

A STUDY ON CROSS BORDER COLLABORATION IN ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH VIRTUAL MEANS

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ABSTRACT

Business and trade have moved beyond national boundaries in the recent times. There are many companies all over the globe, which conduct their operations at international level. People from different corners of the world collaborate in order to get the work done. Here is when virtual managing comes into the limelight. When employees and team members are dispersed geographically and usually communicate via video conferencing or any other technology, their collaboration and coordination plays a pivotal role. These overseas teams have to not only manage diversely located employees but also different languages, time zones, cultures, ideologies, situations and many more other internal and external factors while working together.

Managing these teams has become a new trend and challenge in the corporate world in modern times. Even the leaders who manage these teams have been given a new identity called e-leaders. And these e-leaders are proving effective in managing the virtual business, and enhancing organizational performances. The present study focuses on some of the aspects of infusing collaboration among these overseas teams and also study the challenges faced by the e-leaders while working with teams worldwide. Along with these it will also focus on the type of communication systems used for collaborating the work. Lastly, the factors which will contribute to the success of these teams are also enunciated.

Key Words: *Cross-border, Collaboration, Virtual, communication, team.*

INTRODUCTION

Business operations with the use of electronic communication and technological-support have penetrated in various markets of the world. Along with this, these have also changed the concept of business and trade. Many new dimensions have been added with further scope of expansion, with the aid of virtual technology; bringing dispersed personnel along with managerial know-how together. The main crux of cross border collaboration is the use of internet, intranet or other technological means to communicate and manage personnel between different

geographical boundaries, and time zones. The main element of collaboration and cooperation plays a pivotal role for these teams and play a very tectonic role in managing the business operations worldwide. The main reason for handling overseas teams is the companies taking up geographically dispersed projects with the motive of making profit. Communication is the common thread which integrates all the elements and members of these teams.

The other reason for the evolving of the transoceanic teams is the increasing globalization. This has further lead to the increment in the complexity of jobs and dynamicity of the markets; eventually making it mandatory for the companies to go for a dispersed and diversified approach. Thus, companies are now working with geographically dispersed cross-border employees and managing operations spread across the globe.

JUSTIFICATION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The role of technology in integrating cross-border operations has been in limelight since past few years. But, there are many challenges which are faced by the manager, when it comes to collaborating with diverse teams. These challenges when analyzed, and though on; would help in bringing about more effective ways to identify and rectify the lacunas associated with the same. Therefore, the researchers have undertaken the study to focus on the following objectives:

- To study the significance of virtual technology in cross-border organizational collaboration.
- Challenges faced by the e-leaders in managing overseas teams.
- Factors contributing to the efficient management of these cross-border organizations.

METHODOLOGY

The study is mainly based on secondary source of data. The data has been collected from sources like research articles, research papers, Journals, press release, and other e-sources.

CHARACTERISTICS OF OVERSEAS TEAMS

Transoceanic teams have some aspects related to them, which differentiates them from other teams, the characteristics are as follows:

- These are geographically dispersed among different time zones.
- These teams are driven by a common purpose.
- Usually the size of teams is small.
- The main element of integration among the team members is technological communication.

- These teams are usually involved in cross boundary collaboration.
- In many cases the team is not of permanent nature.
- Team members are knowledge workers, who share knowledge from different sectors of the world.
- The team membership has a flexible aspect; the positions keep on shifting according to the situation and conditions.
- Most of the members are associated with multiple virtual teams.
- These teams form and reform on regular basis, adjusting as per the diversity nature of the market and cultural differences of the place.
- The teams also have multiple levels reporting system; the teams have to function at various levels of the organization.

LEVELS OF COLLABORATION

The level of collaboration also plays a major role in management of these teams as a whole. The level of collaboration covers various aspects in its periphery i.e. nature of efforts, process and tasks, team productivity and applications used to communicate. Below is the overview of the various levels of collaboration identified among these groups of personnel.

LEVELS	NATURE OF EFFORTS	TEAM PRODUCTIVITY	PROCESS/TASKS	APPLICATION
COMMUNICATIVE	Dialog and common understanding, information sharing	Minimal	Informal or semi-formal communication, unstructured chaotic.	Email, chat, news groups, computer mediated communication
COLLECTIVE	Individual separate tasks	Sum of individual performance	Minimal Integration	Word Processing, Spread sheets, Graphics
COOPERATIVE	Group-based, uncoordinated	Sum of individual performance	Ad hoc, separate tasks towards common goals	Net meetings, application sharing
COORDINATED	Sequential team precedential	Sum of sequential individual performance	Chronological, sep-by-step, work-flow oriented	Work-flow
CONCERTED	Mutual communal	Sum of individual and ad hoc team and coordinated team performance	Synchronized, flexible, repeatable, customized	

The virtual team leaders are often referred to as E-Leaders since, they have to manage the team through internet and technology and not just face-to-face communication. These leaders need to have technical, leadership, and communication skills in order to do their job effectively. Also, these leaders have three main functions to perform- team liaison, team direction setter and team's operational coordinator. They further need to ensure that all the activities and events are scrutinized on time among all the teams and team members, they also need to define clear cut goals for the team members and if the leader manages more than one virtual team then he/he must determine clear goals for all the teams separately, and need to ensure that the team members have all the required resources for accomplishing team tasks at their end.

CHALLENGES FACED BY E-LEADERS

Following are the challenges faced by these e-leaders while collaborating the teams:

- Electronic and collaborative technological access- the team members from all corners of the world need access to communication and collaboration technologies. This comes with the expenses to be incurred and also the internet access which is sometimes difficult to be found in remote areas.
- Organizational Culture- recognition leads to promoting the culture of virtual teams and also is a way to motivate the team members to perform with more efficiency. Also it will motivate others to join the virtual team and contribute to the overall organizational goal.
- Virtual Teams issues and E-leader- when dealing with cross-cultural virtual team issues, the management must take care that, if the issues are not resolve on time, they may percolate in the other teams as well; and here is when the need of effective and skilled e-leader comes into the picture. The e-leader should have all the required qualities to manage teams working in different locations, time zones, and cultures and yet working for the same organizational goal.
- Building Trust- Building Trust is one of the most difficult challenges faced by the E-leaders while managing a team. The leaders should try to create opportunities in order to develop the trust. One of the ways to create trust is to foster cultural understandings.
- Cultural Diversities- since the members of the virtual team belong to different cultures and thus have different perceptions and views regarding various things. The cultural diversity can pose a great challenge when managing a team. And therefore, the E-leader should try to minimize these cultural differences and should take these into consideration while taking decisions for the team as a whole.

COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

With the high intensity of diversity, long distance and different time zones factor; the use of software tools becomes necessary in order to manage and consolidate the members of a virtual team. Many a times the integration has to be done not only in one single team, but between more than one virtual teams. And here is when the system software becomes the catalyst of amalgamation. Due to the same reason the software are seldom called Groupware also. Following are the various soft wares’ used, for collaborating cross-border teams:

- SAME TIME-SAME PLACE & SAME TIME-DIFFERENT PLACE- these soft wares’ are called synchronous groupware support system, because they are used for live inter-project collaboration and synchronization of the work.
- DIFFERENT TIME-SAME PLACE & DIFFERENT TIME-DIFFERENT PLACE- these soft wares’ are also called as asynchronous groupware support system, since they are used for independent team member engagement on the project.

SAME TIME	DIFFERENT TIME	
Synchronous	Asynchronous	
Voting, presentation support	Shared computers, documents and messages	SAME PLACE Co-located
Chat, videophone, telephone	e-mail, workflow shared data-stores	DIFFERENT PLACE Distance

- GROUP SUPPORT SYSTEM/GROUP DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM- it acts as a communication backed by technology driven environment, which help to collaborate the work among geographically dispersed team members. This software provides the team members with wide range of applications, which tend to eliminate the travelling costs and minimize the information sharing costs also. This software helps in the decision making activity also at various levels in the virtual team.
- CHAT AND MEETING TOOLS- this software allow the team members to communicate with each other in real-time using various means like- typing, voice and video aids. The pre-requisites for this mode of communication are appropriate application installed at all ends, headset, microphone, video camera and

other programs to support the overall process. Some common tools used are as follows: G talk, Skype and many more have been added to this list in recent years. Moreover some basic web-based programs are also required like Microsoft office live meeting, Adobe Breeze, HP Virtual Meeting rooms etc.

- INFORMATION SHARING TOOLS- the main backbone of team work is the right information shared at the right time and the right place with the right person. The information sharing tools are calendar, file galleries, forums, bulletin boards, content management and work flow management.
- WIKIS-these are the collaborative websites which allow the users to edit information. All the activities are done in real-time using the browser.

FACTORS FOSTERING COLLABORATION IN CROSS-BORDER ORGANIZATIONS

Following are the factors which lead to efficient working and success of these teams, and thus fostering collaboration in organizations working at global level:

- The goals so set, must be achievable and clear in terms to the team members.
- The organization should make it sure; that the team members get a chance to meet each other in person at least once; for increasing the understanding levels of their communication.
- The company should also follow a set code of practices for conducting the meetings.
- The members should be provided a sense of ownership of the project as a whole.
- The right kind of members, with the right skills should be added to the team.
- The E-leaders need to provide proper feedback to the team members in order to clarify the confusions if any. And also make the team goals and the organizational objective crystal clear to them.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

The study was done in order to gain more insight about the cross border collaboration among the organizational members, with special reference to communication efficiency. The cross-border team which are also know as distributive teams have gain more importance in the recent times, with the companies now doing business at the global level. These teams have communication as the common thread which collaborates and integrates the various elements of these. The team members are characterized to be knowledge workers, who work towards cumulating their knowledge from the various sectors in order to get things work. These teams also have a harder side which makes it complex in managing them; the difficulty in determining the technological fit, the management of conflicts, the complex communication mediums and also the required training and development to be provided when going overseas, which may incur huge expenses for the company. Coming on to the software tools used for the better

management of the companies there are mainly 4 types of tools used, which are the combination of the following four variables: same time, same place, different time, different place. And also there are group support systems, chat and meeting tools, information sharing tools and wikis. The collaboration in these teams is exercised at various levels, and at each level there are different applications used to manage the collaboration; the levels are as follow: communicative level, collective level, cooperative level, coordinated level, concentrated level. E-Leaders are the one who manage the teams, and face various challenges in the course of the same.

The researchers suggest the following for the successful functioning of the teams, which include: proper feedback from the e-leader, common understanding between the team members and the e-leader, an efficient communication system, clearness in operational goal and a harmonious relation between the team members and the team leader. Having discussed about the structure, challenges, levels of collaboration and required factors; virtual means are the future of the corporate world, and will play a major role in the overseas collaboration for overall economic growth.

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