Chapter II

Trust and the Trust Placement Process in Metateam Projects

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Abstract

Metateams are temporary organizations composed of two or more geographically and organizationally dispersed teams that are commercially linked by project-specific agreements. In a global business environment demanding innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness, metateams represent a major change in the way organizations and practitioners conduct IT development projects. However, as we found in a recently concluded theory-building study of a real-life metateam, managing metateams presents unique difficulties due to conflicting demands arising from multiple realities. Argued in this chapter is that the effectiveness of the trust placement process (rather than just the exhibition of high levels of trust) significantly affects project success.

Introduction

Teams, or groups working toward common goals, have always existed. From the hunting and gathering days to the information revolution era, humans have been collaborating with other humans to survive, to progress, or simply to achieve temporal objectives (Roberts, 1995; West, 2001). So, why are we talking about teams again? West (2001) argued that the novelty in modern teamwork resides in the complex organizational context in which team members are embedded. Teams are the product of the context from which they emerge and, simultaneously, they help in shaping the organizational environment, by producing actions on which evolution can be based (Bandura, 2001).

During the last decade, teams working on information technology (IT) development and implementation projects experienced significant transformations. Currently, many project teams' members are working in complex and often chaotic environments. Their organizations, pushed by the competitive race and regulators, want to implement new IT solutions at frantic speeds. Teams of mere humans, interacting in a composite commercial and political milieu seeded with conflict, are in charge of delivering the wanted systems. These teams must perform at their optimum levels while interacting across departments, organizations, distances, and cultural borders. This is the world of *metateams*, where entropy reigns, and barriers to success are many and not always understood.

IT outsourcing, shorter time-to-market cycles, scarce human resources, and availability of enabling collaborative technologies are some of the factors fueling the emergence of metateams in major IT projects. A metateam is a temporary system that can be described as a loose confederation of dislocated teams linked by interdependencies and commercial agreements (Fernandez & Underwood, 2001). Within this confederation, teams are members of a *virtual team of teams*, where key teams belong to different firms, each performing well-defined functions according to their contractual roles in the alliance.[1]

Metateams are potentially powerful work structures; they can build IT solutions of high complexity by integrating expertise from different fields and organizations. With the help of communication technologies, metateams can conquer barriers of time and space, collaborating across a nation or across the globe. However, managing metateams presents unique difficulties requiring continuous resolution of conflicting demands. Achieving effective metateam collaborations is critical and difficult. Metateams are particularly exposed to the lack of common understanding of prime objectives and deficient preproject arrangements observed in traditional IS project teams (Jiang, Klein, & Means, 2000); identity issues of autostereotyping (how groups perceive themselves) and heterostereotyping (how groups perceive other groups), arising from encounters

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