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## Human Resources and Virtual Teams



### Recruitment / Selection

In a virtual environment, hiring managers are not constrained to a particular geography when selecting new employees. However, the skills required to work in a virtual environment differ somewhat from that of a worker in a more traditional environment. The skills listed below may assist human resource professionals in the recruitment, assessment, and selection of effective virtual team members.

#### 1. Proficiency with technical tools and electronic etiquette:

- e-mail;
- collaborative software systems;
- Internet;
- Intranet;
- desktop videoconferencing systems;
- non-desktop videoconferencing systems;
- teleconferencing.

#### 2. Ability to form team relationships quickly and effectively:

- entering new teams via introduction of self, asking questions to help the team get organized, and showing interest in others;
- quickly ascertaining other team members' preferred work styles and adapting their own accordingly;
- being aware of one's interpersonal style and planning experiences which lead to improvement;

3. Ability to communicate in a virtual environment:
  - command of written communication skills for utilization via e-mail and collaborative software systems;
  - communicating effectively via videoconferencing for team meetings;
  - making formal presentations through videoconferencing;
  - managing guidelines about when to see people face-to-face, when to send them email vs. voicemail messages, and when to avoid them altogether.
4. Ability to access, analyze, and manage data.
5. Project management capabilities:
  - planning and organizing individual work to correspond to team schedules;
  - developing and using methods to report progress and problems;
  - monitoring and controlling costs;
  - taking actions to get back on track;
  - documenting and sharing individual learnings.
6. Ability to communicate across cultures:
  - awareness of and sensitivity to cultural differences among team members;
  - understanding how cultural perspectives influence work and collaboration;
  - adjusting communication approach based on those differences, when appropriate.
7. Basic teamwork skills:
  - managing differences;
  - participating effectively in group problem-solving;
  - cooperating with others;
  - setting goals.
8. Self-management skills:
  - establishing personal and professional priorities and goals;
  - prioritizing work and setting limits;
  - creating and executing opportunities for individual learning and growth;
  - taking the initiative to change working methods and processes to meet the demands of the work.

## **Job Design**

Job design depends upon virtual team type (see *Overview* tab). Virtual team membership lends itself to more flexible work hours, job sharing arrangements, and working from home.

## **New Job Titles**

Some virtual team meetings incorporate complex technology. A new job title may be in order: “Technographer” to assist teams by focusing on the technology utilized during the meeting. The technographer could also serve as a consultant to teams wanting to optimize available technology to facilitate their team’s work.

Some organizations utilizing virtual work teams have created the job title: “Virtual Team Development Specialist” to assist new teams and leaders get off to a quick and healthy start. These specialists also act as consultants during a team’s lifecycle.

## **Career Development**

Some virtual team members, especially teleworkers, believe that opportunities to be promoted are considerably less with a virtual status due to their autonomy and lack of day-to-day contact with their manager and other business leaders.

Therefore, it is imperative that much rigor, from an HR perspective, is placed around succession planning for key contributors working in virtual environments. More information on this topic is found under the *Managing & Leading* tab.

Many virtual teams are fluid in nature with ever changing membership. Team members report that transitioning people on and off teams so that their careers are positively affected is paramount.

## Compensation

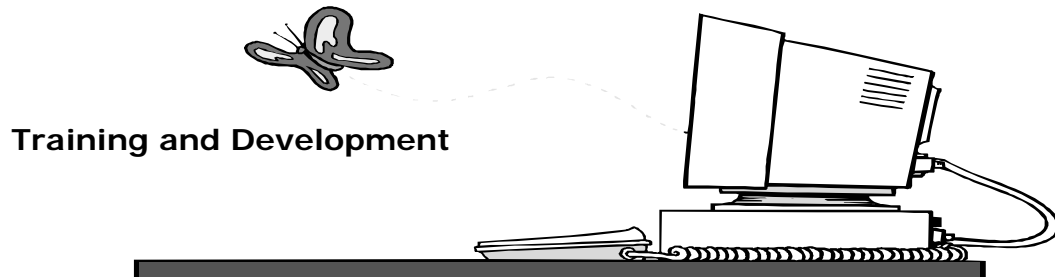
Many virtual team members (especially on “networked” teams) will not be ongoing members; they may be called in for a couple of hours or days. They may be part of the organization – or not. Fluidity of membership will demand flexible and innovative compensation structures. Possible pay structures include:

- Negotiate for a block of time and pay whether or not the time is used.
- Negotiate by the project and contract services dependent upon assumed utilization (overages are “eaten” by the employee).
- Negotiate a “time and materials” contract.
- Include incentive packages / clauses.



## Performance Appraisals

Performance criteria are best developed from individual team member development plans based upon assessment of above-listed skills and competencies. Appraisals for a virtual worker tend to be more results than process oriented.



## Training and Development

A misconception of effective training and development (e.g. mentoring) is that it is most effective in a face-to-face environment. Therefore, individuals working in a virtual environment, especially teleworkers, are disadvantaged. However, research has shown that the medium used for teaching technical skills has no effect on students' learning outcomes. One can use videotape, CD-ROM, videoconferences, teleconferences, web-based training, or even a plain old instruction manual.

Some skills (e.g. communication and some management/leadership skills) are best taught in a face-to-face environment. Virtual workers can be brought in to training centers or directed toward external training venues.



## Measures of Employee Satisfaction

There is no consensus in the literature regarding the impact of a virtual team structure or teleworking on employee satisfaction or other key indicators from a human resources perspective. However, most studies reflect:

- working from home made employees more satisfied with their job
- reduced their likelihood of leaving the company
- reduced their role stressors
- happier with their supervisors
- more committed to their organizations
- lower levels of satisfaction with peers
- lower levels of satisfaction with opportunities for promotion

It is extremely important that employee outcomes and impacts be measured and responded to in a virtual environment. It is suggested that results be divided by team type and whether the employee is a virtual team member in a corporate or telework environment.