

## How To Successfully Lead A Virtual Team

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Virtual teams are becoming as common as their non-virtual counterparts as an increasing number of organisations grapple with the challenges of working globally and also acknowledge the potential they offer to harness a range of skills, experience and ability. Here I will outline some steps you can take to ensure you **successfully lead your virtual team**.

### 1. Understand why you need a virtual team

Virtual teams are great when it comes to harnessing the best skills for your project. They enable you to share knowledge, skills and experience across a range of locations, functions or organisations and can be a cost and time effective way of managing work and delivering projects, especially if they're well led and have a clear purpose and ways of working.

### 2. Invest time to plan your strategy and goals

Linking the purpose of the team to the organisation's strategy is imperative. This will clarify the purpose and vision of the team creating a strong link between the work of the team and the big picture of the organisation. We say 'if you're not sure where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else.

But it's not just linking upwards, shared goals and objectives need to be in place within the team so each individual understands why they're there and exactly what their role is. The more variety there is in a team the more opportunity there is to use all available resources. But this takes careful planning in starting up your team and its way of working. Understanding each other's roles helps everyone understand the big picture and how their work is part of it.

### 3. Use a team's energy and innovation

Great **virtual teams** will unleash everyone's creativity and individual expertise. This means that the leader must have an in-depth understanding of the skill sets and approaches of individuals that make

up the team. Often **virtual teams** will work across boundaries and cultures so a leader must be able to create conversations and dialogue, engaging people and exploring issues and openly acknowledging barriers.

#### 4. **Conflict can be creative**

No team will ever run smoothly but when working virtually you don't always have the visual clues about conflict within a team. A leader will need to provide a safe and open forum where conflict can be explored. Group dynamics and spirit consists of all forces that create the working atmosphere and mentality of the group. Tuning in people to each other is a great way to overcome virtual distance created by technology.

By providing every individual with a chance to be heard, while maintaining a strong and structured process for decision-making, teams will often find more creative options for delivering and working together.

#### 5. **Remember that it doesn't all need to be virtual**

Being the leader of and part of a **virtual team** shouldn't mean you're restricted when it comes to meeting face-to-face, for example. Take the opportunity to bring the team together in one place, but do be wary of not alienating those who may not be able to take part in these face-to-face sessions. Also consider the individual. Build in one to one time in conversations to hear from each member individually.

As team leader it's your role to ensure the **smooth running of the virtual team**. Clearly, technology is the key factor to enable virtual team working so it's important to look at the new technology solutions on the market that will give your team a central, accessible place to share information and make virtual working as easy and hassle free as possible for everyone.

#### 6. **It's all about delivery**

High performing teams are those that deliver, at each stage and at every milestone in a project. Feedback on achieving goals and objectives is essential for all to have. A good leader will ensure that these goals and responsibilities are consistently and continuously met. Milestones, results, deliverables can be useful as outputs that show progress for a team towards its goals.

Bath Consultancy are now helping leaders of **virtual teams** develop their team charters for how they work together and address the issues outlined here as part of their team meetings.

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