

Bridging the Distance: Strategies that Improve the Performance of Global and Inclusive Virtual Teams



The FORUM on workplace inclusion®

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Session Objectives

Participants will be able to:

1. Identify some of the research-based challenges faced by global virtual teams and articulate the need to boost their performance.
2. Identify the eight *Critical Success Components* for global virtual teams. Discuss the impact these components have on teams in your (or your client's) organization. Consider the impact these components have on your team leaders, members, and their results.
3. Analyze a virtual team based on the complexities of time, distance, culture and interdependence among team members (Complexity and Reliance).
4. Apply a model for long distance leadership to your virtual team or other teams you support that will increase their potential of achieving high performance.



Key Points

Trends in the Virtual Workforce

- Virtual teams may be the single most important way that companies prioritize and coordinate work today¹
- By 2020, 62% of employees are expected to work in virtual teams²
- Leading cross-cultural teams is in the Top 10 of global leadership development competencies³
- Nearly 4 million U.S. employees worked from home at least ½ time in 2015, an increase of 115% since 2005⁴

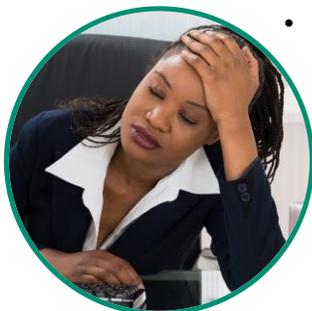
What is a Virtual Team?

A team whose members ...

- work remotely (home) or even if in a similar vicinity
- communicate largely via electronic means
- never, or seldom meet face-to-face



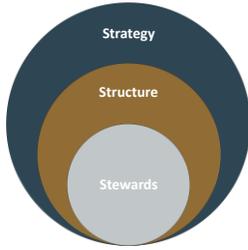
Top Virtual Team Challenges



- Building trust from a distance
- Leveraging communications technology
- Underestimating cultural differences
- Aligning members behind the team's purpose and vision
- Creating and maintaining engagement
- Balancing structure and empowerment
- Making the implicit, explicit



Critical Success Components for Global Virtual Teams



Research supports that there are certain factors critical to the long-term success of globally dispersed teams. These factors, when in place, enable virtual teams to operate effectively and efficiently, achieve results, and bring a high level of satisfaction to the team members.

Impt. (1-5)	Success Component	Sample Criteria	Perf. (1-5)
Strategy			
	Business Need —team members have a clear understanding of the team’s purpose and vision.	There is a clear description of the business needs driving the existence of this team.	
	Organizational Culture —there is a level of trust among team members, management, and suppliers.	The culture supports collaboration among teams and business partners.	
Structure			
	Organizational Processes —team members follow a documented team agreement of norms, work processes, and procedures.	Team Operating Agreements are included as standard procedure.	
	Communication and Collaboration Technology —team members have the tools needed to assist them in communicating, collaborating, and sharing information.	Team members have equal access to communication and collaboration technology needed.	
	Human Resource Policies —HR policies that support virtual team members and account for differences related to virtual work performance.	Job descriptions, development opportunities, compensation, and recognition programs in place.	
	Training and Development —resources are available to virtual team members to develop functional, technical, cultural, and team skills.	Team members have opportunities to learn about working across cultures.	
Stewards			
	Competence —leaders and members demonstrate the skills needed to succeed as a global virtual team.	Members demonstrate the emotional intelligence skills to work remotely.	
	Leadership —if/how leadership is shared among dispersed team members.	Leaders in the organization work across cultural and organizational boundaries.	

Complexity & Reliance of Virtual Teams



This assessment evaluates the impact of two key elements of teams—complexity and reliance. Assess the levels of complexity and reliance for one of your teams by responding to each item below with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to each statement.

Complexity = time, distance and cultural interactions

- 1. Do team members reside in more than two countries? No___ Yes ___
- 2. Do you communicate with team members across time zones that are more than six hours apart? No___ Yes ___
- 3. Are there more than two national cultures represented by your team? No___ Yes ___
- 4. Are there more than two native languages represented by your team? No___ Yes ___
- 5. Are there more than two functional areas represented by your team? No___ Yes ___
- 6. Are there differences in access to communication and collaboration technology based on team member location? No___ Yes ___

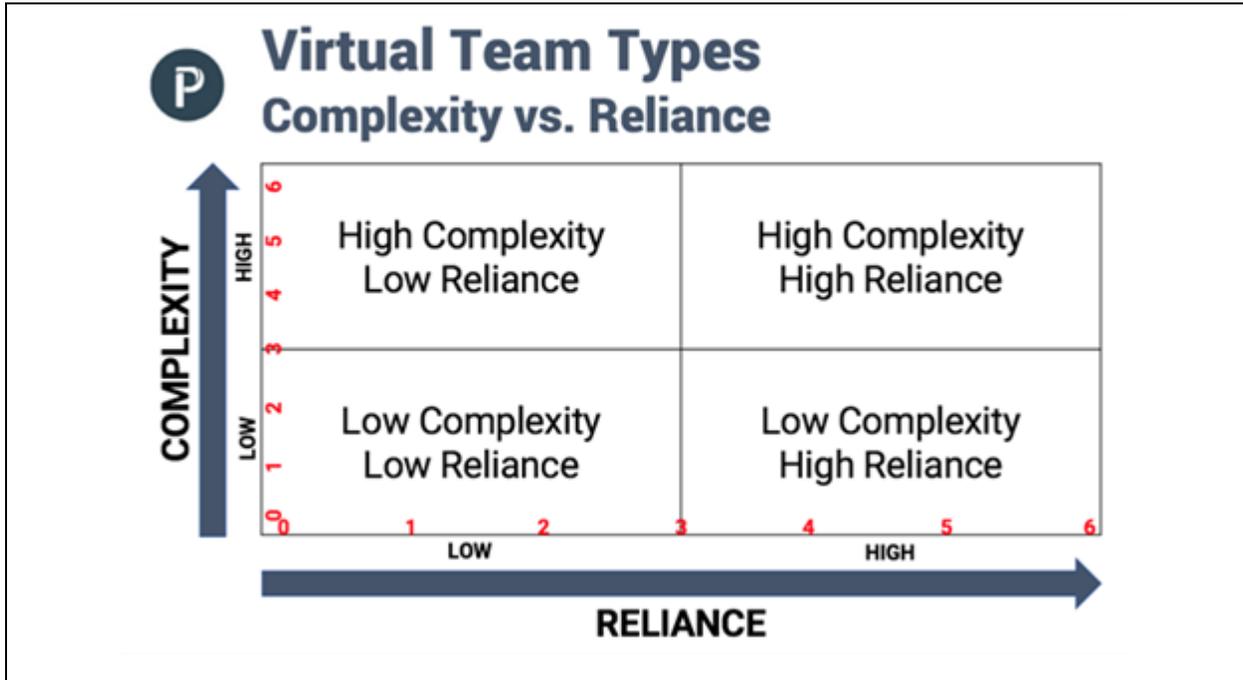
Reliance = the level of interdependence among team members

- 1. Do team members need to frequently communicate as a full group to make timely decisions? No___ Yes ___
- 2. Must your team members rely on the expertise of other members to complete tasks? No___ Yes ___
- 3. Does your team need access to all documents and information at all times? No___ Yes ___
- 4. Must your members collaborate successfully to complete projects? No___ Yes ___
- 5. Are leadership responsibilities shared among team members (versus a single leader)? No___ Yes ___
- 6. Is compensation based on team *and* individual performance? No___ Yes ___

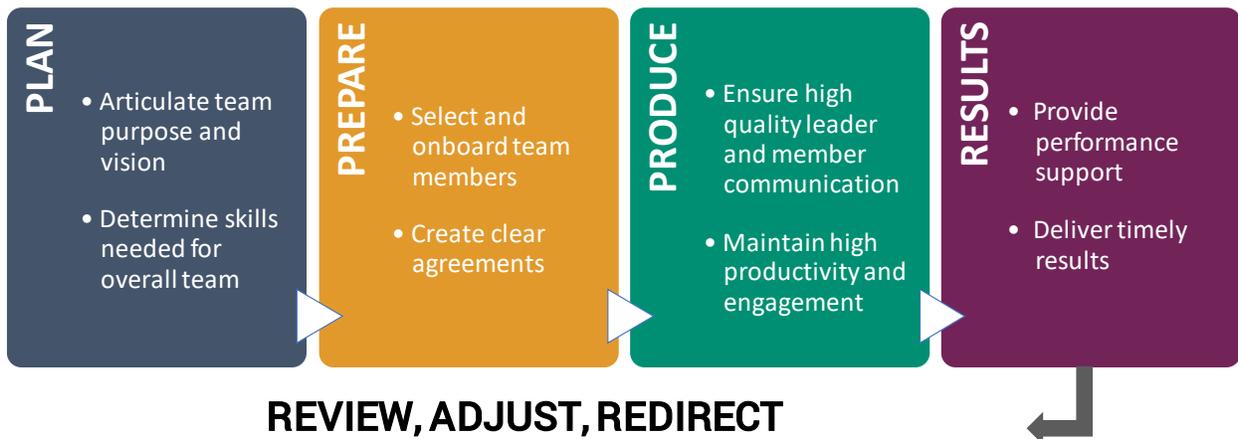
Complexity and Reliance of Your Team

Total the number of 'yes' responses for Complexity and Reliance. Use your two 'yes' scores to plot the combination for your team on the model below. Place an 'X' in the quadrant that best represents your team.

Complexity Total No ___ Yes ___ Reliance Total No ___ Yes ___



Long Distance Leadership Model™





Virtual Leader Skills

- Team Purpose and Vision
- Build Rapid Trust
- Leverage Technology
- Team Member Development
- Balance Team Structure & Member Empowerment
- Cross-cultural Management
- Performance Management & Coaching



Virtual Team Member Skills



- Virtual Team Communication
- Self-Awareness and Self-Management
- Relationship Management
- Project Management
- Communications Technology
- Culture

Team Operating Agreement Elements

- Team Name and Description
- Team Purpose, Vision and Goals
- Team Leader and Member Skills Required
- Resources and Support (available to the team)
- Potential Barriers (that could impact the team's ability to succeed)
- Team Communication and Collaboration Protocols (how they will work together)
 - Level of participation expected
 - Communications technology the team will use and timeliness of responses from team member requests
 - Team Meeting Practices
 - Team Member Communication Preferences and Styles
 - Decision Making Approaches
 - Conflict Resolution Steps



The Influence of National Culture

“Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster.” Prof. Geert Hofstede, Emeritus Professor, Maastricht University.



What is Culture?

Culture is defined as the collective mental programming of the human mind which distinguishes one group of people from another. This programming influences thinking patterns which are reflected in the meaning people attach to various aspects of life and become crystalized in the institutions of society. This does not imply that everyone in a given society is programmed in the same way; there are considerable differences between individuals. It may well be that the differences among individuals in one country culture are bigger than the differences among all country cultures. We can, nevertheless, still use country scores based on the law of big numbers, and on the fact most of us are strongly influenced by social control.

What are Hofstede's Five Cultural Dimensions?

Power Distance Index (PDI) This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of power distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low power distance, people strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.

Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV) The high side of this dimension can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families. Its opposite, collectivism, represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS) The masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. Society at large is more competitive. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) This dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. That is, how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting strong UAI maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas. Low UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles.

Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Normative (LTO) Societies prioritize these two goals differently. Societies who score low on this dimension prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Cultures that score high take a more pragmatic approach. They encourage thrift and efforts in education as a way to prepare for the future. In the business context, this dimension is related to as "short term versus long term." (PRA).

(Information provided by the Hofstede Center; <http://geert-hofstede.com/dimensions.html>)



Effective Virtual Team Meetings

Before the Meeting	Yes	No
Did you draft the meeting agenda? Include the meeting purpose, topics, expected outcomes (decision, action, FYI), who needs to attend, and estimated time for each topic. Include 5-10 minutes at the beginning of each meeting for socializing to build rapport.		
Did you determine the technology methods that best match the messages to be communicated? Confirm that participants have the required technology and bandwidth.		
Did you ensure that all participants know how to use the required technology?		
Did you determine the meeting length and time of day? Limit meetings to 60-90 minutes; if longer, plan a break. Rotate meeting times when multiple time zones are involved.		
Did you send out the agenda and meeting materials in advance? Expect participants to have read the materials prior to the meeting and are prepared to engage.		
Did you leverage technology engagement tools – group chat, polls, screen sharing, etc.?		
Did you upload presentation materials in advance and test the technology? Have a backup plan?		
Did you delegate tasks such as taking meeting minutes, presenting a topic and soliciting input?		
During the Meeting		
Did you begin with a question to engage everyone? Have members say their names when speaking.		
Did you recap the meeting purpose, time, and expectations?		
Did you ask participants to close their laptops and place their mobile devices on silent on the table while the meeting is in progress?		
Did you vary your voice pace, tone and pitch to engage participants and gain involvement?		
Did you use a “parking lot” for any items that are important but outside of the agenda?		
Did you ask one question at a time and wait 10 seconds for members to respond?		
Did you listen for voice tone and word choice to understand the meaning behind words?		
Did you prevent individuals from dominating the meeting? Solicit input from members who are quiet. Use a “round robin” technique to solicit input. Do not assume that silence means agreement. Allow for anonymous feedback.		
Did you record meetings for those unable to attend?		
After the Meeting		
Did you post meeting notes and the recording (if used) and notify participants?		
Did you post any action items, due dates, and responsibilities on the team website?		
Did you solicit member feedback about meetings and what would make them better?		
Did you call or email participants to ensure understanding, follow-through and commitment to the meeting outcomes?		
Did you brief absent members after they view meeting notes or listen to the recording?		
Did you prepare participants for the next meeting?		

The more “yes” answers, the more likely your virtual meetings will be more engaging and productive.