

How to Build a Successful Virtual Team, by Iris Clermont

1. The positive effect of sharing expectations and best practices of virtual teams

After an introduction of a virtual session it is helpful to request:

- What are your expectations for this session, what do you expect to take from it and how will this help you?
- What are your experiences and best practices?

The positive effect of sharing expectations as well as motivations and best practices is obvious:

- You avoid your team colleagues' thinking there might be a hidden agenda behind your behavior
- You increase trust with your business partners
- You increase the awareness of the expectations and with this knowledge you can support your team effectively
- Especially in the engineering area, I saw experts sitting on their knowledge, as knowledge means job security to them and sharing of expectations and best practices helped a lot to open up the team atmosphere.

Best practices collection for successful virtual teams from the participants of the SIG call:

- Collect the photographs of the various team members, put them together on one page and distribute them to the team members, as a visual reminder who the people are on the call; very simple and effective.
- Use a virtual circle: distribute the circle of names to the team. This helps in the call to give directions, e.g. "Let's start with Kristina and go around the circle clockwise" and supports people knowing and visualizing when they are next to speak.
- Virtual map with a small story and a photograph of all the participants, helpful to experience where the people are working, adding chat around how they are and how the world looks from their perspective.
- Set the expectation at the beginning of the call.
- Talk openly at the beginning, making agreements e.g. it is okay to say out loud: 'I have the feeling not everyone is fully engaged in this call' and including the diversity of time zones.
- Make sure everybody is being heard, to ask everybody about their opinion input. Take care of speaking slow in case of non native English speaking persons are part of the team.
- Start with a quick "Stand up" exercise, using these 3 questions: "What have you done yesterday? What are you going to do today? What barriers might you face?" It is a quick communication exercise and each person has 1 minute speaking time.
- Giving acknowledgement and feedback to the one who is speaking.
- Use your intuition to name what you feel in virtual discussion.
- In the beginning of the project invest in a whole call session to ask each participant: Share why they joined the project what they want to get out of it, what you think you can contribute, this helped to get credit offering and helped to get everybody on the same page.
- Start each session with: What is the weather out there? This is a reminder that people are not in the same room.



Iris Clermont, author, diploma mathematician, ACC, process consultant and team coach shares experiences about successful virtual teams

- The positive effect of sharing expectations and best practices of virtual teams
- Different possibilities for virtual eye to eye contacts
- An exercise with opportunities for virtual common coffee breaks
- Key success criteria for successful virtual teams

2. Different possibilities of virtual eye to eye contacts:

- Weekly phone conferences with the following proposed agenda:
 - Introduction (Moderator) 5 minutes
 - What happened during the last week, acknowledgement about what went well and attention to what needs to be improved and what activities are planned for the coming week (All) 50 minutes
 - Where we are on the way to our goal and way forward (Moderator) 5 minutes
 - Completion round (All)
- In between, phone chats with the key contacts speaking about the main goals and how to support each other and about conflicts and how to solve them
- Whenever thinking “should I call?” or “should I not call?” make the choice to call!
- Virtual team-building exercise:
 - As a preparation to the conference call, send different pictures to your colleagues or send them the link from where to fetch the pictures.
 - During the conference call, when everybody has joined, create a unified story from a set of sequential pictures. Each person has a picture but cannot show it to the others. This exercise requires patience, communication, and perspective taking in order to recreate the story’s sequence.
 - Share your insights and feedback with the team at the end of the virtual team- building exercise.
 - The exercise we used in the SIG call is meant to experience creating a unified story from a set of sequential pictures. Each participant of the exercise receives a different picture with a number to be aware when to continue with the story. Any series of pictures can be taken. For the exercise of the call I used the pictures from my ‘Team Magic’ book pages 43 and 44 “Carlo and Eduardo’s typical day”. While Eduardo has a positive attitude, Carlo spends his day feeling terrible and complains.

Carlo’s typical day:



Eduardo’s typical day:



Celebrating team success

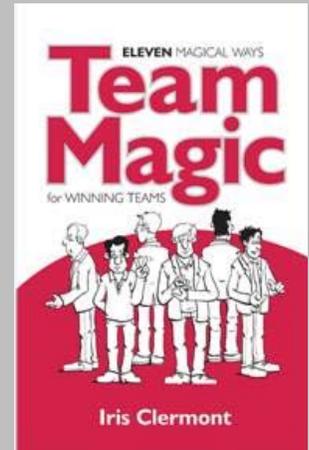
3. Exercise opportunities for virtual common coffee breaks

- Call your key contacts on Monday morning or on Friday afternoon to exchange private stories about hobbies, weekend activities...
- Place an informal once-a-week 10-minute chat, while relaxing with a cup of water, tea or coffee via a conference call or web session without an agenda with the rule: whoever wants to join is welcome and the feeling is relaxed.

4. Key success criteria for successful virtual teams

- Establish regular virtual coffee breaks and virtual one-on-one, “eye to eye” contacts as well as virtual team building exercises.
- Use of an agreed conflict management and escalation process in alignment with the organisation’s code of conduct.
- Be aware, that conflict is a normal part of the team’s life cycle.
- Take care to focus with conflict discussions on tasks and not on another person.
- Agree on rules for the conflict process. Examples: avoid the use of e-mails to solve conflicts. Use the telephone and speak directly to the person. Go to the person first, not to the team leader or another team member.
- Take the pulse of the virtual team frequently (e.g. asking ‘What is the weather like?’ at the beginning of regular sessions).
- Keep the interests and goals of the team at the forefront of all decisions and balance the local interest of team members with those of the entire team.
- Speak about cultural, gender, generation,...differences openly and name anything disturbing that might be a barrier to reach the team goal

30% discount for the E-Book ,Team Magic’ for the participants of the SIG call



available via

<http://www.aiccoaching.com/>

or an email to

info@aiccoaching.com.

The printed version is available on Amazon.

Completion round ending with the wisdom of Kim Mc Millen from her book:

*‘When I loved myself enough’:
I redefined success and life became simple. Oh the pleasure of that
I came to see I am not special but I am unique
I gave up the belief that life is hard
I came to see emotional pain is a signal I am operating outside truth
I started feeling all my feelings, not analyzing them – really feeling them. When I do,
something amazing happens. Try it. You will see.
I quit wishing my life looked some other way and began to see that as it is, my life serves
my evolution.
I began taking the gift of life seriously and grateful*

I wish you great success and I am happy to hear from you.
Iris Clermont info@aiccoaching.com

