

## Message 39

### Virtual Teams' Management for the 2003 E.U. Presidency

Virtual teams are teams that are geographically distributed and in which team-members are cross-functional yet working on highly interdependent tasks. Their core work is conducted mostly virtually through Information and Communication Technologies (hereinafter, ICT) with minimal face-to-face interactions, team-members share responsibility for team outcomes, and the work to be done is complex either because of the cultural diversity of the team or the innovation required in the task.

The 2003 Greek Presidency of the E.U. might require the use of virtual teams to coordinate the proceedings and manage decision-making during the six-month term of it. Herein, you may find suggestions on virtual teams' management that might be useful.

In research on virtual teams, team-members generally report, that the team:

- Helps to develop competencies within the team to share knowledge.
- Leads to a significant degree of knowledge sharing in the team.
- Helps develop "know-how" knowledge within the team.
- Helps to develop "know-why" knowledge within the team. &
- Has the team's knowledge used by external constituencies.

Regarding the development of intellectual capital through virtual teams, team-leaders of the E.U. Presidency should consider the following issues:

1. Understand virtual teams' work processes.
2. Define technical competence for sharing knowledge.
3. Know how involved organization(s) work.
4. Exploit new knowledge created by virtual teams.

Regarding team-members' knowledge sharing, team-leaders of the E.U. Presidency should consider the following issues:

1. Accessibility of others' knowledge.
2. Management of knowledge within the team.
3. Input of knowledge from outside the team.

Regarding virtual teams' know-how competence, team-leaders of the E.U.

Presidency should consider the following issues:

1. Streamline internal processes.
2. Reduce redundancy of team knowledge.
3. Coordinate team work.
4. Implement new ideas rapidly.

Regarding virtual teams' know-why competence, team-leaders of the E.U.

Presidency should consider the following issues:

1. Anticipation of surprises and crises.
2. Identification of new ways for virtual teams to operate.
3. Understanding of decision-making rational.
4. Understanding of critical relationships.

Regarding the degree to which virtual teams' knowledge is shared with external constituencies, team-leaders of the E.U. Presidency should consider the following issues:

1. Define process for knowledge-sharing.
2. Identify external constituencies.
3. Leverage on knowledge-sharing to motivate and provide a roadmap for action.

Regarding the use of ICT, team-leaders of the E.U. Presidency should consider the following means:

1. Audio conferencing
2. Information repositories
3. Instant messaging systems
4. Synchronous application sharing
5. Electronic whiteboards
6. Video conferencing

Regarding the use of Information Repositories, team-leaders of the E.U.

Presidency should consider using systems with the following capabilities:

1. Field identifying authorship of entries
2. Online capture of team progress
3. Electronic annotation
4. Identification of authors of electronic annotation
5. Entries having searchable keywords

6. Auto-generation of revision history
7. Personal electronic folders
8. Threaded discussion
9. Context-sensitive search capabilities
10. Auto-notification of additions
11. Integrated with corporate databases
12. Easily changed keywords
13. Links associated with entries
14. Text mining to identify related concepts
15. Auto-suggestions of keywords

Regarding the application of ICT in knowledge-sharing, team-leaders of the E.U. Presidency should consider using means that enable:

1. Knowing who contributes knowledge.
2. Finding knowledge contributed.
3. Making and saving author-identified annotations.
4. Keeping track of changes in documents over time.
5. Alarming when documents change.

Regarding the degree of virtual teams' cohesiveness, team-leaders of the E.U. Presidency should consider taking the following action:

1. Pre-meeting preparation in which they assigned agenda items and individuals to each agenda.
2. Conduct brainstorming and commenting on draft documents electronically using asynchronous discussion threads between meetings so that people would have time to reflect on their thoughts during the discussion threads as well as people who don't share a common language would have time to compose their thoughts into the discussion thread. Time during virtual meetings could spend on areas of disagreement that surface during discussion thread, not on areas of consensus.
3. Form sub-teams and ask them to work on a sub-task together and report the results to the team members.
4. Clearly allocate action items at end of virtual meetings with and follow-up.
5. Use of face-to-face meetings to strengthen cohesiveness.

Regarding the alleviation of team-members fear for knowledge-sharing, team-leaders of the E.U. Presidency should consider taking the following action:

1. Discourage the use of email to only some members; encourage the use of the team repository for all communication.
2. Use discussion threads so everyone could see what everyone else's comments were on all draft documents.
3. Establishing communication norms about what should be shared outside the team.
4. Allow only team members access to repository.
5. Allow sub-teams (sometimes individuals) to have private folders in the repository where they can store documents till they felt they are ready to share it with the whole team.

The suggestions above consider research on virtual teams management that was cosponsored by the Society for Information Management and the University of Southern California's Center for Telecommunications Management and supervised by Dr. Ann Majchrzak, Professor of Information and Operations Management at University of Southern California, Marshall School of Business and Arvind Malhotra Assistant Professor of Information Technology and E-commerce. Following is the list of organizations that participated in the research.

- Agilent
- Air Products
- AMP
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- Digitas
- Dupont Dow
- Emery
- EDS
- Freelances
- Fullcircle
- Gartner
- GSK
- HP
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