

Virtual Team – Organisation Assessment

The statements below allow an assessment of where an organisation may have problems with operating virtual teams. The statements are separated generally by the three parameters of people, process and technology. A number of the statements overlap, however, since there are many interrelated facets to operating in this fashion.

Italicised text provides a context for the statements since, in this new mode of operation, terms are not universally agreed.

An organisation reviewing its position on virtual teams should complete the boxes to the right of the statements.

	Statement	Applies		
		Yes	Partly	No
	<u>People</u>			
1.	We operate as virtual teams.			
2.	We never experience problems with virtual teams. Communication is always effective, team members know the objectives and their role, results are always achieved to plan, and members are rewarded appropriately. We have never had a complaint from a team member about difficulties of working this way, nor have we ever missed a target date. <i>Not the experience of organisations just starting to work in this way. If this were true then there is little left to be said.</i>			
3.	We recognise the new problems that virtual teams introduce. <i>Not collocated; cultural; maintaining focus on achievement,</i>			
4.	Some of our virtual teams are set up specifically to achieve a defined purpose. <i>Distinction between 'formally established teams and those that come together almost on an ad-hoc basis.</i>			
5.	Some of our virtual teams arise dynamically as business situations demand. <i>Both this and the above are common and viable. Both need to be managed. Both require purpose.</i>			
6.	We understand the characteristics of virtual teams. <i>Operate across time, space and the organisation.</i>			

Statement

Applies

		Yes	Partly	No
7.	Staff may be members of many teams, taking different roles in each. <i>Potential conflict of priorities. Requires a higher level of management and good communication of role and effort commitment needed.</i>			
8.	Staff may take different roles in different teams <i>As above.</i>			
9.	Teams may span different business functions and different countries. <i>The former is hardly unique to virtual teams, but the problems of diverse groups and wide-ranging locations can be addressed, with some chance of success, through recognising how to employ technology effectively.</i>			
10.	Teams can include external members, such as suppliers, contractors, even competitors. <i>Adds potential benefits, but also can create problems, particularly with technology.</i>			
11.	We understand the different types of virtual teams that can exist. <i>Networked, Parallel, Project/Product, Production, Service, Management, Action.</i>			
12.	All team members feel a part of the team. <i>Must feel 'included' even though physically distant.</i>			
13.	Everyone in the team is fully aware of, and committed to, the objective. <i>Requires 'buy-in' and effective processes.</i>			
14.	All team members maintain a real focus on achievement. <i>Can be difficult to maintain enthusiasm when remote from colleagues; feelings of not being 'where the action is' if communication not maintained effectively.</i>			
<u>Process</u>				
15.	We recognise the critical success factors for operating in virtual teams. <i>HR policies / training and development / standard organisational and team processes / electronic communication and collaboration technology / organisational culture / leadership support / competence.</i>			

Statement

Applies

		Yes	Partly	No
16.	We have a well-defined process for establishing a virtual team. <i>Identification of sponsors/stakeholders/champions; team charter; selection of members; contacting team members; team-orientation session; developing team process.</i>			
17.	All our virtual teams have a sponsor. <i>Essential.</i>			
18.	All our virtual teams have a well-defined objective. <i>Like any team, and even more so for virtual teams, there must be agreed objectives that everyone understands.</i>			
19.	Every one of our teams has a defined leader. <i>Like any team, there must be a leader, even if leadership changes depending on the tasks in hand. In a virtual team leadership is even more essential as the driver toward the goal.</i>			
20.	Virtual team leaders pay due attention to the first contact they have with team members. <i>Obvious but even more necessary if physically apart.</i>			
21.	We spend time at the stage that a team is being formed to ensure that objectives, goals and roles are clearly established and communicated. <i>'Invest in beginnings'; reduces later problems.</i>			
22.	Team objectives are developed collaboratively to gain 'buy-in' and commitment. <i>Not unique to virtual teams but more difficult to build consensus when remote. Processes are in place for defining team objectives.</i>			
23.	We spend time at the stage that a team is being formed to ensure that the team's methods of working (their processes) are clearly established. <i>For on-going team communication, and for planning and control.</i>			
24.	Every team member is made fully aware of the processes that the team defines for operating remotely. <i>Non-compliance creates unnecessary problems.</i>			
25.	Every team member applies the processes that the team defines for operating remotely. <i>Non-compliance creates unnecessary problems.</i>			

Statement

Applies

		Yes	Partly	No
26.	All virtual teams commence work with an orientation session. <i>Ideally face-to-face if at all possible. Audio or video conference as second choice.</i>			
27.	All team members are aware, and work to, the norms set for the team. <i>Etiquette for virtual meetings; response times in responding to e-mail; approval procedures</i>			
28.	All team members are fully informed of their role and responsibility.			
29.	All team members are fully informed of the roles and responsibilities of other team members. <i>Provides a context for team member's individual efforts and stops unwitting and unnecessary cross-over.</i>			
30.	Teams develop a media plan to show how and when and through what medium they will maintain communication. <i>Communication medium / type / one- or two-way interaction / frequency of use / location.</i>			
31.	We have recognised and responded to the cultural differences between team members, be they from different business functions and/or of different nationalities. <i>Understanding that different cultures, both business and national, work in different ways, and finding means to accommodate this whilst still achieving the goal.</i>			
32.	The time differences between team members do not cause us a problem <i>Ways have been found to overcome time zone problems.</i>			
33.	We have recognised that we need to adjust the reward system for members of virtual teams. <i>Difficulties arising from far-flung team members not receiving credit for their efforts.</i>			
34.	We recognise that teams require to bond so we encourage face-to-face meetings as a part of the team-building process. <i>Virtual teams do meet face-to-face at kick off and usually on completion. Need for human contact, building relationships, seeing the real person.</i>			
35.	We have adjusted our planning and control process so that remote team members work to milestones rather than to the detailed task level. <i>Reduction in burden of micro-managing which can be exacerbated by operating virtually.</i>			

Statement

Applies

		Yes	Partly	No
36.	We allow team members to achieve milestones through whatever tasks they think are appropriate as long as they hit targets. <i>Empowerment of team members.</i>			
37.	We manage the potentially conflicting aspects of co-ordination and collaboration against autonomy by asking team members to complete regular self assessments. <i>Virtual teams can suffer from poor co-ordination and collaboration, particularly if communication is difficult, and there is often a need for a remote member to instigate autonomous action, sometimes actions that would be taken by a collocated team leader.</i>			
38.	When creating a virtual team we take account of the nature of the task when considering team composition, the processes, and the tools to be used. <i>Is the goal driving the task cooperative or competitive in nature? Should the team be one or many strong? Is this a generating, choosing, negotiating or executing task? (Can have significant impact on the selection of appropriate tools.)</i>			
39.	When we run meetings of a virtual team, due care is given to the selection of participants. <i>Arguably not unique to virtual teams, but has the complexity of communication medium and the need to keep participant involvement Also may require different technologies for different agenda items.</i>			
40.	When we run meetings of a virtual team, due care is given to the development of the agenda. <i>Relevancy, timings, involvement needed of some or all members, ... all complicated by working remotely.</i>			
41.	When we run meetings of a virtual team, due care is given to the meeting logistics. <i>As above points.</i>			
42.	When we run meetings of a virtual team, due consideration is given the possible use of a facilitator. <i>As above points.</i>			
43.	When we run meetings of a virtual team, due care is given to selection of the technology to be employed. <i>As above points.</i>			
44.	We run 'lessons learned' meetings both on completion of a team's goal and after the production of significant deliverables. <i>Allows for improving processes, re-establishing norms, etc., and benefits other teams.</i>			

Statement

Applies

Yes	Partly	No
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Technology

- 45. We recognise that technology is key to virtual team working.
- 46. We employ a range of communication media.
Face-to-face, e-mail, voice and audio conferencing, etc.
- 47. We recognise that the technology employed must reflect the needs for both information richness and social presence.
Information without context can be misleading; some interactions can only be achieved successfully through a medium with high social presence.
- 48. We are aware of the pros and cons of using the various forms of communication media.
Media palette, noting the communication media that are available to teams and the types of communication to which they are most suited.
- 49. We have an appropriate technical infrastructure in place to support virtual team operations.
Synchronous facilities (such as video conferencing) and asynchronous (such as e-mail).
- 50. The technical infrastructure is adequate to support virtual team operations.
In many virtual team operations there can be inadequate technology in some 'outlying' parts of the business.
- 51. Everyone is trained and competent in their use of the technology we have in place.
Working remotely is made even more difficult if members are unused to the communications technology.
- 52. Full technical support is available to all team members.
Local support essential to maintain continuity of communication.
- 53. We are always able to select the appropriate medium for communicating amongst team members.
Recognition of the nature of the task and thus selection of the best medium to achieve it. For example, e-mail can be good for generating lots of ideas about plans, but it is completely inappropriate for resolving interpersonal conflicts.
- 54. All members of a virtual team share a common scheduling system.
Access to a scheduling package that allows team members to see how and where their tasks fit.

Statement

Applies

		Yes	Partly	No
55.	We recognise that some interactions and discussions require permanent recording. <i>Examples are shared databases and even e-mails; compared to voice messages, say.</i>			
56.	Where permanent recording of interactions is necessary we employ appropriate technology to achieve this. <i>Technology in place, use understood, processes defined for its use, available to team members to access as appropriate.</i>			
57.	Since we are not operating face-to-face, we have set up a 'virtual place' for the team. <i>A web site, groupware database, or similar.</i>			
58.	We have a team intranet site. <i>One per virtual team; specific for the team's members; can contain personal as well as project information.</i>			
59.	We are using a groupware application. <i>Such as Lotus Notes; provides alternative to intranet site.</i>			
60.	Where a team includes staff from external organisations we have experienced no technological problems.			
61.	External organisations employ complementary technology.			