

## **HRD Forum — Viewpoint**

---

### **Global Entrepreneurial Talent Management challenges and opportunities for HRD**

## **HRD Implications of Virtual Teams: Explorations and Challenges**

**Molka Mazghouni, Chonnam National University**  
**Ilsang Ko, Chonnam National University**  
**Samuel Clegg, Northumbria University**

Virtual teams, sometimes referred to as global dispersed teams, are increasingly replacing co-located traditional teams at work. This strategy improves the workflow dynamism and fulfils the organizational need to enlarge the parameters of businesses seeking to explore international markets and opportunities. There can also be cost considerations involved as skilled, reasonably priced talents are more readily accessible in emerging economies. But what is the impact and challenges of such virtual working?

The Global State of Remote Work report 2019 explored data from 3,000 candidates located in six continents. Respondents varied in ages from 18-65+ and worked in different industrial fields including technology and marketing, healthcare and medical, hospitality, transportation, and more. Some of the major findings of the report indicate that employees who work virtually at least once per month revealed a 24% higher level of happiness and productivity compared to non-virtual workers. Furthermore, organizations that provide virtual work facilities encounter 25% less employee turnover than organizations that do not provide virtual work facilities.

This suggests significant merits to virtual working. An important addition is the finding that virtual working is said to be especially attractive to Millennial workers/Gen Y given their technological skills and desire for flexibility. However, by contrast such workers are said to also appreciate collaborative work environments and require direction in their workplace. The virtual work environment provides challenges and opportunities regarding team-based structures. Research has addressed several issues relating to controlling the communication medium process to aid fulfilment of multiple tasks and accomplish team members' goals, and the most convenient means to coordinate such groups which rely extensively on virtual work. An open question is whether certain settings of team core characteristics are advantageous or unfavorable in relation to characteristics and values-based work of Millennials. Two important factors here include skill differentiation and authority differentiation. Skill differentiation is "the degree to which members have specialized knowledge or functional capacities that make it more or less difficult to substitute members" (Hollenbeck et al., 2012, p. 84), while authority differentiation is

“the degree to which decision-making responsibility is vested in individual members, subgroups of the team, or the collective as a whole” (Hollenbeck et al., 2012, p. 84) In order to further explore this topic we conducted interviews with x 5 generation Y respondents, representing 5 industries, 4 nations, and 5 organizations. For the purpose of this forum we present the findings along the themes of a) factors determining virtuality, b) virtuality and team member outcomes and c) subsequent levels of organizational commitment and turnover intentions.

## Factors Determining the Level of Virtuality

... Different cultures don't affect our communication with the tools like video calls. Distance doesn't impact the task accomplishment because adopting a method like Scrum helps on its barriers (Khawla, Tunisian based in France).

... Work norms and routines influence of the level work process quality in virtual communication and due to these differences, it takes more time to the members to be on the same level of performance ... (Khawla).

... We had all different work norms and routines and it is the biggest advantage of working online, you cannot force anybody to work same way like you so online working help to avoid working same way like others ... (Miryam, Pakistani Based in South Korea).

I think the member knowledge and skills affect the virtual space for example when 2 tasks are affected by 2 people the one who has more skills will do it better than the other that will affect the communication quality between them and it will rise conflicts ... (Khawla).

What is more important is to setup norms and routines for the team so everyone will have to follow it (Sana).

... Based on my experience the coworkers came from different nations and background. We communicate in English we don't meet that much and because of that we don't face a lot of misunderstanding ... (Sana, from Morocco based in Dubai).

... The level of knowledge and skills it affects the work because virtually you don't know the actual skills of the person working with you but if you're working in the same place you can manage easily but virtually you cannot see their capability you can only see that in the output ... (Sana).

... If coworkers and the team have same nation it would be easier in term of time we can gain more time because of communication ways will be faster and easier but I don't think it matters in multinational virtual team when we share the same target and we have the same vision ... (Rami, Tunisian Based in Morocco).

... For me it is difficult to work in different time zones because the meeting hours becomes very difficult to cope with but I had experience to work in different time zone that doesn't affect the work that is you who have to manage this it is easy if you are able to manage it ... (Miryam).

... If we had the same working routines we can reduce time of accomplishing the work but if we don't it is not much big problem ... (Steve).

... Knowledge and skills differentiation this is common problem for offline and online but in offline is easily to deal with it to be really honest it is very hard to deal with different knowledge and skills on online work ... (Steve).

## Relationship Between Virtuality and Team Member Outcomes

The leader of the team is the most influencer on members team outcomes:

... Identity with the team should be developed ... especially the manager should listen and understand what's happening and what they feel in virtual team and try to motivate them and listen them ... (Khawla).

... My leader and others play their leadership role it is good to have different leaders at once in different fields ... (Khawla).

... It is essential that team members from different countries have different knowledge skills and educational backgrounds so here the manager are asked to combine their knowledge and skills and to make an exchange between different team members ... (Rami).

... If the tasks are well dispatched between the team members then I don't think there would be a problem of working or achieving the target ... (Rami).

... It totally depends on other team members and in case they are providing good working environment and cooperating very well and respecting other person comfort zone. Then I felt successful and satisfied ... (Miryam).

It is not easy to develop some of individual outcomes because of virtuality barriers:

... I think in virtual you cannot achieve a high satisfaction because it could be misunderstanding and you cannot know because the person cannot tell their dissatisfaction easily ... (Sana).

## Team Member Outcomes and Subsequent Commitment/Turnover Intentions

... I am attached emotionally to my team especially the ones I work with in France because she is so kind even I don't know her in reality and I think with my first experience she tries to help me a lot with difficult problems ... but ... If I have the possibility to change my work I will do so because I will feel more present in real office of work and I love to exchange experience and others skills ... (Khawla).

I would consider moving from the virtual work if I get a bigger chance to learn and develop my skills ... (Sana).

... I would change my position if I have more benefit and more opportunity to learn ... (Sana).

... There was no emotion with them in the start but step by step I developed with them some kind of friendship ... (Steve).

... I don't think that want to change my job because the problem I face on virtual work are not severe (Steve).

... Yes, sure I feel attached to the team I worked with I belong to network of colleagues and we shared same targets and tried our best to achieve the targets and fulfill the demand and make the success ... (Rami).

No attachment was developed because of the independent way of working that are characteristics of most of the virtual jobs, coupled with short time communication

... I work mostly independently and I don't communicate that long with my coworkers ... (Sana).

... I got a lots of chances to work in non-virtual position but this job has provided me a lot and helped me to take care of my baby child and take care of my house and gave comfortable zone and gave me a lot of knowledge and the managers were very communicative and caring to us ... (Miryam).

## Summary

This Forum opens up the critical topic of Millennial's experiences of virtual work. There are many points of direct relevance to HRD that can be noted. These include the importance of norms, routines, targets and working towards a clear vision. Many respondents mentioned the importance of the individual skills required for virtual work, but also raised the question of how they could best understand the skill-sets and capabilities of those they are dealing with virtually and have not direct met. Also of critical significance is leadership that encourages, motivates and sets the tone for virtual interactions. Finally, in terms of the impact of such work, many respondents mentioned the significance of relationships, shared understanding and a sense of shared achievement as factors that would motivate them to stay with an organization. As virtual work becomes more prevalent, it is incumbent on HRD professionals to better understand the opportunities and challenges presented by this work. The result will be the development of an optimal infrastructure of support to facilitate Millennial workers in their virtual work.

## References

- Bernazzani, S. (March 1, 2019). *23 Key Remote Work & Telecommuting Statistics for 2019*. <https://www.owllabs.com/blog/remote-work-statistics>.
- Hollenbeck, J. R., Beersma, B., & Schouten, M. E. (2012). Beyond team types and taxonomies: A dimensional scaling conceptualization for team description. *Academy of Management Review*, 37, 82–106.
- Hollenbeck, J. R., Ellis, A. P., Humphrey, S. E., Garza, A. S., & Ilgen, D. R. (2011). Asymmetry in structural adaptation: The differential impact of centralizing versus decentralizing team decision-making structures. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 114, 64–74.

## The Authors

Molka Mazghouni is originally from Tunisia and is a PhD student in the College of Business Administration, Chonnam National University (CNU), South Korea. She specialises in researching virtual teams. She has been central to the organisation of the International Conferences on Global Entrepreneurial Talent Management & Social Collaboration and has presented and published with various colleagues in the GETM3 project in which she works mainly in the workstream investigating young people.

Professor Ko Il-sang is a Professor in the College of Business Administration, Chonnam National University (CNU), South Korea. He has an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh, PA and a PhD from the University of Colorado, USA. His research interests are B2B electronic commerce, global collaboration, and firm's capacity and capability of IT applications. Il-sang was an original member of the GETM3 project team, leads the participation of CNU, and ensures

implementation of the project activities there, including chairing the International Conferences on Global Entrepreneurial Talent Management & Social Collaboration. He has undertaken secondments in the UK, Ireland, Slovenia, and Poland.

Samuel Clegg is an Associate Lecturer in entrepreneurship at the Newcastle Business School at Northumbria University, UK. He has first-hand experience working within start-ups having previously co-founded several businesses through accelerator programmes, and is currently the Managing Director of Highfly, a digital marketing agency based in Newcastle upon Tyne. He is also a business mentor through the Supply Chain North East regional development programme. Sam plays multiple roles on the GETM3 project: contributing to all workstreams, running social media communication, building the online dissemination platform, and championing social capital development. He has undertaken secondments in Ireland, Poland, Slovenia, and Korea.

