditional environment or a project-based virtual environment while performing a specific task?
3. Are the same people identified as team leaders regardless of the virtual environment (class-based or project-based)?
4. Do people identified as virtual team leaders (class-based or project-based) share any common leadership characteristics? If so, what are those characteristics?

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