Going the Distance:
Leading Dispersed Teams

presented by
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Center for Creative Leadership
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Workshop Agenda

- Research background
- Advantages/challenges of dispersed teams
- Do you really need a team?
- Forming a dispersed team
- Leading a dispersed team
### Polling Questions

- Are you currently a member of a dispersed team?
- Are you currently a leader of a dispersed team?

### The Research Background

- How do organizations form, maintain, and provide ongoing development for geographically dispersed teams (GDTs)?
- What are the competencies leaders of GDTs must have in order to be effective?
- *Ultimately – what does it take to make a GDT productive?*
Data Collected From

- 19 Organizations
- 45 Teams
- 324 Team Members

- 15 USA Based Teams
- 2 Non-USA Based Teams
- 23 USA Based Global Teams
- 5 Non-USA Based Global Teams

Industries Represented

- Automotive
- Banking and Finance
- Computer/Technology
- Corporate T and D
- Electronics
- Federal Law Enforcement
- Federal Service Agency
- Insurance
- Manufacturing
- Not-for-Profit
- Personnel Services
- Pharmaceutical and Life Sciences
- Photographic and Imaging
## Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Co-located team (CLT)</th>
<th>Geographically Dispersed Team (GDT)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Group of individuals residing in the same location</td>
<td>• Group of individuals separated by distance, time, and in many cases culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Close physical proximity</td>
<td>• Limited face-to-face contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Able to experience face-to-face contact on daily basis</td>
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## Definition

A Geographically Dispersed Team (GDT) is a small group of individuals with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, have interdependent performance goals, and share an approach to work for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.

A distinguishing feature of a GDT is the fact that its members are not co-located in close physical proximity. Rather, a GDT’s members are separated by distance, time and frequently national culture.
What are the similarities and differences between CLT’s and GDT’s?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Similarities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Function and purpose of team</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Individual and team attributes</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Communication issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Need for collaboration</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Team and project management</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Leadership</td>
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Differences

- Reduced face-to-face contact and non-verbal communication
- Less verbal communication
- Greater emphasis on team dynamics and project management
- Distance, time, and culture
- Harder to maintain trust
- Commitment to the team

What are the advantages and challenges facing dispersed teams?
## Dispersed Team Advantages

- Growth/development and career advancement
- Information sharing and understanding
- Cultural diversity/global perspective
- Diverse ideas, skills, and methods
- Resource utilization
- Organizational learning and change

## Dispersed Team Challenges

- Start-up time — productivity
- Communication challenges
- Lack of face-to-face contact
- Team and project management
- Distance, time, and culture
- Technology resource utilization
Primary Research Conclusions

- Knowledge about CLTs can be translated and applied to the formation and development of a dispersed team.

- Although dispersed teams take longer to develop than CLTs in the long run, they can be just as productive and utilize resources better!

Leading Dispersed Teams

- Do you really need a team
- Critical organization support
- Forming a dispersed team
- Leading a dispersed team
## A Day in the Life of a GDT

The organization you work for has just merged with another company. This was a friendly merger driven by economic conditions and competition. The CEO of the merged company has asked you to be part of a task team that is responsible for defining and implementing the new corporate culture, using the best of both merged companies.

### A Day in the Life of a GDT

- The CEO is the team sponsor.
- The new organization is a global company.
- Recommendations and plans must be submitted within six months.
- The team has limited financial resources and can only meet face-to-face two times.
A Day in the Life of a GDT

- There are eight members of the team and they are all located in different parts of the world including: Asia, Australia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East, and North America.

- You have been asked to be the leader of this team but are not “the manager” of the members.

- Membership on this team is in addition to everyone’s regular work assignment.

Polling Question

Does this group need to be a team?
Individual to High-performance Team Continuum

Geographically Dispersed Teams
Do You Need to be a Team Questionnaire?

1. Describe the nature of the task to be completed.
2. Is the task simple and one-dimensional or is it complex and multidimensional?
3. What types of barriers and problems might have to be addressed and solved in order to successfully complete the task?
4. In order to complete the task, what types of decisions might have to be made? What boundaries or constraints might apply to these decisions?
5. Will the task be repeated or will it only occur once?
6. How long will it take to complete the task?
7. How readily available are the information, knowledge, and skills required to complete the task?
8. Is a subject matter expert available who has all the information, knowledge, and skills required to complete the task?
9. Does the task require the efforts of several people who all have the same or similar expertise, knowledge, and skills?
10. How important is diversity of thought and opinions in the successful completion of the task?
11. How critical are relationships with key stakeholders, customers, internal clients, and top management in the successful completion of the task?

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You Don’t Need a Team if …</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- An individual has all the expertise, knowledge, and skills needed to do the job and is solely accountable for completing the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- People are essentially doing the same work but are not dependent upon each other for information and skills needed to accomplish the job.</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>You Don’t Need a Team if …</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- People only need information from each other in order to accomplish the job or are simply passing work off to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- While errors in execution may affect the ability of others to complete their work, people are only accountable for their own work and are rewarded for individual performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## You Might Need a Team if …

- Because of the complexity of the task, no one individual possesses all the expertise, knowledge, and skills needed to complete the job.
- There is shared accountability for completing the job, thus collaboration is required.
- People will be rewarded for group, not individual, performance.

## Does this group need to be a team?

Answer: Possibly  
At the very least, this collection of individuals will have to perform as a *collaborative* group in order to be successful.
Organizational Readiness

Critical components:

- Planning & support
- Purpose goals
- Goals & objectives
- Tasks & roles
- Authority
- Timelines
- Team members
- Technology
Forming a Dispersed Team

- Initial focus on process; task secondary
- Clear purpose and goal
- Measures of success established
- Defined roles and responsibilities
- Norms and protocols defined
- Leadership function defined
- Ideally, initial meeting is face-to-face
- “Swift – Trust”

Swift-Trust

Recognizable by the following social characteristics:

- Willingness to be vulnerable – extending good will to others and hope that other team members will care about the task.
- Willingness to suspend doubt, even in the face of uncertainty, in order to complete the task.
- Willingness to take risks.
- Positive expectations of the benefits associated with being part of the team.
Critical Team Processes

- Communication
- Decision Making
- Conflict Management

Geographically Dispersed Team
Communication Planner Sample

Directions: This planner should be completed as a team activity. Use the planner to identify the type of information that will be exchanged internally and between team members. In the first column, list all of the subject areas that relate to team communication and interaction among members of the team. Provide an example of the subject and record it in the second column. Assign a priority to the subject using the scale at the bottom of this planner. Record the priority in column 3. Finally, using the scale of communication and interaction, determine the mechanisms that will be used to communicate the information and how recipients will respond to it. Record the plans in the fourth column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>MECHANISM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Schedule Meeting</td>
<td>Medium Priority</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision</td>
<td>Staff Team Input Details</td>
<td>Medium to High Priority</td>
<td>Email or Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Problem</td>
<td>Staff Team Input Details</td>
<td>Medium to High Priority</td>
<td>Email or Phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| System Change | Announcement of new customer assignment | 7/17 | Email or Intranet Mail |

Priority:
- URGENT: required immediately
- High Priority: required within 30 days
- Medium Priority: required within 60 days
- Low Priority: expected within two months
- PM: no responses needed

Mechanisms:
- Face-to-face
- Phone/video mail
- Fax
- Email (Intranet/Internet)
- Voice mail/Text
- Team Meeting (face to face or phone)

* Customize these mechanisms to fit your own specific needs.

* Customize these priorities to fit your own specific needs.

© 2004 sample for Crewloft Randolf
Team Communication

Team communication:
- What
- When
- How
- Urgency

Media Richness Continuum

Body language
Facial gestures
Telephone call
Chat-rooms
Fax
Snail-mail

Face-to-face
Video
Voice mail
Email
Tone of voice
### Geographically Dispersed Team
#### Decision Making Planner

**Sample**

**Directions:** This planner should be completed as a team activity. Use the planner to identify the types of decisions that the team will have to make and who will be responsible for making the decisions. In the first column, list all of the different types of decisions that will be made. Provide an example of each decision and record it in the second column. Determine who will be responsible for making the decisions using the scale at the bottom of the planner. Record the responsibilities in column name. Finally, using the scale in the bottom of the planner determine the mechanism that will be used to communicate the decisions and how recipients will respond to it. Record the answer in the fourth column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>By Whom</th>
<th>Notification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget Expenditure</td>
<td>Office Supplies</td>
<td>Individual Team Member</td>
<td>None Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Expenditure</td>
<td>Panel Expense for Team Meeting</td>
<td>Team Leader &amp; Team Members</td>
<td>Conference Call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Expenditure</td>
<td>Design Car Park</td>
<td>Team Leader</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Privacy**
- Team Leader
- Team Leader with input from the Team
- Team Leader & 1st Team Member
- Team Leader & 2nd Team Member
- Refer to Senior Management

* Customize these priorities to fit your team's specific needs.

**Mechanisms**
- Face-to-Face
- Phone/video call
- Email: Group/Air
- Semi-Official Mail: Team Server
- Official Mail: Team Leader or Other
- No Notification Required

* Customize these priorities to fit your team's specific needs.

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### Team Decision Making

**Team decisions:**

- Who makes what decision
- How do the decisions get made
- Can decisions be challenged
Inevitably, every virtual team experiences some type of interpersonal conflict among its members. Depending upon how it is managed (or not managed), conflict can be either a destructive force that damages the group, or a productive tool that, if handled well, enhances individual and group performance. Addressing conflict in a virtual team can be more difficult because team members are separated by distance and time. However, with all virtual planning, certain factors can mitigate negative consequences and enhance the positive outcomes of conflict. The following steps can help virtual teams get off the right track:

1. Have team members talk about their feelings about conflict (it’s quite normal for people to avoid conflict). To prompt discussion, have members of the team respond to the following two questions:
   - What’s the best part about conflict?
   - What’s the worst part about conflict?

2. Anticipate the type of conflict team members might experience. Generally, most conflict falls into one of the following four broad categories:
   - Task – which can be identified and framed and resolved
   - Goal & Strategy – which can be identified, discussed, and rationalized
   - Personal Preferences – if identified, can be addressed and negotiated
   - Values – constant form of conflict in virtual teams

3. Discuss which types of conflicts the virtual team will address and which ones will be avoided or ignored.

4. Finally, agree on a process and strategy for addressing unresolved conflicts. For example, as an unhandled personal preference conflict between two members begins to have negative impact on the whole team, whose responsibility is it to address this conflict?

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Team Conflict Management

Team conflict:
- Is it okay to disagree
- What is acceptable behavior
- What happens if disagreement becomes a conflict

Resolving Conflict

What is the source of the disagreement or conflict?

- Facts
- Goals, tactics, or strategy
- Personal preferences
# Leading a Disperse Team Means …

- Providing feedback and coaching
- Motivating from a distance
- Reforming the team when needed

## Team Leader Competencies

- Communication – verbal and written
- Interpersonal – EQ
- Remote facilitation
- Project management
- Decision-making and problem-solving
- Comfort with differences
### Feedback and Coaching

**SBI Model**

- Specific situation
- Behavior heard or observed
- Impact on you and your perception of its impact on others

### Motivating from a Distance

**What is de-motivating the team?**

- Unclear purpose or goal
- Unclear roles
- Missing skills and/or ability
- Missing organizational support
- Unresolved team conflict
- Not feeling appreciated
## Team Reformation

Do we have to start over?

- Review and update objectives and goals
- Keep a team history
- Review roles and responsibilities for entire team
- Review team norms
- Use a buddy system

## Recommendations

- Determine if organization structure can support Dispersed Teams
- Develop team vision and clear purpose
- Team design and structure should support vision and purpose
- Carefully select team leaders and members
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
### Recommendations

- Establish group identity and norms
- Provide training and development to all team members
- Build formal and information communication channels
- Conduct initial meetings face-to-face
- Use technology wisely

### Good Resources

- [http://www.startwright.com/virtual.htm](http://www.startwright.com/virtual.htm)
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Thank you for joining us!