

Chapter XXX

Future Trends: Global Projects and Virtual Teaming

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ABSTRACT

The business world is running at a faster pace than ever before. Globalization has partnered the world and new ways of doing business to meet increasing demands are inevitable. Teams now have members dispersed around the globe, distanced by location and brought together by technology. Where these geographically dispersed teams work is known as a “virtual” world. The “virtual” team is different from the traditional team many are familiar with requiring that new skills be learned to be a successful member. This chapter will introduce the virtual team and discuss how it is different from traditional teams. The skills required of the leadership and members of a virtual team will be identified and detailed. The various types of virtual teams will be examined to determine how they are utilized in today’s business world.

PROJECTS TODAY AND FUTURE TRENDS

Globalization and Project Teams

The integration of the world’s people, markets, culture, economies, technology, politics, processes, resources, and services gives birth to “Global-

ization”. Even though the concept of merging international economies seems new, it has been in development for many centuries.

Worldwide trade and exploration had its beginnings in the 16th century as Portugal began what is known as the “Age of Discovery” in the mid 1400s. As those adventurous early explorers began to venture further and further beyond the

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known, they began the integration of the world's civilization and gave birth to globalization. It has only been in our lifetime, during the past 75 years or so, that the acceleration of globalization has touched everyone's life on a personal level making it seem a modern phenomena.

In examining how globalization has changed the world it can be safely said that it has influenced every facet of our lives. It has changed our economies; brought together the world's cultures, developed technology, improved health care, led to human rights, and influenced ecology.

This chapter studies the effect globalization has on projects and the project team. Just as it has an impact on our everyday lives, globalization has changed how we manage projects and the structure of the project team and how they interact. Globalization, integration, and multinational corporations all represent a major trend in the twenty-first century (Lientz & Rea, 1998). Teams have changed from the members being co-located organizationally and geographically to the team members being distributed organizationally and geographically (Kimball, 1997).

The way we interact with each other on a project and at the team level has been greatly influenced by today's technological advances. The geographically dispersed team needs a way to communicate and share information in real-time. Technology has provided the means to enable communication globally. The way we work is changing and just like the early explorers we are expanding our horizons and learning new ways to work with the future landscape that is being developed. As Smagg (2008), points out there is an "abundance of technology available today for collaboration including instant messaging, web conference, collaboration technologies, unified communications..." we still need to adjust to this new way of doing business. The roles have changed and the idea of the project team and members roles has changed.

As globalization fosters increased partnering relationships between our organization and those

outside such as partners customers, vendors, etc. becomes more complex and important. As technology allows immediate access to partners across the globe and the ability to share electronic project data files real time it brings us together and makes our lives easier, but it also further complicates things. The boundaries between organizations and countries disappear and new challenges arise; to be effective in today's business world the pressure is to be more productive. The virtual or geographically dispersed team has been born out of the need for teams from all over the world to work together.

Work began in the virtual world during the late 1980's when the distance education field began to use computers to connect students. As Pauleen points out, the "Current notion of the Virtual Team has been around since the mid 1900's: First addressed by the practitioner literature... research on virtual teams in organizations has only emerged in the last few years" (Pauleen, 2004).

First, let's define what a virtual team is. There are many definitions of virtual teams, but they all have one thing in common: the "Virtual team members are physically separated (by time and/or space) and the virtual team members primarily interact electronically." ("Virtual", 2008). The quest of business to gain new markets on a worldwide or global level has been the driving force behind the development of virtual teams. As Kimball (1997), points out "Although the technology that supports these new teams gets most of the attention when we talk about virtual teams, it's really the changes in the nature of the teams- not their use of technology – that creates new challenges for team managers and members." There are challenges faced by virtual teams that are usually not a factor in tradition teams, virtual team members usually have never met each other in person, they often live in different countries, are from different cultures, work for different organizations, and they usually do not share the same first language.

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