



Managing Virtual Teams

hello@focusu.com



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Virtual Teams Are Here To Stay..... 2

Chapter 2: Work Delegation..... 4

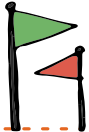
Chapter 3: Communication & Collaboration..... 7

Chapter 4: Productivity Management..... 10

Chapter 5: Motivation & Engagement..... 13

Chapter 6: Performance Management, Rewards & Training..... 17

Conclusion..... 22





Chapter 1:

Virtual Teams Are Here To Stay

The Coronavirus pandemic has made it necessary for many companies to adopt virtual operations. But the truth is, virtual teams were growing in popularity even before the pandemic.

According to a [survey by BlueFace](#), there will be just as many fully-remote workers, as there are in-office workers, by 2025. Leaders and managers must learn how to manage these virtual teams to ensure productivity and performance doesn't take a hit.

Virtual teams come with a unique set of challenges that in-office teams don't suffer from, such as:

- Disengagement from the team.
- Lack of discipline and the resultant loss of productivity.
- Poor communication & misinterpretation.
- Lack of synergy in team collaboration
- Absence of work-life balance.





It is the manager's job to address these challenges and ensure operations are smooth and the team remains engaged.

In this eBook, we look at how managers and leaders can successfully:

- Delegate tasks & resources virtually
- Create a collaborative virtual environment
- Manage the team's productivity remotely
- Motivate virtual teams and create a virtual community
- Evaluate virtual team performance & administer rewards
- Administer training to remote workers to improve performance



Image Credits: Pexels





Chapter 2:

Work Delegation

Delegating tasks when working face-to-face is indeed significantly easier. But, with a bit of planning, managers can delegate work remotely as well. Here's how you can do this:



1. Delegate based on skills & expertise

Just as with offline teams, delegate based on skills & expertise. This way you'll never have to worry if your remote team members are able to complete the allocated tasks or not.

If no one in your team has the skills needed to take up a certain task, consider training someone to handle the work and then delegate the task.



2. Use work schedules

Create a work schedule that contains the work allocation details of each team member. Specify in detail what milestones or goals are expected from each task. Either share the employee's work plan with them directly or make the schedule viewable to everyone in the team. This way your team will be able to better co-ordinate virtually.



3. Forward important work emails with the entire team

As the manager, you will be running point on all projects. When you're working in-office, it's easy to share any project updates. But this can't happen with remote teams. So it's best practice to share important project emails with the entire team, so that work delegation and resource allocation becomes easier.

Your team will also become aware about company priorities and expectations and will be able to adjust their approach accordingly.



4. Appoint someone as second-in-command

Let's say you need to take a day off. You need to have someone who can delegate tasks and allocate resources in your absence. It's important to always share your work allocation schedules with someone else and to train them on how to delegate during your absence.



5. Regularly follow-up

While micromanagement is detrimental to your virtual teams' success, it is necessary to keep your employees committed to their tasks. Regularly following up and asking for updates about each task's completion rates will help you understand whether the project is progressing according to schedule or not, and if you need to delegate any new tasks to your team.



MANAGING THE EXPENSES OF VIRTUAL TEAMS

Even virtual teams, with their task delegations and resource allocations, come with expenses. Accountability is necessary to ensure your team doesn't abuse the virtual nature of their job, to generate unwarranted expenses.

If you want to keep the expenses of your virtual team low, here's what you need to do:

- Ask your team to use their personal resources (for example, their home internet, personal laptop, personal mobile phone etc.) when working. Reimburse on actuals.
- For purchases, provide a virtual credit card with a limit. Budget how much each team member can spend and don't allow overspending.
- Use expense automation & invoice processing software to track expenses. Ask the team to upload photos of every bill they generate, while making claims.
- Track employee spending in real-time with expense tracking software and notify team members when they reach their limits.



Image Credits: Pixabay



Chapter 3:

Communication & Collaboration

Virtual teams can have so many communication and collaboration problems, purely because colleagues aren't present nearby to seek clarification. A part of your job is to facilitate seamless communication and collaboration between team members.

Some of the things you can do are:



1. Hold daily catch-ups by call

Schedule conference calls every day, first thing in the morning. These calls allow your team to discuss their individual performance. Your team will be able to share insights about the work they're doing, task completion rate, and issues they're currently facing.



2. Get everything on email

Since it's difficult to share information when working virtually, it's best to get every conversation and every decision documented on email. Appoint someone in the team to take notes and share the minutes of the meeting with the rest of the team.





If your team members communicate with each other, ask them to expressly spell out their intent and their requirements in the mail, so there's no ambiguity.



3. Put web meetings to good use

Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx and Google Meet are excellent for holding video conferences. These web meetings are a great way to address any confusion or queries that your team members may have about their tasks. They are also a great way to boost team engagement and reduce the social disconnect that comes when working remotely.



4. Facilitate informal communication

In addition to formal routes of communication, you can improve team collaboration by making available informal channels.

Messaging tools like Slack and Whatsapp allow your team members to chat with each other, share files & folders and schedule meetings. This way, your team can communicate and collaborate without your intervention.



5. Software helps for collaboration

Collaboration technology empowers your virtual teams and allows your employees to become in-sync with each other.





Dropbox is great for sharing your files and documents with a large number of people. Google Docs allows you to work collaboratively on files, make notes, and write comments that others can action later. Tools like Concept Inbox and Codingteam are great if your team works on visual elements or develops software. You can also use project management tools like Basecamp, which allows your team to seamlessly work together online.



6. Provide instantaneous feedback & support

When working face-to-face, you can easily offer feedback and bring your team back on-track, if they're going wrong. But this is challenging when you're virtual.

This is why it's important that you immediately address any issue or negativity the moment you notice it. Encourage your team to approach you for anything they need. Having an open-door policy when working virtually helps.



7. Create a remote collaboration process that everyone has to follow

As best practice, develop a standardized collaboration process that every person has to follow. This will prevent any communication from being missed out. Any issues or deviations from the procedure will be highlighted quickly





Chapter 4:

Productivity Management

Studies show that employees are 77% more productive when working virtually. So, if you're worried whether your virtual team will be productive or not, don't be.

But you do need to remember that not every employee is this conscientious and hard working. A few rotten apples can reduce your team's overall productivity. These virtual productivity management practices can help you here:



1. Create deadlines for each task

Having deadlines for every task and milestone is a great way to know if your team is productive or not. When they meet these deadlines, it is indicative that tasks are being completed when they should be.



2. Determine which metrics are worth tracking

Some metrics can only be calculated when you are working in-office. It isn't fair to subject your virtual team to these metrics. So, choose metrics that you can monitor and evaluate remotely.





Examples of a few metrics which you can track remotely include:

- Number of new leads/site visits generated
- Number of leads/customers contacted
- Call volume in a day
- Revenue generated per call/email
- Response time on call, email and chat box
- Number of customer issues resolved in one hour
- Number of projects worked on
- Number of issues flagged in a day/week
- Leave rate of each employee



3. Ask your team to fill-in time sheets every day (if you think it can help)

Time sheets are a great way of checking if your virtual teammates are putting-in the required daily hours or not. Alternatively, you can ask them to check-out every day with the work that they have accomplished on that day.





4. Use project management tools to generate productivity reports

Project management tool like Scoro & ProofHub can help you track metrics like task completion rate, time taken to perform each task, billable hours, extra unscheduled hours worked etc.

Other productivity tools like Time Doctor and Toggl, allow you to generate various reports such as inactivity report, daily timeline report, attendance report, project completion report etc. These tools also track a variety of integrations and software, helping you see what website/software your employee was using while working.



5. Allocate daily quota when possible

If your employees' jobs are quantifiable, then it makes sense to give them a daily quota. The key here is to give them a quota that challenges them, but doesn't stretch them so much that they focus on quantity over quality.

Tip to remember: Before implementing productivity monitoring tools, inform your team about your decision.

This way there'll be complete transparency and won't be breaching their privacy



Image Credits: Pixabay





Chapter 5: Motivation & Engagement

It can be very difficult to inspire and influence remote workers, because you're physically not present to show them your support. The geographical distance can cause a psychological distance between employees and lead to team members not developing good relationships with each other.

This is why you need to implement the right tactics to motivate your employees:



1. Create physical presence even when you're working remotely

A lot of times, just seeing a colleague's face can make employees feel energized and engaged with the rest of the team. You can create physical presence by organizing daily video conferences (a short 5-10 minute meeting on Zoom or Skype can work wonders).



2. Use visual scoreboards

Visual scoreboards are spreadsheets that track each employee's performance in the team. They stimulate friendly competition amongst team members.





You can use visual scoreboards to motivate your virtual team by openly complementing and rewarding their good performance.



3. Show your team how they contribute to the company's success

Many virtual employees fail to see how they fit-into the company. You can help them feel more connected to your team and the rest of the company, by giving them concrete examples of their contribution.

Actively share updates about the company, your department and your team. Any achievements, milestones met and good news should be shared. You can either announce these on your daily videocall or send out a weekly newsletter with all the information.



4. Recognize employees for their contribution

If you've seen the movie The Intern, you'll remember how the company has a bell that's rung every time an employee does something good or if a team achieves a goal. That's an example of an employee recognition tool. You can mimic the same virtually as well.





For example, encourage your team members to publicly share any instance when a teammate went out of their way to help them. If your team achieves something, even if it's a small goal, acknowledge it and praise them for it.

ENGAGING EMPLOYEES

Engagement is just as important as motivation when managing remote workers. Here are some things you can do:

- Start a “Get to know your teammate” program. Every week, nominate an employee to share a short write-up about themselves, with information about their hobbies, dreams, favorites etc.
- Organize weekly quizzes where your employees can get on call, form teams and compete in friendly quiz competitions.
- Play Pictionary. You have many online drawing tools like Skribbl and Drawize, which you can use to play Pictionary with each other. You can also play other multi-player games like Scrabble online.
- Organize **virtual wellness** retreats every month. These could be yoga & meditation sessions or silence retreats. Let the event last for 1-2 hours, during which time your team can unwind and reenergize.





- Hold online group exercise sessions and encourage your team to come on video while they workout with their colleagues.
- Organize a movie evening each month. Have your team vote for a movie and stream the movie for everyone to watch together. If your team likes to read, then you can organize monthly book club meetings as well.
- Use tools like Donut, which are specifically designed for engagement. This tool randomly pairs employees together, and the pair can start a conversation on the Donut platform. Once the session is over, the pair is disbanded and re-paired with a new person.



Image Credits: Pixabay





Chapter 6:

Performance Management, Rewards & Training

A very important part of managing virtual teams is performance management. Here are a few steps you need to follow:



1. Provide clear goals and set expectations from the start

Since you don't have the opportunity to physically meet your virtual teams, you need to set your expectations and clarify goals at the outset. This way, your team will be constantly aware of what they must achieve and will channel their efforts accordingly



2. Organize peer-to-peer and manager-to-subordinate feedback sessions regularly.

Manager-to-subordinate feedback is an excellent way to understand the struggles your employees are facing with their roles. You can use this session to plan for their current & future performance.

Peer-to-peer feedback is very useful if your employees are having trouble





with the fundamentals of the task and need advice/support from someone who has hands-on experience doing the task.



3. Document everything for appraisal

Documentation is essential when you're appraising and managing virtual teams. Every document your team works on, every email they send, every report they generate and every feedback they receive must be documented. They are evidence of your team's skills, competencies and achievements. They will help you take a more informed decision during the employee appraisal stage.



4. Share everything that employees need for PIPs

Performance improvement plans are difficult to administer remotely. Your virtual employees may hesitate to ask you for help or may not know what to for. This can be detrimental to your PIP.

This is why you need to make available in advance, everything they possible need for their performance improvement plan. Encourage them to reach out to you for support.





REWARDING GOOD PERFORMERS REMOTELY

Good performers deserve good rewards. Compensation and benefits aside, you'll need to do a lot more to reward your remote employees.



1. Use an intranet social network to publicly praise and reward employees

According to the results of a [Gallup workplace survey](#), most employees would rather receive public recognition for their stellar performance, than a hike in salary. An intranet social network allows you to publicly recognize and reward an employee.



2. Reward top performers with online perks

You can give your best performers a variety of online perks such as - membership to a new tech platform/software, fully-paid access to training materials, coupons to an eCommerce store, tickets to an online event etc.



3. Call-up your employee and compliment them face-to-face

There's nothing more satisfying for your workers, than to have you personally call them up and praise them for their effort. Host a video call. You can even invite your own managers for the conversation – this is a greater honor for your team.





4. Send them gifts

From thank-you notes to flowers to donuts to tablets, you can mail your remote team a variety of gifts to their physical geographical address. Such gifts are especially good for employees who have recently received a promotion or who have reached a career milestone in your company.

IMPLEMENTING VIRTUAL TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Rewards are just one part of performance management. Training is another. Here's how you can train poor performers in your virtual team:



1. Collect information from your team through online surveys & polls

It's important that you administer online surveys, quizzes and polls to your remote workers, to collect information about their knowledge gaps and needs. Your surveys and quizzes could either be topical to judge subject matter awareness. Or, it could be generic where you collect your team's opinions about T&D programs.



2. Develop self-paced training modules that your employees can take remotely

Self-paced training modules are a great way to educate your employees about fundamental concepts and practices, which they will be using for





years to come.

You can use a Learning Experience Platform to provide personalized training modules to each employee, based on their performance & role.



3. Organize synchronous training sessions

Synchronous training sessions refer to live training sessions where your entire team takes up the training simultaneously. You can use these sessions when multiple employees are facing difficulty with the same concept/issue like say –

How to manage virtual teams!



4. Administer tests to evaluate what your team has learnt

Post-training assessments are extremely important to understand whether the training has been effective or not. To pass the assessment, your employees must score 80% or higher in each assessment. Grant your employees only 2-3 tries, after which they must re-take the training.

To ensure your team takes these training seriously, give a deadline before which they must pass the assessment.





CONCLUSION

Virtual teams are the future of the corporate world. In fact, we may someday go fully remote in our work. By following the above tips, strategies, and steps, you can seamlessly manage your virtual teams and ensure top performance.



A few books that we recommend:

