

THE VIRTUAL TEAM

Introduction

A virtual team is a team where the primary method of interaction is done through electronic mediums. When it comes to the medium, it could range from e-mail communications to video conferencing.

Some virtual teams do not interact face-to-face *whenteammembersresideindifferentdemographics* and some virtual teams physically meet up occasionally.

Think of an online business for web development. Someone can start such a business and hire developers, QA engineers, UI engineers and project managers from different parts of the globe.

Since web development does not involve in physical delivery of goods and all the deliveries are done electronically, such a company can exist on the Internet.

Team meetings can be held through conference voice calls or video calls. This virtual team can work towards their company goals and act as a single entity just by telecommuting.

Why Virtual Teams?

There are many reasons for having a virtual team. First of all, it is the technology.

The Internet and related technologies helped enhancing the communication across the globe, where certain industries that do not require the person to be present in physical sense could make much use of it. A good example is a web development team.

Following are some of the top reasons for having virtual teams:

- Team members are not located in the same demography.
- The transportation cost and time is quite an overhead.
- Team members may work in different times.
- The company does not require a physical office, so the logistics and related costs are minimum.
- The type of work done may require high level of creativity, so the employees will have better creativity when they work from a place they are comfortable with *home*.

Types of Virtual Teams

There are many types of virtual teams operating at present. Following are a few of those teams:

- Entire companies that operate virtually
- Tasks teams, responsible of carrying out a specific task
- Friendship teams such as groups in Facebook or any other social network
- Command teams, such as a sales team of a company distributed throughout the US
- Interest teams where the members share a common interest

The Technology

The technology plays a vital role for virtual teams. Without the use of advanced technology, virtual teams cannot be effective.

The Internet is the primary technology used by the virtual teams. The Internet offers many facilities for the virtual teams. Some of them are:

- E-mail
- VoIP *VoiceOverIP* - voice conferencing
- Video conferencing
- Groupware software programs such as Google Docs where teams can work collaboratively.
- Software for conducting demonstrations and trainings such as Microsoft Live Meeting and WebEx.

When it comes to the technology, not only the software matters, the virtual teams should be equipped with necessary hardware as well.

As an example, for a video conference, the team members should be equipped with a web camera and a microphone.

Advantages and Disadvantages

First of all, let's look at the advantages of operating as a virtual team.

- Team members can work from anywhere and any time of the day. They can choose the place they work based on the mood and the comfort.
- You can recruit people for their skills and suitability to the job. The location does not matter.
- There is no time and money wasted for commuting and clothing.
- Physical handicaps are not an issue.
- The company does not have to have a physical office maintained. This reduces a lot of costs to the company. By saving this money, the company can better compensate the employees.

Along with the above-mentioned advantages, following are few disadvantages of using virtual team:

- Since team members do not frequently meet or do not meet at all, the teamwork spirit may not be present.
- Some people prefer to be in a physical office when working. These people will be less productive in virtual environments.
- To work for virtual teams, individuals need to have a lot of self-discipline. If the individual is not disciplined, he or she may be less productive.

Conclusion

Virtual teams are rising in numbers nowadays. Small technology companies are now adapting virtual team practice for recruiting the best people from all over the globe.

In addition, these companies minimize their operating costs and maximize the profit margins. Additionally, the employees working in virtual teams are at advantages when it comes to working in their own home, own time, and reduction of commuting costs.

Therefore, organizations should look into setting up virtual teams for different tasks whenever possible.

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