Virtual Teams in the New Development Process at UNICEF

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Political pressure, appealing to local markets, and regulatory requirements are just some of the reasons for a business to globalize their development process (Salomo, Keinschmidt, & de Brentani, 2010). Developing for global markets is a necessity in today's business environment (Salomo et al., 2010; Sosa, Eppinger, Pich, McKendrick, & Stout, 2002) especially in highly competitive markets (Dayan & Di Benedetto, 2010). A global development process requires a more diverse development team (Schilling, 2012). Geographically dispersed teams are increasingly more prevalent, with some estimates suggesting that 40% of all workers will be contract or temporary by 2020 (Cornelius, 2015). To be successful, a virtual new product development team relies on a supportive firm culture, support from senior management, and balanced resource commitment (Salomo et al., 2010).

Virtual teams, also known as remote teams, have several advantages over traditional team structures. They are an inexpensive and less risky way to increase team diversity (Salomo et al., 2010), which helps develop interpersonal trust (Dayan & Di Benedetto, 2010). Diversity also gives teams access to a more comprehensive knowledge pool, which can enhance knowledge of localized markets and increase competitive advantages (Salomo et al., 2010). Additional knowledge points also increase creativity, which increases innovation (Salomo et al., 2010) and allows remote teams to developer faster and decrease costs (Dayan & Di Benedetto, 2010). Remote teams are more agile and adaptable than traditional teams (Dayan & Di Benedetto, 2010) and have the potential to make more effective strategic decisions which can also help reduce development time and therefore costs.

Despite these advantages, the biggest challenges to remote teams are building trust (Schilling, 2012) and resource commitment (Salomo et al., 2010). The difficulty of maintaining a sense of the corporate culture (Schilling, 2012) and a mixture of senior and junior employees (Lund, Manyika, & Ramaswamy, 2012) are two major factors that can negatively affect trust building. Increased complexity of relationships within remote teams and between virtual and physical teams can also challenge the success of the development process and make resource balancing difficult (Salomo et al., 2010). Effective team structures and components vary greatly between companies, departments and even teams, so there are few templates or quick start guides to guarantee success (Salomo et al., 2010). This uncertainty coupled with the commitment and complexity of remote teams remain the biggest challenges to companies adopting a virtual team structure. Fortunately, increased access to electronic communication is lessening these challenges (Sosa et al., 2002) and allowing companies to enjoy the benefits of remote teams.

For a virtual new product development team for emergency packet radio, I would recommend an autonomous team structure. Such a structure would allow the team the flexibility to succeed in various markets (Schilling, 2012). Autonomous teams help reduce development costs by sharing responsibilities (Langfred & Shanley, 2001), increase success at solving development challenges, and enables companies to become leaner to save operating costs (Kokemuller, n.d.). This team structure has become increasingly more prevalent in recent years (Kokemuller, n.d.) Different teams have different structural and management needs (Schilling, 2012). To be most effective, this autonomous team should utilize a product champion or product advocate, someone who helps to allocate resources (Schilling, 2012) and generate excitement within the organization to generate success (Hastie, 2015). This product champion should be someone in senior management (Schilling, 2012) who has the resources and influence to accomplish these tasks (O’Reilly III & Tushman, 2004).