VIRTUAL TEAMS IN MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

Jean Richardson

PMP, CSM, CSPO and ITIL Certified Practitioner

In This Workshop We Will Discuss:

- How online relationships differ from in-person relationships.

- How to build relationships with remote team members that facilitate getting the work done.

- How the dominant U.S. culture compares with non-U.S. cultures in terms of team dynamics.

In This Workshop We Will Discuss How To:

- Analyze remote communication technologies for appropriate use with different communication styles and tasks.

- Conduct or participate in a non-face-to-face meeting effectively.

- Identify the proper communication channel for your needs.

- Deal with escalating conflict in a remote setting.

- Identify problem-solving styles and methods of working with specific styles.

Which Cultures Are Represented in *Your* Workplace?

Culture is…

- An expression of "what works"

- Subtle and pervasive

- Story

Culture is…

- Codified in art, language, food, etiquette…

- Carried by individuals in key roles

- Symbiotic with language

Many Kinds of Culture

- Corporate

- Ethnic

- Religious

- National

Three Levels of Culture

- Artifacts

- Espoused values

- Basic underlying assumptions

Forms of Remote Communication

- Telephone and teleconference

- Fax

- Email

- Chat

- Snail mail

- Videoconference

- Web conference

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Mehrabian's Analysis

Communication flows through three primary channels:

- 7% of the emotional meaning of a message is communicated through explicit verbal channels.

- 38% is communicated by paralanguage, or the use of the voice.

- ~55% comes through the nonverbal channel, which includes such things as gesture, posture, facial expression, and so forth.

We Create Our Shared Meaning

- Ultimately, all interpersonal realities are negotiated.

- When our companies and communities don't create new rules for our virtual communication, there is no common basis for these negotiations.

- We, then, as individuals, construct our own relatively idiosyncratic realities, or rules. This can cause waves of misunderstandings if we do not share the same virtual communication rules and norms.

Costs of Virtual Communication

- Loss of the Human Moment

The Human Moment

*"An **authentic psychological encounter** that can happen only when two people share the same physical space. . . . The human moment has two prerequisites: people's physical presence and their emotional and intellectual attention."*

- Edward M. Hallowell
"The Human Moment at Work"

Costs of Virtual Communication

- Loss of the Human Moment

- Incidence and increase of Toxic Worry

Toxic Worry

"Anxiety that has no basis in reality. It immobilizes the sufferer and leads to indecision or destructive action. It's like being in the dark."

- Edward M. Hallowell
  "The Human Moment at Work"

Costs of Virtual Communication

- Loss of the Human Moment

- Incidence and increase of Toxic Worry

- Loss of mental acuity

- Decrease of emotional well-being

Impact on Mental Acuity

- Human contact impacts levels of epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol

- Facetime stimulates the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin

Costs of Virtual Communication

- Loss of the Human Moment

- Incidence and increase of Toxic Worry

- Loss of mental acuity

- Decrease of emotional well-being

- Decreased access to thinking skills important in problem solving

Benefits of Virtual Communication

- Teleconferences decrease travel costs and sometimes allow meetings to be scheduled more easily.

- Email can be more efficient, if used wisely.

  - Asynchronisity lets communication happen without interrupting critical work processes.

  - Low context tasks such as organizing meetings can occur without repeated phone calls.

- Side conversations can be taken offline or offlist with less distraction.

Benefits of Virtual Communication

- People who write well can often communicate tremendous richness of information in email.

- People who do not do well face-to-face can be stellar contributors in email.

- While conflict can sometimes escalate more easily in email, it can also sometimes be more easily addressed—or avoided—in email.

But . . .

Trust, the bedrock of relationship, the channel through which work ultimately flows in all human systems, is more fragile in virtual environments.

Building Trust

Trust builds slowly through a series of shared experiences where:

- Expectations are met.

- Belief in each other is validated.

- Individuals find they can depend on the predictability of each other's behavior.

Building Trust

- Overwhelmingly, all our trust-related sources agree that face-to-face relationship building activities and actions must precede virtual communications and negotiations.

- Where that is not possible a somewhat tentative and rather fragile relationship may develop.

- Face-to-face contact and conscious relationship building will likely be required to repair the relationship should it become damaged.

Building "Instant" Trust

The following must be demonstrated:

- Performance and competence

- Integrity

- Concern for well-being of others

Conflict Styles – Online and IRL

- Competing

- Accommodating

- Avoiding

- Compromising

- Collaborating

Transitional Moments

- These are the moments when trust is broken or at risk, typically because there is a lapse in shared meaning.

- They are usually signaled by:

  - Shifts in tone of response.

  - Response time changes.

  - Response seems out of alignment with what you've communicated.

  - Shutdown or "going dark."

Inquiry at Transitional Moments

- Query carefully in email.

- Pick up the phone and calling your correspondent for clarification.

- Request an online meeting or teleconference.

- Request a face-to-face meeting.

- Enlist the assistance of a third party intermediary.

Proactive Communication Model

- Know that conflict will arise.

- When you see the transitional moment or a flame war breaks out, STOP.

- Explicitly communicate that you are interested in partnering to clarify a possible misunderstanding.

Proactive Communication Model

- Focus on gathering information collaboratively:

    - Describe the observable facts.

    - Interpret those facts and compassionately verify your interpretation with the other party.

    - Evaluate the facts and your understanding of them together.

Proactive Communication Model

- Focus on actions and agreements that will move both of you toward your mutual goals.

Preventing Problems

- With new team members or potential partners, identify your communication partners' communication norms.

- When forming a new team, be conscious about norming communication.

WIN Model

- **W**ait a minute

- **I**nteract, don't react

- **N**egotiate a solution

Preventing Problems in Remote Meetings

- Appoint or volunteer to be a facilitator.

- In email,

  - Isolate issues and summarize discussions for clarification of shared understanding.

  - Monitor who is participating and who is not.

  - When making decisions, delay finalizing the decision until everyone has "checked in."

Preventing Problems in Remote Meetings

- In teleconferences,

    - Introduce all parties, identifying their roles and locations. Have them each speak at least their name during "check in".

    - Note when individuals depart and arrive.

    - Don't "sneak out".

    - Poll all parties when making a decision.

    - Follow up with written minutes.

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Questions?

Comments?

Stories?

JEAN RICHARDSON

jean@azuregate.net