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Managing From a Distance: What Makes a Virtual Team Leader Effective?

It's probably not surprising to hear that effective leadership plays a critical role in team performance. But just how does a leader's effectiveness impact the performance of a virtual team? A new study conducted by OnPoint Consulting (www.onpointconsultingllc.com) surveyed 48 virtual teams across industries and found that the leader plays a particularly important role in the performance of geographically dispersed teams. What's more, the behaviors associated with virtual team leader effectiveness are somewhat *different* than those required to effectively lead co-located teams.

"We wanted to understand why some virtual team leaders were more successful at managing from a distance despite facing similar challenges" says Darleen DeRosa, managing partner at OnPoint Consulting, a firm that specializes in organizational and leadership issues. "Our research identified six key behaviors that drive virtual team leader effectiveness", says DeRosa.

What are the behaviors of the most effective virtual team leaders?

- **Effectively manages change** – managing change and leading teams through ambiguity is challenging in a non-virtual setting, but this becomes more complex when team members are geographically dispersed
- **Fosters an atmosphere of collaboration among team members** – effective virtual team leaders are able to build relationships and develop collaboration processes to help enhance performance even though team members may only meet face to face a few times a year
- **Communicates team goals and direction** – successful team leaders articulate the team goals and direction and continually revisit these over time so that team members have a shared target to help unify actions and keep them focused on execution
- **Invites constructive feedback from team members** – despite the lack of regular face to face interaction, effective virtual team leaders create a two-way dialogue such that team members feel comfortable providing constructive feedback that will enhance the team's effectiveness
- **Empower team members to make decisions** –effective virtual team leaders delegate work, empower team members to make decisions, and monitor progress without micromanaging team members
- **Shares information in a timely manner** – communication and information sharing are particularly important characteristics for effective virtual team leadership, and the most effective virtual team leaders establish informal and formal communication vehicles to keep team members informed and engaged

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Organizations need to consider how they select and develop virtual team leaders to ensure that they have the necessary skill set. In order to be fully effective, virtual team leaders should focus on these six critical practices so that they can successfully lead from a distance.

Editors: For a copy of the complete article or to arrange an interview, please contact Darleen DeRosa at 203.488.1702 or dderosa@onpointconsultingllc.com.