

*For Immediate Release*

**Collaborating From a Distance: Success Factors For  
Top Performing Virtual Teams**

*"Globally linked virtual teams will transform every government and company in the world.  
Any of our peers who don't do it won't survive."  
-John Chambers, CEO, Cisco*

Rising travel costs, coupled with the global dispersion of talent, are just some of the reasons that organizations have migrated toward virtual teamwork. While numerous organizations have made significant investments in virtual teams and the technology to support them, a surprising number of virtual teams are not reaching their full potential.

A new study conducted by OnPoint Consulting ([www.onpointconsultingllc.com](http://www.onpointconsultingllc.com)) surveyed 48 virtual teams across industries and found that there are specific practices associated with successful virtual teams. "We were surprised to find that many of the virtual teams in our study struggled with fundamental issues such as not having clear roles and responsibilities or not having a shared process for decision making" says Darleen DeRosa, managing partner at OnPoint Consulting, a firm that specializes in organizational and leadership issues.

What makes top performing virtual teams successful? "Our research identified nine practices that are the key ingredients for optimal virtual team performance", says DeRosa:

- **Team members demonstrate a high level of initiative.** Members of high performing teams are more proactive and engaged, and they demonstrate higher levels of initiative. Thus, it is important to ensure that team members have clear roles and celebrate team success. "One way to do this is by creating a team charter to enhance commitment and accountability", says DeRosa.
- **Team members are willing to assume leadership responsibility.** Even though the majority of teams had dedicated team leaders, team members on high performing teams proactively took on leadership responsibilities as required. In contrast, members of less effective teams were less likely to do this.
- **Teams have a shared process for decision making and problem solving.** Low performing virtual teams did not establish processes to facilitate problem solving and decision making. Effective team leaders ensure that communication processes are established early on and revisited over time.
- **Team members are clear about how their work contributes to the success of the organization.** High performing virtual teams have an understanding of how their work aligns

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with the strategy of their organization. This is extremely important in a virtual environment where team members may feel isolated and it is common for team members to become disengaged.

- **Provide timely feedback to one another.** Communication challenges are more pronounced in virtual teams, especially when there is a lack of face-to-face contact and time zone differences. However, high performing virtual teams find ways overcome these challenges.
- **Trust one another to get things done.** Trust is a top factor for virtual team success but task-based trust (a belief that team members will do their job) is especially difficult to develop when planned or spontaneous interactions among team members are infrequent and difficult to arrange. Trust builds when team members follow through on commitments and hold one another accountable for results.
- **Team members are willing to put in extra effort to get things done.** Team members of top performing virtual teams are willing to go above and beyond what is required to accomplish team goals. Therefore, it is important for team leaders to inspire team members and regularly monitor members' motivation.
- **Team members work together effectively.** Successful virtual teams have determined how to effectively collaborate. "If organizations invest time and resources in virtual teams, then it is important to capitalize on this and ensure that team members understand how to work together to achieve their goals. Successful teams develop operating guidelines to help structure team communication and coordination", says DeRosa.
- **Team members help one another achieve team goals.** High performing virtual teams involve team members rather than independently executing tasks and objectives. They place greater importance on leveraging others to get work done whereas less effective teams do not involve one another as frequently.

If organizations want to maximize their return on investment, they should ensure that these core practices are in place and continually assess the performance of their virtual teams against these factors over time.

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