

Studying Identification with Virtual Teams: A Communicative Perspective

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Virtual team studies

- Studies have been conducted for example in the area of
 - trust in virtual teams
 - virtual team development
 - technology issues in virtual teams
- Organizational teams have often been neglected
- Qualitative virtual team studies in minority
- Most of the qualitative studies are either
 - case studies or
 - use ethnography and/or
 - grounded theory in data collection and analysis



Studies exploring virtual team communication

- Communication is seen often in an instrumental role
- My perspective: teamwork is about communication, and teams' task performance and social relationships are founded on communication
 - Identification with the team is constructed through communication



Case: A study of virtual team leaders' identification tactics

- Qualitative, interpretive research methods
- Participants: four virtual team leaders from four international organizations
- Three methods of data collection: interviewing, observation and the recording of actual communication
- Analysis: an approach influenced by Miles and Huberman (1984) and Lincoln and Guba (1985)



Findings

- Tactics the team leaders used to foster virtual team members' identification:
 1. catering for the individual
 2. giving positive feedback
 3. bringing out common goals and workings
 4. talking up the team activities and face-to-face meetings



Catering for the individual

C1: it makes particular demands on bosses about not to favor the people near you in any way, which happens so easily without any bad intentions, especially in the way things are communicated, and also those things that don't necessarily concern the people far away, if you have told everybody else, and they will hear afterwards, that this information has been passed on, then they will think why haven't I been told. You have to keep this in mind always when you inform [the team members] about anything

C3: good morning!

C1: good morning C3, it must be awfully late for you!

C3: it is midnight, I am just finishing up with my resume and now I am going to bed! [...]



Giving positive feedback

B1: Yeah, very good. Thank you already for the progress you've made and I was really happy and surprised, and also [Name] was really happy to hear that it's already implemented in Denmark. So well done, and keep up the good work.

Web development March 2003

07.03.2003 - 09:44:36

D1: Hello! Here is attached the document where you can find the web development which is going on at this month. As you see, lot of countries are doing a good work updating the sites.



Bringing out common goals and workings

B1: ... in the beginning you could see and hear a lot of such as “in [Country] we do it this way”, and then you had to say, no, we [the team B] do it this way, we work as one function and the decisions are now made like this. And nowadays you don’t see that much. We have of course co-operated a long time now, but we also have quite many common models and agreements, and when we didn’t have them in the beginning, then we had to handle every situation on its own, and then we easily slid into the old [ways of working]. So in my opinion there is a better harmony [in the team] now and we work better as one unit than in the beginning.



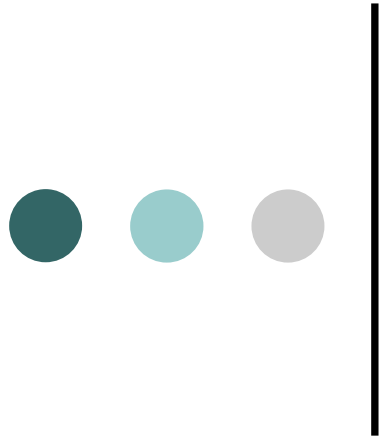
Talking up the team activities and face-to-face meetings

D1: [In a meeting] the team members are focused on the subject, but if they read e-mail, they might pass it over like a stack of papers, and the phone rings and so on, it just blows totally over, or they are kind of alone when receiving the message, but now [in a meeting] when they are all there and if one of them is supporting me, someone who is committed to this, he will get the others along as well.

A1: Then we have used to comment on the training courses you've been on, I don't know if this is the only one, this [Name of the training course] at the moment. A11 is the only one present, who has been on this course.

A11: Yeah, what about it?

A1: Yes, tell us how it was. What did you learn and...?



Thank you!

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