

Work Preferences, Leadership and Virtual

Using the Team Management Profile in a Virtual World

The Types of Work Model

From a team performance perspective, understanding how virtual work affects the work functions if the Types of Work Model is very important. The points below illustrate common impacts on the various work functions and linking when a team is working virtually. These are tendencies and it may not fit for all teams so it is important to really consider how your own team may be different.



Maintaining – Key question - What's really important?

Maintaining can be a struggle for virtual teams is a specific way. Not so much the purpose of the team, shared values, or business goals, but What's Really Important to the individuals on the team.

The leader of the team really needs to make sure there is enough individual time spent in these conversations or things like engagement can become problematic quite quickly.

Advising – Key question – What do we need to know?

In virtual teams Advising is often initially performed well at a surface level. Virtual communication lends itself to good information sharing and everyone knows it's important to share information. The challenge is often achieving **shared understanding** of information since follow up interaction is so limited.

The leader needs to share their perspectives on what that information is saying, why it is important and push others to do so as well.

Innovating – Key question – What are the possibilities?

Innovating is often one of the most challenging work functions to perform In virtual teams since the patterns of interaction that typically support innovative interaction do not fit well with virtual environments. Often it can be important to schedule virtual team meetings to focus on nothing but innovating and to ask team members to prepare in advance for those innovating meetings.

Follow up by the leader is important after time is spent innovating. Getting back to people to check on whether their ideas were heard or if new ideas have emerged. Summarizing where ideas stand and being open to revisiting things if new information arises.

Promoting – Key question – Who needs to know about this?

Promoting on virtual teams is often a challenge because visibility is so constrained. This also means promoting is very important. Typically, the way in which a team does promoting changes considerably on a virtual team and often it will be the team leader that needs to drive this work.

The leader needs to ensure that in their promoting work, there is good balance in promoting the entire team as well individuals on the team. Also encourage team members to promote each other outside of the team.

Developing – Key question – What do we move forward with?

Developing tends to happen just fine in virtual teams; the big challenge is the PROCESS of how it happens! Since decisions are made here that will often allocate resources; power, and how it is used is important. Virtual communication does not lend itself well to challenging others' ideas, especially that of the leader. This means the Developing function can become autocratic quite fast since decisions need to be made 'efficiently'.

One way the leader can enhance good performance here is to ensure people have all the information needed to make a good decision and have the team prepare for a good Developing virtual meeting. A good leadership mantra is 'share information until you don't feel comfortable; then share more'!

Organizing – Key question - What needs to be in place to ensure this happens?

Organizing usually gets figured out fairly quickly in virtual teams since it is so important to producing results. Sometimes it can be effective to scale back participation! Letting a specific person focus on Organizing, knowing they need to get input from others, as needed, is very effective. If it's a new virtual team there is a high likelihood errors will be made here but if those can be treated more as 'learning the Organizing ropes' as a virtual team, then the team can continually improve in this area.

The leader can be instrumental in legitimizing a more directive approach to organizing so people don't feel alienated. At the same time it is important that the leader does not let more directive, become autocratic.

Producing – Key question - Are we effectively and efficiently delivering what is expected?

Virtual teams typically produce effectively, often more effectively than co-located teams! Don't be surprised initially if there is more duplication of effort than with face to face teams however. Not a bad thing, just something that needs continual improvement.

It can be important for the leader to make sure the team is building capacity and awareness for the performance of the other work functions of the Types of Work Model. At some point all of the work

functions will need to be performed and virtual teams can become so focused on producing they neglect other work functions.

Inspecting - Do we consistently check to ensure we are adhering to standards?

With virtual teams Inspecting is all about the outputs produced, are they up to standard? While the process of work needs to be made much more transparent on virtual teams, you are not Inspecting it! You are making it transparent and adapting it continually!

A leader should stay mostly away from Inspecting the process of how outputs are produced (unless the output does not meet standards). Don't Inspect if people are at their virtual desks, if they are working 'normal' hours etc. One of the key benefits of virtual work is flexibility, if a leader embraces this, virtual work realizes this benefit!

Linking - How do the work functions connect?

Linking changes A LOT on virtual teams! Not only how it is done but the frequency. You need lots more Linking on a virtual team!

For a leader often the best strategy initially is do more linking than you think necessary, be transparent about that and find a good balance over time. A good signal that too much Linking is happening is when the energy drops in your Linking activity or the silence is deafening! A sign that not enough Linking is happening is that too often people make decisions that need to be changed. As a leader, it is important to recognize that different individuals will have different Linking needs from you.