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When Virtual Teams Outperform In-Office Groups

How to Manage Virtual Teams

Source: Pixabay: rawpixel 2459 image

Virtual teams CAN'T be more effective than in-person teams!

When teams are working within the same office space, it is common to improve group performance with emotional bonding events. Examples:

Going out to the local tavern after work

Ordering pizza in and not discussing business issues during the meal.

These emotional bonding events facilitate the transformation of colleagues into chums.

A "chum" is a work colleague where there is also a positive emotional bond. Chums are not the same as friends. Chumship is defined as the art of transforming colleagues or customers or prospective clients into chums.

The best professional service "Rainmakers" are chumship masters (Stybel Peabody, 2005).

Virtual Team Chumship?

What about emotional bonding when physical contact is absent?

Northeastern University student Ghida El-Solh (2018) found a great article from *Entrepreneur Magazine* titled, "This Company Hosts Virtual Dance Parties to Help Its 170 Remote Employees Feel Connected. "

A company named Zapier employs 170 workers in 15 countries. The company created a "Remote Dance Party". Zapier workers around the world would send a five-second video of themselves dancing to the same popular song. The company then splices the individual videos to create one video dance number where everybody is together on video and having fun.

Does it Work?

Can a simple mechanism like a virtual dance party help create emotional bonding between people who lack physical contact? Ms. El-Solh examined Zapier's Glassdoor's employee evaluations.

> The website shows an employee rating of 4.8 out of a possible 5. One hundred percent of the reviewers approve of the Zapier's CEO. One reviewer also said that "100% Remote team helps make a great team and culture."

When Virtual Teams Outperform Teams In-Office Teams.

Frank Siebdrat and his colleagues studied the performance of 80 software development teams employing 392 professionals either in virtual teams or in-office teams (2009). The authors concluded that virtual teams CAN outperform in-office teams:

> "When virtual teams are geographically dispersed, members tend to bring higher levels of professional and cultural diversity. The diversification of problem-solving perspective can be useful in identifying peripheral opportunities people with similar backgrounds may ignore."

But these high performing virtual teams contained structures to facilitate chumship:

> "Virtual teams that had processes that increased the levels of mutual support member effort, balance of member contributions, and task-related communications consistently outperformed other teams with lower levels."

Structure Virtual Teams for Success:

*Emphasize Teamwork Skills in Selecting Participants and Provide 1:1 Coaching When Needed: C*ompanies make a mistake by staffing

teams primarily based on technical expertise and availability. Managers must also consider social skills as a pivotal component of membership. If such skills are lacking, provide 1:1 confidential assistance.

Create a Team Structure to Screen Out People
Lacking Conscientiousness.

When a group is physically working together, the team leader can easily detect individual deficiencies in contribution. These deficiencies can be discussed privately. That option is nonexistent in virtual teams.

The "Free Rider Effect" effect refers to employees who do not do their fair share of work. Every team member knows what it is like to have Free Riders. Sometimes Free Riders are conscientious. They discount the value of their potential contributions. And sometimes they lack motivation.

Stybel Peabody recommends that one of the written rules of virtual team engagement be the following: if two or more team members send a written request to have an employee ejected from the team, that employee is ejected, and a note will about the ejection will be inserted into the employee's personnel file. 000

The previously unmotivated free rider now is motivated!

Conduct Virtual Fikas: Stybel Peabody (2017) wrote about how teams can use the Swedish fika as technique for chumship. A virtual fika could be the following:

> In advance of a team meeting, one team member will mail a regional nonalcoholic beverage or nonperishable food to other members. The food or drink should have significance in the region where the employee lives or have some uniquely personal meaning for that employee. During the video portion of the virtual meeting, all team members open their deliveries at the same time. All enjoy the food at the same time while listening to the story.

Emotional Bonding Through Clothing. Ms. El-Solh recommends that all team members wear the same shirt during the video portion of the virtual meeting. Make a special t shirt focusing on the team.

Avoid Neutral, Predictable Team Leader Start-Up Conversations. Before starting the business part of a virtual team meeting, the leader might ask people if they wish to share a story about what is going on with their professional lives, their personal lives, or their families. These stories could be happy or expose difficulty. It is up to the employee to determine. Avoid emotionally neutral discussions about the weather.

Summary and Conclusions:

According to Frank Siebdrat and his colleagues, using virtual teams might be even be a better idea than using in-office teams. But managing virtual teams for success means the management of chumship.

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