

Review of the book “Leading and developing virtual teams. Practical lessons learned from university students”

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Virtual teams represent undoubtedly a topic of increasing popularity in any organization nowadays and an area of research which is rapidly being developed into new courses in higher education programs. Fostering a productive virtual work environment is challenging, but as remote work is becoming more and more common, it is now a necessity. “Leading and developing virtual teams. Practical lessons learned from university students” provides a critical overview of the concepts and theoretical models of virtual teams as well as relevant empirical data from academics and students in an international perspective for illustration. I am really pleased to see this monograph and I welcome the authors’ work and their contribution to the massive growth and development of the field of teamwork in the virtual context. The book consists of four chapters in addition to introduction examining key theoretical work, thoughtful review of previous research and providing critical empirical data to place different aspects of virtual teams in the context of an emerging competence develop in students within the university. It begins with a literature review on virtual teams, moves onto defining and discussing the concept of e-leadership and the development of e-leadership skills, and then looks at managing performance in virtual teams and ends with specific tools for developing virtual teamwork skills in university students. The first chapter entitled “Evolution of virtual teamwork in a historical perspective” tackles the characteristics of virtual team in a comprehensive approach, from definitions to taxonomies, benefits, and challenges, and ways of developing multicultural and virtual teamwork skills. The definitions of virtual team in a chronological perspective offers the opportunity to evaluate the main factors seen as important from the 1991 to nowadays. Thus, the author comes up with an integrated definition of the virtual teams: “the virtual teams consist of participants who are ge-

ographically distributed, work interdependent, and knowledge flows between members are facilitated through communication technologies”. A great emphasis is put on virtual communication as a core and ubiquitous process that enables the members’ interactions, planning, collaboration, and task accomplishment. Trust, collaboration process and task clarification are also discussed in a systematic and critical analysis of the previous research. Despite its popularity, working in virtual teams can pose challenges and difficulties. Based on the previous research, the author pinpoints the gap in empirical research and employs a study to identify the factors that influence the development of multicultural and virtual team skills in students. The data was collected from academics from two universities (Polish and Romanian) and a comparative analysis has been conducted. The results reveal similarities and differences in the participants’ perception of methods of developing multicultural and virtual team skills in students. These interesting results can be a promising beginning for a comprehensive program and practical courses that fit the very specific context of each university. The second chapter brings into attention a critical component of virtual teams, namely, leadership. Leading any team involves managing people, technical oversight, and tasks management, but leaders of virtual teams perform these functions from afar. Although there are many benefits of working with virtual team members, managing remote teams can be complicated. Understanding how to lead virtual teams can be crucial to team success. This chapter walks the reader through the main theoretical inputs of leading a team with its members scattered across the globe, keeping them organized, communicative, and productive without face to face interactions. Then, challenges for e-leadership – technology, communication, and trust – are analysed and competencies and practices of e-leadership are well documented in the literature. In a remarkable way, the author discusses emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence highlighting the need to consider such dimensions in studying and leading virtual teams. The last section deals with the empirical research conducted among Polish and Romanian students to identify the e-leadership skills in a comparative analysis. Trustworthiness, E-technology competence, self-leadership skills, cultural intelligence, spiritual intelligence were assessed. Descriptive statistics are provided, and preliminary tests have suggested the main differences only depending on students’ familiarity with virtual teams. Other differences concerned students’ nationality or gender. The chapter ends with practical guidelines for developing e-leadership skills given the data revealed by the empirical research employed in the project. The third chapter tackles the topic of managing performance of the virtual teams. The concept of team effectiveness benefits from a thorough review of the research in both traditional and virtual teams. The review leads to specific factors influencing the performance and shaping the process

of performance evaluation in virtual teams. Despite the similarities between the antecedents of success in traditional teams and virtual team, special attention should be paid to the factors like technology, the policy of human resources, the learning and development programs, the characteristics of the team processes, organizational cultures, leadership, and personal mastery. Task interdependence, type of team, team composition and team processes emerge as the most critical antecedents of effectiveness in virtual team. Drawing upon the well-known IPO model (Input-Processes-Output), the author sums up the performance models for the virtual team stressing the role of the leader for team's success. Next, individual characteristics as a critical predictor for team performance are considered. A potential relationship between generation characteristics related to millennials or generation Z and preference for working in virtual teams is inferred. Consequently, an empirical study complements the approach of managing performance in the third chapter. A cross-sectional study was performed among a large sample of Polish and Romanian students. The analyses of perceived team effectiveness and challenges related to working in virtual teams depict differences between Polish and Romanian students and reiterate the importance of previous experience in virtual teams for the team performance. This empirical study pinpoints the potential factors influencing team effectiveness and breaks new ground in exploring its predictors. Also, the data might inform the university policies and practices to boost the productivity, efficiency and collaboration of the virtual teams. The last chapter presents specific tools and strategies for students in the process of shaping their competence of teamwork in a virtual environment to better adapt to future organizational requirements. Tutoring, coaching, mentoring are discussed as methods to leverage teaching and developing virtual teamwork skills. A field study to illustrate the process of working in a multicultural and virtual team was designed in order to deepen the understanding of the topic. Although the data were merely qualitative and descriptive, the conclusions suggest that the students are willing and open to working in multicultural and virtual teams despite the difficulties they face. All in all, the data is worth considering for improving the university programs and professional learning in higher education. The last section of the chapter –“Recommendation for the implementation of virtual teaching methods”–adds valuable reflections on virtual teaching and learning and provides advice to cope with the current requirements of technologically mediated communication, building collaboration remotely and ensuring high-quality results. To sum up, I appreciate that this is a valuable book, significant in many ways, as much for the theoretical review, insights, guidelines, and suggestions as for the many equally important questions and issues that it raises. This book provides essential reading to

those interested in virtual teams and will be an indispensable companion on management courses in leveraging virtual team work competencies in students. Academics, students, anyone interested in virtual teams would benefit from reading this book. Firstly, one of the great strengths of the book is the way the authors integrate research from across the social sciences, including management, organizational behavior and psychology. It complements and extends previous work in the field and can be a starting point to explore further issues of virtual teamwork in the academic context. Secondly, at a time of impending changes for organizations and universities, this book comes up with solutions being a comprehensive, highly practical account of the emergent topic of team work in the virtual context. Given that the book is built on an appropriate base of theory and concepts concerning working in virtual teams alongside empirical data from the academic context and it offers an adequate understanding of leading and developing virtual teams, in my capacity as a reviewer, I appreciate that the book meets the requirements for a monograph. I would end considering that, based on the knowledge provided by this book, virtual teams can be a mission possible!