

# Virtual teams research paper example

[Business](#), [Company](#)



Different authors have come up with different definitions for the word virtual teams. However, the key concept of having collaboration even if physically dispersed through the use of information technologies is present in all definitions. Mortensen et. al. defined virtual teams as “interdependent individuals physically separated from one another and relying on information technologies to communicate, collaborate, and coordinate work to achieve a common goal” (2009). Another term used to refer to virtual teams is geographically dispersed teams (GDT). Based on the term used to refer to them itself, it can be gleaned that these teams are not physically together, but are able to work together through the use of the numerous communication technologies available in the market today. (Keogh, 2010)

Virtual teams have been very popular among business organizations in the 20th century. This is mainly because of the rapid technological advances occurring. Virtual teams give organizations great advantage since they are now able to hire the best people around the world without thinking of their locations. By saying working in virtual teams, this does not necessarily mean that members of the teams are all working from their homes but rather, they can be employees of a group of employees across several branches of an office. For example, a virtual team for a Coca-Cola company could be a team composed of one member from USA, one member from Europe or from several other countries. Oftentimes, these team members do not physically know each other and are only able to get acquainted with each other through the use of IT technologies like email, Skype and other collaboration tools. These teams do not necessarily work at the same time but rather, deadlines are there to beat so they can work anytime at their

convenience as long as they were able to meet the deadlines.

Another common example of a virtual team is having a team of virtual assistants. A US company could outsource online employees across the globe. This team of virtual assistants would have one team leader that is responsible for distributing tasks for a common goal. It would now be up to each team member on what time they do the task as long as their part of the goal is turned in time. Collaboration or communication among this team is made through the use of different technologies available.

Today, there are no limits as to who can use virtual teams. With the rapidly changing environment and the increasing costs to hire people and move them to physically to where they are needed, firms need to adapt changes in their management to cope. Aside from being able to communicate, current technologies have enabled the sending of documents in seconds or other real-time data from one location to another where the data is needed. With virtual teams, companies are being able to work on a project 24/7 increasing its productivity since the team members working on projects come from different parts of the world. When half of the team is sleeping the other half is working and vice-versa. This makes it flexible which is beneficial for both the company and its customers. (Laxa, 2011)

### **Advantages and Disadvantage of Virtual Teams**

The main characteristics of swift virtual teams are their flexibility and the lack of infrastructure needs. Team members do not need to work on the same time. There is output oriented and researches have proven that “working” virtual teams have been more productive. According to Ebrahim et. al. the following are the advantages of virtual teaming: reduce relocation

time and costs (including travel costs), reduce time-to-market costs, being able to tap the best talent irregardless of location, increase productivity in a shorter span of time, higher autonomy for the teams and the capability to construct teams without taking into consideration their distance with one another, companies being able to respond more quickly to the environmental changes enabling them to respond faster to increasing market competition, ability to share knowledge and experiences with other team members which could lead to having a team that could produce better outcome and because they work well with others, a higher chance for employees to make self-assessment on their performance and ultimately, making them more responsible employees, and being able to increase and cultivate the creativity of each team member. (2009) In summary, the main benefits of virtual teams to a company are increasing productivity, extension of market opportunity, knowledge transfer, and lower overhead costs. (Laxa, 2011)

However, even with all of these advantages of virtual teams, there are also disadvantages of creating virtual teams. Some disadvantages includes the lack of physical interaction among employees, management challenges resulting from the cultural diversity and distance between each team member especially when it comes to the development of trust among each member. Team members also need a lot on special training and encouragement especially in terms of establishment of constant communication between each team member. Another disadvantages is the challenge of looking for the right technology to be used which would not fail the team especially communication since communication is very important for them (Ebrahim et. al, 2009).

## **Technologies used in virtual teams**

A fruitful virtual team comes with good IT technologies. With the increase number of virtual teams with increasing needs, the number of group collaboration also increases and are becoming more sophisticated. It is important for a team to choose the right collaboration tools fit for their needs rather than just shifting from one tool to another or shifting to the latest tool even if the features of the new tool are not needed by the team.

Group collaboration tools for the virtual team usually provide both synchronous and asynchronous transactions. Synchronous transactions have the capability for video conferencing, real time chat, whiteboard and other services. Examples of collaboration tools offering such services are Google Docs, Jing Project, Skype, Dropbox, Basecamp and Mantis. On the other hand, asynchronous interactions include newsgroups, calendars, mailing lists and collaborative writing systems. Some services offer both synchronous and asynchronous services (Ebrahim et. al, 2009).

In addition to these features, some tools are design to support other work processes like decision support systems. These help a lot in the improvement of the work processes and problem solving mechanisms of the team (Mealer, 2010)

## **Creating successful virtual teams**

The management of virtual teams is very different from managing onsite teams. Several managers consider them more challenging to lead. Although virtual teams post several benefits for both the employee and the management, there are still lots of challenges facing management and team

leaders. Employees are free to work on locations where they are comfortable and at times convenient to them as long as required outputs are delivered on time. This saves on costs of travel and clothing for the employee and office space for the management. The office becomes a virtual office as well as data repositories. Data is accessible to everyone who needs and authorized to access them.

One problem facing management when it comes to management of virtual teams is related to the commitment of the members to the project. Because, they do not physically meet, there is a danger that each team member will not show commitment in their work. To solve this, management and team members must find ways to ensure that they have a sense of ownership of the project. They must also be responsible and reliable team members as well as participative in virtual meetings. In all of these, proper communication is key. The team must set rules on communication protocols as well as conflict management since it would not be avoided that conflicts between management and the team and between each members occur. Developing trust between team members is also difficult to achieve in this kind of setup.

Aside from establishing proper communication, communities must be built among the members of the team. Developing trust between team members is also difficult to achieve in this kind of setup. Leaders must model the behavior expected from each team member. Purpose must be established. This means that there must be a common goal and objectives shared among each team member in order to come out successful in a project. There must also be collaboration and coordination across boundaries. Leaders especially

must show gratitude for small details achieved by each team member and not only notice their mistakes. (Thompson, 2012)

Building effective virtual teams is challenging but there have been several successful virtual teams which can be modeled upon.

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