ROLE OF MANAGER IN GEOGRAPHICALLY DISTRIBUTED TEAM; A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Geographically Distributed Team is a team where members are dispersed in different locations across the globe and collaborate together to achieve a common goal. Such kind of team have the characteristics of both virtual team and global team. The team members work from far flung locations and relying heavily on computer mediated communication tools to interact and to collaborate with each other. The members work in different time zones and are culturally diverse. Managing such distributed team requires a different set of competence than a collocated team. The team leader or manager not only have to manage a team who may have never met or worked with each other before but also have different cultural orientation, working style, values and behaviours. This paper reviews research studies highlighting the managerial challenges of geographically distributed teams as faced by team leaders/ managers and also discuss managerial roles and behaviours that have been found to be effective in overcoming those challenges and to build an effective distributed team.

Keywords: Geographically Distributed Teams, Virtual Teams, Leadership, Management, Communication, Trust, Cultural Diversity

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1. INTRODUCTION

Geographically Distributed Team is a team which has members dispersed across globally and collaborate together to achieve a common goal. Such team have the characteritiscs of both a virtual and a multicultural team. The team members are working form far flung locations have limited or no interaction in person with each other and are highly dependent on computer mediated communication tools to interact and collaborate with each other. GDT provide certain benefits to organisation in terms of access to people who are expert in their domain located across the globe, working 24/7 due to different time zones, reduced mobility costs and sharing

knowledge across geographic boundaries and organizational units and sites. In spite of these benefits there are a number of challenges that GDT faces in comparison to collocated team some of them are communication and collaboration difficulties, low level of engagement by team members, longer time to build trust and feeling of isolation, social distance between members and challenges in monitoring and managing team performance (Dulebohn & Hoch, 2017). Also being located in different countries they are culturally diverse. The members of such team have different working style, time orientation and cultural differences which can interfere in their teamwork quality.

1.1. Managerial Challenges

(Barczak & McDonough, 2003) classifies the challenges of managing GDT into interpersonal & programmatic challenges. Interpersonal Challenges faced by manager are ensuring members communicate amongst each other and building relationship & trust to foster collaboration. Programmatic issues are keeping project on schedule, within budget, having required resources, and keeping project focus.

(Oertig & Buerger, 2006) list the managerial challenges faces by project leaders of GDT's. Managing virtual communication among members in located at different time zones who have a short overlapping time window. Lack face to face interaction in distributed team do not offer any opportunity to have conversation, knowing each other and building social ties. This also explains the reason why developing trust takes a longer time in such teams. Members should be able to trust each other's ability and expertise this can aggravate if there are a large number of members exiting and new members joining the team during the assignment/project.

Language and culture are the next big challenge which the managers have to deal with especially if English is not the first language of all the members. Recognition and interpretation of different communication patterns which primarily involves pace of speech, accent, slang, anecdote, meaning of 'yes' or being silent, style of communication i.e. reading between the lines etc. can create misunderstanding and miscommunication among teams.

This paper reviews research studies pointing out the challenges of managing geographically distributed teams. It identifies roles and behaviours that have been found to be effective in building an effective GDT team. This review paper will be useful for a GDT's manager or team leaders to understand what role and behaviour can have positive impact on team performance.

1.2. Mintzberg's Managerial Roles

Mintzberg (1990) highlighted ten roles manager derived from the authority and status at various organisations which has provided to him to fulfil the work requirements.

Table 1.3 depicting Managerial Roles by Mintzberg

S.No	Role	Description
Interpersonal Role		
1.	Figurehead Role	Attending Ceremonial Programs.
2.	Leader	Motivate and encourage subordinates; align individual needs with organisational needs.
3.	Liaison	Make contacts with external stakeholders of the organisation.
Informational Role		Have access to information more than what subordinate knows due to formal and easy access to various entities in and outside organisation.
4.	Monitor	Scan environment for information, elicit information from different entities and through informal contacts
5.	Disseminator	Shares and passes the necessary information to subordinates

Role of Manager in Geographically Distributed Team;

S.No	Role	Description
6.	Spokesperson	Keeps important stakeholders inside and outside the organisation informed with the progress of work.
	Decisional Roles	Formal Authority and being resourceful with required information, can make decisions on behalf of his team or organisation.
7.	Entrepreneur	Initiates and approves for new projects, improvement and change programs,
8.	Disturbance Handler	Respond to high pressures, contingency of uncertain environment, unanticipated consequences.
9.	Resource Allocators	Make complex choice of allocation,
10.	Negotiator	Make negotiation on behalf of organisation due to bestowed authority, resource and possess information

All the ten-role defined by Mintzberg work together as one role will have impact on the other like unless the manager has all the required information, he can take an effective decision neither can pass any useful information to his subordinates. However, manager's as per the nature of work may enact some role more than the other roles. These roles cannot be shared among team members unless they reintegrate them into one entity. The informational role being the most challenging as it would involve the difficulty of sharing the full managerial information acquired mainly by verbal interactions. This role can also not be split into internal and external as they have bearing on each other when it comes to taking decisions. These roles were derived by assessing the activities managers do on day to day basis in coordinating work with their team located along with manager. But in today's time when the team members and manager are working in a virtual work environment where members are dispersed across various countries and are working in different time zones are these roles still effective? What are those new roles managers are required to be played for effective team management?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Leslie, Dalton, Ernst, & Deal, 2002) in their study investigated what managerial roles listed by Mintzberg (1990) are effective and ineffective in global context. The study classify manager in to low and high global context in terms of number of countries a manager manages, and the number of times zones a manager works in. The results showed that in high global context, roles like innovator which involves sharing of knowledge and taking initiative; negotiator which involves translating plans into action and ability to manage conflict positively impacts manager's effectiveness whereas liaison, monitor, decision maker role were not found to be very relevant.

Table 2.1 Showing Effective Managerial Roles in Global Context.

S.No	Roles	Effective in
1.	Monitor: scan environments, monitor units, probe and seek information, act as corporate nerve center of incoming information	Not effective in any context
2.	Spokesperson: communicate and disseminate information with multiple levels of the internal and extra-organizational system, advocate and represent the organization	Low global context
3.	Innovator: Come with inventive ideas; experiment with new concepts and ideas	High Global Context
4.	Leader: motivate, coach, build teams, maintain corporate climate and culture, and supervise the work of others.	
5.	Liaison: network, coordinate, link entities, and span organizational boundaries	Not effective in any context
6.	Decision maker: take action, troubleshoot, make decisions, and use power to get things done.	Not effective in any context
7.	Negotiator: make deals, translate strategy into action, negotiate contracts, manage conflict, and confront others	Most effective in high global context

Leadership Effectiveness when assessed from team member's perspective in a global virtual team it was found that out of the eight-leadership role listed by Denison (1995) the most impactful was one of the Mentor Role. An effective leader as mentor exhibit high degree of empathy towards members, is assertive without being overbearing or inflexible, provides regular, detailed and prompt communication and clarifies role and responsibility of each virtual team members (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002).

Table 2.2 Leadership roles for Managers defined by Denison (1995).

S.no	Role	Description
1	Innovator	Come with inventive ideas; experiment with new concepts and ideas
2	Broker	Exert upward influence in the organisation; influence decision made at higher levels.
3	Producer	Ensured that I met short term stated goals; ensure that I met long term stated goals.
4	Director	Made my role very clear, clarified my priorities and directions
5	Coordinator	Anticipated problems and avoided crisis; brought a sense of order to my work
6	Monitor	Was in control of his/her work; compared records, reports and so on to detect any potential problems
7	Facilitator	Surfaced key difference among team members and then worked participative to resolve them, encouraged participative decision making.
8	Mentor	Showed empathy and concern in dealing with me; treated me in a sensitive, caring way.

The leadership effectiveness in GDT is a strong predictor of role clarity, communication satisfaction and communication effectiveness in terms of frequency, clarity and quality within the distributed team. The communication approach of effective leaders is promptly responding to questions, acknowledging suggestions, directing activities of team, clearly stating each member's tasks and consulting with team before setting deadlines. Also, such leaders are sensitive, caring, appreciates, empathises and take interest in knowing the team members. Ineffective leaders do not clarify responsibilities, do not follow up well and are not much involved in the group (Kayworth & Leidner, 2002).

Team diversity is another challenge in distributed team which creates negative outcomes in terms of reducing team innovative capacity and effectiveness. The main problems of diverse team are failure to collaborate, lack of trust and goodwill among members and failure of knowledge sharing. Distributed teams form subgroups based on the surface level diversity in terms of nationality, gender, age and location at the initial stage of team development and in later stage based on deeper level of diversity related to personal values, attitudes and dispositions.

An effective leader in such diverse team are ones who keep switching between two styles of leadership Task-Oriented and Relationship-Oriented as the team progress from initial stage of formation to development. Task-Oriented leader lays greater emphasis on task at hand by creating detailed project plan, building tight schedules, setting high but realistic performance goals and is accessible to members in order to provide all the information required to work. Such style works well at the initial stages of team formation where members become aware of each other's skills and expertise but may not know them personally. But as the team progress the Relationship Oriented style is more effective, wherein the leader builds the culture of the team, is kind and gives respect, fosters trust and cooperation (Gratton, Voigt, & Erickson, 2007).

(Chen, Wu, Yang, & Tsou, 2008) confirms that leaders who exhibit diversified role listed by Denison (1995) are more effective in a virtual environment. The most effective role is the producer's role in which manager focuses more on task completion as per the deadlines a virtual team has to meet. However, when it comes to build team trust producer role is the least effective compared to the other role of leader.

(Plotnick, Hiltz, Ocker, Rutkowski, & Rosson, 2008) proved that leadership configuration has no significant effect on building trust among sub team and other sub team members. The leadership configuration is of three types centralised, decentralised and hierarchical. In the centralised leadership, there is one leader for both sub team, decentralised in this each sub team will have a leader collocated with the team and hierarchical in this leader of both sub team report to overall leader of the team. The level of trust between sub teams is correlated to team performance and sub team leader effectiveness is associated with both trust within the sub team and trust between sub teams irrespective of the configuration of leader.

(Joshi, Lazarova, & Liao, 2009) applies the theory of leadership and social identity to investigate the impact of inspirational leadership in enhancing team effectiveness of geographically distributed teams. The inspirational leader creates and communicates common vision for the team, shows confidence in team members and encourages interpersonal interaction among team members. The study proves that inspirational leaders are important antecedent to team effectiveness in geographically distributed teams and positively impacts team commitment, team trust in GDT and ultimately team performance.

(Al-Ani, Horspool, & Bligh, 2011) propose a framework for leaders of GDT. The team members of a GDT identified effective leadership roles when team is collocated with leader and with team members are not at the same site of leader. The two aspect of effective leadership listed topmost were Project Management skill like setting goals, decision making and delivering project results and the other was People Management skills like ability to listen, patient, managing conflict, strong communication skills, fostering trust and respect among team members. Establishing common vision for the team and technical competence were last in the list.

Table 2.3 Framework for leaders of GDT

Stages of VT Team	Concerns	Capabilities Strongly Related
Preparation	Defining purpose of team, selection of team members combining specialist and knowledge resource from different location, designing of task and incentive to encourage team cooperation.	Cognitive
Launch	Developing relationships, Building Trust, Team cohesiveness and shared identity. Building Shared Context, Promote Sense of Oneness. Increased team interaction. Clear Communication of Objectives.	Social
Performance Management	Promoting motivation and in-group knowledge management; Switch role to Coach and Moderator, Developing Shared Understanding, Managing Knowledge, Develop Shared Team Identify, Maintaining Interpersonal Trust, Transparent Performance Evaluation Criteria	Social & Behavioural
Team Development	Assessing the training needs or deficits and develop training program for team members. Encourage Learning, Coach, emphasise experimentation and provide valuable feedback.	Cognitive & Behavioural
Disbanding	Recognising the individual and team achievements, motivating to re-integrate in future.	Cognitive & Social

(Mukherjee, Lahiri, Mukherjee, & Billing, 2012) through review of several research studies on the leadership identified three capabilities of leaders required in a leader to manage a GDT. Cognitive capability is ability to think, judge and synthesize information with an aim to influence others to make voluntarily decisions. Social capability relates to interpersonal skills. Thirdly, behavioural capability relates to personal behaviour which can influence members of diverse constituents to think and function in the best interests of the organization.

These capabilities are related to effective leadership as the virtual team goes through the five stages of lifecycle.

The leaders of GDT have to utilise their capabilities according to the stage at which the team is which enhances effectiveness of GDT.

(Davidson, 2013) pointed out task focussed leadership is more effective in managing geographically distributed teams. The leader should focus on managing meetings and work, creating visibility for the team, facilitating team member contact, knowledge sharing and establishing team structures and processes.

(Erez, 2015) Identified three global characteristic cultural intelligence, global identity and openness to cultural diversity makes a leader highly effective in multicultural teams. Leaders who are high on global identity are able generate a sense of belongingness, serves as a role model and unite the culturally diverse team members into a single coherent global team.

(Lisak, Erez, Sui, & Lee, 2016) examines Team Leaders high global identity impact on team innovativeness. The limited research has been conducted to test the direct relationship between leadership behaviour and team performance. Studies which looked into the effect of team diversity had a mixed result which have mediating and moderating effects. Thus, relationship between leader's global identity behaviour's impact on team innovation have been studied indirectly by introducing global leaders fostering team-shared innovation goals and team communication inclusion mediating effect on team innovation. This relationship was moderated by team member perceived cultural diversity.

(Hill & Bartol, 2016) confirms that distributed form of leadership encourages collaboration among members of GDT. An empowering leader is way more effective in managing GDT's than any communication and information tool. An empowering leader, leads by example, believes in participative decisions making, coaches his/her team members, keeps them informed about team's goals and is concerned for the team. Empowering leaders fosters collaborative behaviours among members and positively influence their performance in a virtual team.

3. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The role of a team leader or manager in managing a GDT is much greater than collocated teams by recognising differences in team members, employing member's talent to achieve synergy and synchronization of communication in an effective way. Managing such team would require a different set of skill and competencies than for a collocated team. The team leader or managers not only have to manage a team who may have never met or worked each other before but also understand the different cultural orientation in terms of work style, values and norms.

3.1. Fostering Trust

In distributed team where communication between members are highly dependent on computer mediated tools role of leaders in fostering trust has been to be essential ingredient in team effectiveness (Chen et al., 2008). Managers can build trust by encouraging open communication with team members about sharing their views and thoughts and treating all team member equally (Barczak & McDonough, 2003). Developing trust and mutual respect enables mutual interaction and free flow of knowledge and information sharing (Oertig & Buergi, 2006).

3.2. Inclusive Communication

In GDT, member' lacks physical proximity with each other, leaders are critical "missing link" in order to build commitment and trust (Joshi et al., 2009). Inclusive communication behaviour like setting rule of engagement among team member and leader-member communication which involves clarity in role and goals, equal distribution of information, being considerate to members of all location and setting communication norms are essential component in fostering collaboration in distributed teams (Davidson, 2013). Inclusive Communication helps members to overcome conflict, develop understanding and build trust for a cross cultural team to performance. Communication inclusion is required to motivate team members to interact as who are highly multicultural. Team Communication Inclusion are the efforts by leader to communicate with other members by using simple easy understandable words, familiar concepts and ensuring that other members have understood the message. Leader who convey sense of inclusion to their team positively influence culturally diverse team to unite around shared innovation goals (Lisak et al., 2016).

3.3. Being Culturally Sensitive

The team diversity found in global teams poses two main problems; failure to collaborate and failure of knowledge sharing due to subgroup formation based on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, functionality, tenure in the organisation, education level and nationality. The leaders behaviour and style plays a vital role in enhancing collaboration and flow of knowledge in such teams (Gratton et al., 2007).

Behaviours of Team Leaders which help multicultural team to perform and achieve its goals are fostering team communication inclusion, respect team cultural diversity, treat multicultural team as one inclusive team (Lisak et al., 2016). The leaders who develop tolerance towards ambiguity are able to connect with dispersed members and appreciate the diversity in team. Such leaders facilitate greater cohesion leading to enhanced members satisfaction and their improved work-life balance in GDT.

Managers to adopt collaborative leadership style involving recognising and appreciating people, showing empathy, managing extrovert and introvert personality during meeting, prompting quite team members to speak during conference calls. Facilitating and encouraging frequent communication among distributed members is critical to share information to the team members. Emailing complex and detailed documents in advance of teleconference calls helps to team members less fluent in language to process information and understand better. Holding regular progress meeting to keep team focussed on project goals, maintaining commitment, enhancing motivation, maintaining relationships. Also having face to face meeting during the initial phases of team formation was also found to be helpful in building the rapport among team members (Oertig & Buergi, 2006).

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