

Chapter 56

Effective Virtual Project Management Using Multiple E-Leadership Styles

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INTRODUCTION

The field of organizational behavior defines leadership as “the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals” (Capella, 2005, p. 294). Leadership styles have been well studied and researched. Early leadership studies were developed using traditional, co-located work arrangements in mind. Later studies expanded to include traditional project team environments. In the current business environment, however, nontraditional virtual work arrangements are becoming more popular. Virtual project teams are increasing in business today and will continue to become more common in the future (Martins, Gilson, & Maynard, 2004).

Managing nontraditional work involving virtual teams is becoming a necessity in the current business environment. The type of leadership e-

managers must demonstrate for successful virtual team management is different from traditional project team management (Konradt & Hoch, 2007). Understanding appropriate leadership styles for virtual project teams and the transition toward new leadership styles is an important part of managing human resources in organizations and successful virtual project management. Emerging e-leadership roles and management concepts for virtual teams include multiple leadership models, and their application is an important part of our evolving virtual organizational behavior.

This paper reviews management concepts for virtual teams that include leadership styles such as control-related models, transformational and transactional leadership styles, leadership that empowers team members to self-manage, and situational and contingency leadership styles. In the virtual project environment, the effective manager

needs to use as many different styles as needed to bring the project to a successful completion.

BACKGROUND

Introductory Definitions

Virtual teams reflect the ever-increasing non-traditional work environments of the 21st century, with members collaborating from geographically distant locations (Lee, 2009). Ariss, Nykodym and Cole-Laramore (2002) define virtual teams as a group of skilled individuals who “communicate via computer, phone, fax and video-conference” (p. 22). Virtual teams involve individuals who are geographically distributed and use technology to communicate and produce results (Duarte & Snyder, 1999).

The term e-leadership describes leadership in today’s nontraditional virtual business environment. The need for e-leadership in virtual project teams has become increasingly relevant as businesses move toward more non-traditional work. Virtual project teams are increasing in business today, and understanding e-leadership styles of virtual teams is an important part of e-business. E-leadership styles for virtual project team managers may be different from traditional project team managers, and how they might be different is still an emerging study. E-leadership styles is an expanding topic for developing the knowledge and practices necessary to determine the most effective leadership styles for virtual project managers.

Leadership Styles

Control-Related Leadership

Control-related leadership is defined as leading by tasks and includes motivating, providing role clarity, setting clear goals and priorities, and by giving good directions. Control-related leadership has

been linked to effective virtual team management. Konradt and Hoch (2007) examined leadership roles and showed that the task leadership function was “rated as significantly more important to virtual team effectiveness than people leadership function” (p. 25) and “that managers in virtual teams viewed control-related roles as more appropriate for virtual team success and performance than non-control-related roles” (p. 26). Similar goal-related concepts can be found in management by objectives (MBO) studies. Previous studies found that control-related leadership strategies were positively related to virtual team success (Hertel, Konradt, & Orlikowski, 2004). Control often has a negative connotation when linked to management behaviors, but leadership involves some degree of responsibility for influencing the behavior of workers (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2001, p. 17).

Transformational and Transactional Leadership Styles

Transformational and transactional leadership characteristics are common management styles for virtual teams. Transformational leaders are defined as leaders who inspire followers to work (Capella, 2005). Transactional leaders are defined as leaders who motivate followers to complete goals by clearly identifying roles and setting vision (Capella, 2005). In a study by Hambley, O’Neill and Kline (2007) to determine virtual team leadership behaviors, the results were divided into five major behaviors closely related to transactional leadership characteristics: (1) ability to provide role and expectation clarity and good communications, (2) working along with the team; (3) relationship building skills; (4) effective team meetings; and (5) strong project management. Many of the e-leadership behaviors identified in the Hambley, O’Neill and Kline study (2007) can be linked to the transformational and transactional leadership styles. They found that leaders setting goals for virtual teams reflected the transformational style

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