

5 TIPS FOR VIRTUAL TEAMS

By **FOONG SUET LING**

suetling.foong@leaderonomics.com

WITH emerging technology trends, the establishment of virtual teams is becoming more popular, especially in multinational companies.

As organisations streamline their processes and tasks, it is no surprise that certain jobs can be outsourced to countries with lower wages and be managed virtually by a team of subject matter experts to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

According to Wayne F. Cascio's research titled *Managing a virtual workplace*, there are multiple advantages and disadvantages when it comes to working virtually.

Feelings of isolation, cultural issues, and a lack of trust between team members may occur.

Here are five tips to mitigate the disadvantages:

1. INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS

Whenever there is any significant news going on in the countries your virtual team members are residing, try to make a point to connect with them and strike up a conversation.

This helps in showing concern and interest towards their current issues and will strengthen the bond between virtual colleagues.

If possible, turn on the webcam and have "virtual coffee" chats once in a while. It will be a good change from the usual verbal or email communication.

2. THE UNSPOKEN WORDS

Sometimes when we are in the midst of a virtual conference, not everyone is given equal chance to speak up.

It is worthwhile to connect with your virtual colleague privately after the call if he or she appeared to be unusually quiet during virtual meetings.

Since body language is absent during virtual interactions, you can only find out if something is amiss by deliberately reaching out to them.

3. BEING RESPONSIVE

Some virtual teams may feel a sense of isolation as they don't see their colleagues physically on a daily basis.

It would be ideal to respond to their emails or chats in the quickest manner just to make your presence felt by the other party.

4. VIRTUAL HANGOUT PLACE

Just like how Facebook brings friends and families together, it can be done for virtual teams too.

Sites like Yammer has similar functions to provide opportunities for asynchronous interactions, especially for teams scattered across the globe in different time zones.

Things shared in the "hangout place" can range from posting of wedding photos, sharing of best practices, tracking of team members' birthdays, etc. This helps people know each other better on a personal level.

5. TRAVEL

This can be done either by traveling to a place together, attending meetings or having an exchange programme for colleagues to experience each other's culture and enjoy each other's company.

Although this method involves more money, it will definitely be worthwhile to meet your virtual colleagues at least once, as nothing can fully replace the human touch element.