Virtual Team Assessment

In their groundbreaking study of teams, Carl Larson and Frank Lafasto attempted to answer the question, "What makes an effective team?" The results of their work were eight key characteristics which help to explain how teams develop or why they don't develop. The eight characteristics that apply to co-located teams will also apply to virtual teams however there are, of course, some similarities and differences. After reviewing a lot of the current research and best practice on virtual teams, we have come to the conclusion that we can also identify eight characteristics – that are similar but not identical with those originally described by Larson and Lafasto.

The first characteristic is **clear and aligned goals**. Research indicates that virtual teams often run into difficulties when their goal is too general or ambiguous or when individual objectives take a higher priority than the team goal. Other characteristics are a **system of team communication** which allows for regular and real-time relationship-building, group collaboration and feedback exchanges, **defined team processes** to counterbalance the inherent ambiguity of virtual teamwork and **competent team members** that are both masters of the technology and who also possess the self-management and interpersonal skills required in a virtual world.

Establishing high levels of trust or a **collaborative climate** between team members is one of the greatest challenges to any group that communicates primarily through information technology but paradoxically it will be a key success factor. Equally teams that are unable to hold each other accountable to agreed **standards of excellence** are unlikely to consistently deliver high levels of performance and teams that lack the **external support and recognition** of key stakeholders and senior management will find it hard to get things done. The final characteristic which we describe as **adaptive leadership** suggests that virtual team leaders that are able to adapt their leadership style according to the needs, expectations and cultural context of each of their team members and encourage individuals to take decisions based on clear goals and a shared vision of the future are generally rewarded with superior results.

The Virtual Team Assessment can be administered via email (as an attached form) or using an internet-based questionnaire. It is intended to support a team feedback and action planning session – either with or without an external facilitator. If you would like more information or would like to see a sample report, please contact us at info@clarionlearning.com.au .

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