



Red Flags of Underperforming Virtual Teams

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Virtual TEAMS = Vulnerability

- A certain amount of vulnerability exists when working in virtual teams
 - Team members are dependent on managers/leaders
 - Managers/leaders are dependent on team members
 - Everyone is dependent on technology



Red Flag #1 – Loss of Identity for team members

- Lack of participation
 - Failure to participate in group or individual meetings
- Exhibit depersonalization
 - Do not believe that the rules/goals apply to them
- Continually miss deadlines
 - Fail to see/understand how their performance affects the team
- Express hopelessness
 - Depression
 - Do not feel like their work is important
- Failure to see the big picture
 - Inability to see the end result



Loss of Identity Countermeasures

- To counteract a loss of identity among virtual team members, leaders can
 - Create social contracts that clearly define roles, expectations, and big picture goals
 - Create weekly/monthly/quarterly status reports
 - Benchmark successes
 - Create virtual events (like luncheons) to remind everyone of their group “humanity”
 - Create a “fun” newsletter to foster a connection

You are less likely to be indifferent and more likely to want to contribute when you “KNOW” your teammates!!!

Red Flag #2 – Lack of Communication

- Team members may misinterpret communication in print (i.e. emails) and develop “hurt feelings”
 - Tone and body language are missing
 - Generational/cultural differences in communication
- May miss communications
 - Emails go to spam or forget to check emails
 - Miss telephone calls
- Not “mentally present” in meetings
 - Virtually present but mind is elsewhere
- Communication style changes/loses professional tone
 - Verbiage and presentation may become too informal, crass, tactless

Lack of Communication Countermeasures

- Follow the 7 X 7 rule
 - Things must be repeated 7 times in 7 different ways for comprehension
- Be transparent with your expectations (these can also be outlined in your social contract)
 - “If I contact you, I expect a response within x hours/days”
- Be mindful of your timing for communications
 - A technical meeting right after lunch or close to quitting time is **NOT** a good idea
 - People are general more present about 1 – 2 hours into their workday or about 2 – 3 hours after lunch
- Set the example for communication
 - Role model your expectations
- Use video conferencing for important messages

There is more of a personal connection and a higher comprehension rate when team members can “see” each other during communication.



Red Flag #3 – Lack of cohesion

- Devolving team players
 - Cliques, arguments, “assignment stalking” for other employees, gossiping
 - Teammates begin “us versus them” mentality
 - Decrease trust in other team members
 - Breakdown in workflow and communication
 - Work-life balance becomes unhealthy
 - Affecting other team members’ assignments
 - Taking sick-leave, etc



Lack of Cohesion Countermeasures

- Leader increases transparency (if everyone knows what is going on, there isn’t much to gossip about)
- Leader must be proactive with intragroup arguing – do not wait until it blows up
- Enforce core working hours for assignments that impact others

Virtual teams function differently with different dynamics than centralized teams.



Red Flag #4 – Struggling with autonomy

- Team members do not know where to start
 - Struggling to identify “step 1” of the new approach
 - Struggling with virtual setup
- Lack initiative to move on after completing an assignment
 - Struggling to adjust to workflow or speed of completion
 - Forget to contact leader for the “what’s next”
- Lack intuition regarding the needs of other teammates
- Team member goes “rogue”
 - Taking on tasks/problems out of his/her “jurisdiction”
 - Issuing directions to other teammates contrary to management



Autonomy Struggles Countermeasures

- Communicate expectations
- Check in with individual team members regularly
- Give the team members a sample action plan, but give them the freedom to adjust to what works best for them (it’s about the goal, not the journey)
- Reiterate monthly/quarterly your goals and expectations while accenting how these goals and expectations are already being met by the team

Any and all teams naturally seek out guidance from a “leader” regardless of that person’s official position with the organization. The “leader” sets the flow.



Red Flag #5 – Loss of Creativity

- Team members become stagnant
 - Fall into a rut
 - Lose ability/willingness to think outside the box for problem-solving
- Lowered morale
 - Team members no longer feel like they can make a difference



Loss of Creativity Countermeasures

- Ask for team feedback
- Provide brainstorming sessions for recurring problems
- Highlight creative moments (i.e. Jane figured out a way to fix...) or abilities (John did a really good job designing...)

People perform higher than expectations and have higher job satisfaction when they feel that they and their “gifts” are a valued part of the organization.



Questions??

