

Virtual Teams Now a Reality

Don't look now, but your project team meeting room is virtually disappearing. A recent study by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) found that — while a very healthy 42% of companies queried feel that the need for teams will continue to grow over the next three years — more than two-thirds (67%) foresee their reliance on virtual teams mushrooming in importance. In companies with more than 10,000 employees, the virtual team concept jumps to more than 80%.

As the practice continues to charge forward, companies also have clear views regarding the benefits of using teams. More than 75% of respondents said teams facilitate information-sharing to a high or very high extent, while 70% said teams encourage diverse thinking and 62% feel they result in higher productivity and facilitate cross-training. The activities most supported by the use of teams is topped by special one-time projects, with 77% rating high or very high, followed by ongoing project management (67%) and day-to-day business (53%).

“With highly distributed workforces and the rising cost of travel, it's not surprising that organizations would anticipate a greater reliance on virtual teams,” said Mary Key, i4cp's leadership pillar director. “What it foreshadows, however, is the greater need for the development of virtual leadership skills. I expect more and more corporations will put more effort into developing this skill set internally.”

Indeed, the major challenges posed by the use of teams are led by the idea that virtual teams are too difficult to manage, with 35% of respondents overall ranking it first on a high/very high scale. Thirty-one percent of respondents feel that coordinating schedules is problematic, and a like percentage noted that they feel their company's technology tools are inadequate for team meetings.

The element considered most critical for team performance — cited by 96% of companies as being critical to a high or very high extent — was listening skills. Trust was ranked as high or very high by 92% of respondents, followed by the ability to establish actionable items at 87% and group facilitation skills at 78%. Consensus-seeking skills, cultural awareness and a sense of humor all have more than two-thirds of respondents saying they are critical to a high or very high extent.

The Taking the Pulse: Teams survey was conducted by i4cp, in conjunction with HR.com, in August 2008. The total number of respondents was 278. The full results of the survey are available exclusively for all i4cp corporate members.

About i4cp, inc.

i4cp is the world's largest private network of corporations focused on improving workforce productivity. Our vendor-free community facilitates innovation by giving our members — among the largest and most respected organizations in the world — access to:

- Peers to spark new ideas and prevent “reinventing the wheel”;
- Research to enable members to understand current practices and next practices,
- Tools to put ideas and research into action,
- Technology to enable members to easily access tailored information and execute workforce strategies.

Source: i4cp