We Are Virtually All on the Same Team: The Effectiveness of Self-Managed Virtual Teams

Hilary Moore, M.A.
Communications and Technology, University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Sharmila Ferris, Ph.D.
William Paterson University
Wayne, New Jersey, USA

Marco Adria, Ph.D.
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationship between member satisfaction and effectiveness of virtual, self managed teams. Specifically, this paper studies the various perceptions of eight virtual team members. The study reveals eight major themes for how team members evaluate themselves and will provide a basis to evaluate the relationship between these factors and the effectiveness of the self managed team. While team members on the whole expressed a high degree of satisfaction, there was no conclusive evidence that this is related to the team being more or less effective.

Keywords: Virtual teams, self-managed teams, member satisfaction, team effectiveness.

1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the relationship between member satisfaction and the effectiveness of self-managed, virtual teams. Virtual team members juggle competing demands for attention, ambiguity of remote communication, establishment of personal relationships, and the need for accessible, stable, and user-friendly technology [24]. A lack of face-to-face communication, long distances, and a sense of isolation can sometimes be exacerbated by traditional top-down leadership styles. Due to these complex variables, working in self-managed virtual teams can prove challenging to members. Unless teams have satisfied members, achieving business objectives and extracting value from these teams can be difficult.

As technology profoundly affects the nature of virtual teams, Adaptive Structuration Theory provides a useful framework for examining the social aspects the technology brings and its impact on member satisfaction. By studying these aspects together, this study seeks to give organizations further tools to evaluate, and succeed in, their use of virtual, self-managed teams.

2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between member satisfaction and the effectiveness of self-managed, virtual teams. Specifically, the research attempted to identify the forces that influence member satisfaction, and how this satisfaction impacts the perceived effectiveness of the team.

RQ1 – What is the relationship between member satisfaction and effectiveness in self-managed virtual teams?

To explore this question, a qualitative ethnographic interviewing approach was used to examine eight members of a small, western Canadian hotel management company, who met weekly for a self-managed virtual team meeting.

Due to a lack of qualitative measures to assess satisfaction of virtual, self-managed teams, this study created questions drawn from a pre-existing quantitative instrument (Communication Satisfaction measures) and adapted them to an ethnographic interview situation.

3. FINDINGS

Results yielded eight major themes which include:

1) The Virtual Team Experience, including comparing virtual and face-to-face meetings, the size of the virtual team, competing demands for attention, meeting efficiency, reducing the sense of isolation, and creating a support network for members.

2) Technology, including taking technology for granted, email versus conference calling and consideration of alternate technologies.

3) Self-Management, including autonomy and interest in self-management.

4) Operation of Meeting, including standards, structure, stability, and scheduling of meetings.

5) Team Members, including establishment of personal relationships, meeting counterparts, the personality and
experiences of team members, newness to the meeting, losing face, and designated roles on the team.

6) Decision making, including methods such as deferring to the head office and consensus.

7) Rewards, including receiving value, recognition, gratitude, and benefitting through sharing and learning.

8) Effectiveness, including meeting member expectations and trust.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research project has provided an approach for understanding the relationship between team member satisfaction and effectiveness in a virtual, self-managed team. Through the use of individual, semi-structured interviews, guided by the concept of AST as it relates to the social aspects and structure created by technology, this research was able to identify participant’s perceptions of the use of technology, the self-managed team structure, and how indicators of communication satisfaction can help identify the ability of the team to be effective. While team members on the whole expressed a high degree of satisfaction, there was no conclusive evidence that this related to the team being more or less effective. Broader research that incorporates virtual, self-managed team member experiences and perceptions of satisfaction and effectiveness would be a worthwhile development to pursue in further studies.

4. REFERENCES


