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ABSTRACT OF DIPLOMA THESIS

Virtual Teams in Practice

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Virtuální Týmy v Praxi

Abstract

This Diploma thesis focuses on investigation of virtual teams in practice. A team of people who work in virtual environment was selected in order to be examined and evaluated. In accordance to the findings about the chosen team, the thesis provides suggestions to improve its effectiveness. The content of the thesis is divided into theoretical and practical part. Definitions and explanations of the phenomenon of virtual teams are outlined in the theoretical overview in order to draw ideas about how these teams cooperate and function. The practical part presents chosen virtual team and its attributes. This part of the thesis also includes a semi-structured interview and an online questionnaire to bring objective information on the topic. At last, the proposal of improved team strategy is established at the end of the thesis and conclusion is provided as well.

Keywords: virtual teams, communication, on-line cooperation, trust, virtuality, geographic dispersion

Introduction

Technological progress and globalization phenomenon is without a doubt reflected in the speed of the civilization. The world is becoming interconnected thanks to the immense use of computers. Today, the advanced information technologies allow us to be in touch with almost anyone in the world at any time, no matter where we are. We are able to transfer an e-mail, video or sound to the other end of the world within seconds. The existence of the Internet is now part of everyday reality of most of the people in the world and brings huge opportunities. Many people cannot even imagine what it would be like if Internet did not exist. Also, work in today's organizations is increasingly linked on the global level and it is becoming more complex and dynamic. Through virtual teams, companies are able to connect work of experts from all over the world which makes them more effective, competitive, and reduces their costs. Cooperation across distance and time however inevitably brings certain implications not only for the firm and its functioning but also for the people that work there.

The topic of virtual teams was selected for this Diploma thesis since it has not yet been explained on a larger scale in literature. At the same time, many aspects of working in virtual teams are often neglected which is a paradox due to the fact that these kinds of teams are more and more seen in practice. This fact was therefore one of the reasons why this thesis tries to pursue the issue of virtual teams and learn more about them. The author sees future in this kind of cooperation for organizations. Furthermore, chosen virtual team of people, whose job is to administer a web page about cycling, and which was examined, consists of members which are associated with author's close relatives and therefore it was easier to get to know what these teams do very closely.

Objectives

The main objective of this thesis is to provide insight into the issue of cooperation in virtual teams with emphasis on areas of communication, motivation and management of virtual teams. It should provide a comprehensive summary of the cooperation within virtual teams and also a proposal of improved strategy for the chosen virtual team.

The aim of the thesis is to propose a plan and specific requirements, which should help the virtual team to be more effective and to consider possible changes and improvements which could enhance the success of the team.

Methodology

Firstly, the thesis describes the theoretical issues in relation to virtual teams, their existing types, dissimilarities from traditional teams, managing strategies, ways of communication, and psychological aspects of cooperation in virtual teams.

Secondly, practical part of the thesis introduces a case study of chosen virtual team and its investigation. This qualitative research serves as a basis for the proposed upgraded team strategy and recommendations. The practical part also includes a semi-structured interview which was made with the manager of the selected virtual team. Additionally, to get more objective information, 25 people which have experience with virtual teams were selected to fill in an online questionnaire from which the final data were transferred into graphs to indicate results. It is expected that the proposed strategy should bring improvements for the whole team and be beneficial for its existence.

Results

After the examination of chosen virtual team and taking deeper look into its everyday functioning, there emerge factors which from the authors' point of view could be improved in order to enhance success of the team. The recommendations serve to illustrate steps, which could be taken by the team and its leader to see whether revision of the team strategy would help to be more effective and competitive in the market. Proposed recommendations are built on findings from discussions, interviews, analysis of the data from the questionnaire and deep investigation of the chosen virtual team and its cooperation. Thanks to the fact that the author of the thesis has met in person with majority of the team members during the research, it was possible to create a real vision about team members' attitudes towards the job and to generally see, what is on team's daily agenda. The effectiveness of chosen virtual team is expected to be improved after taking recommended steps despite they should only serve as a suggestion.

Proposed improvements for the team include: realization of a face to face meeting in order to set new targets, change of the web page design and its upgrade, implementation of communication and team standards, introduction of a calendar for face to face meetings, using motivational techniques to improve performance of the team, giving feedback regularly, and at last, realization of research to get opinions from the readers and to see the possible options which could help the web page to be more attractive for readers.

Conclusion

This Diploma thesis explains the concept of virtual teams and at the same time examines whether cooperation between its team members is different to the collaboration of members of traditional teams. In the context of virtuality, the thesis mainly focuses on communication, motivation and leadership.

Although the investigation of the thesis was limited and should rather be taken only as a recommendation, it is necessary to say that it might contribute to understanding of problems of geographically dispersed teams, which due to today's technological development are becoming common parts of many organizations worldwide.

The existence of virtual teams still has unclear areas that have not yet been investigated in the long run. The trend of increasing use of computers and information technologies for the purpose of communication has an impact on human psychology and behaviour and is worth further research.

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