Leading Virtual Teams
Liana Thompson, MA
CETABC Conference, May 2016

© Liana Thompson, 2016
Introduction

Liana Thompson
- Director, CE at the University of the Fraser Valley
- 20+ years in leadership for municipal government and non profit organizations
- 15+ years Instructor, corporate trainer, and curriculum developer
- Mother, wife, and novice mountain biker

© Liana Thompson, 2016
Check In

Think of one word that describes how you feel right NOW.

Write down that word.
Leading Virtual Teams

- Define virtual teams in the context of CE practice
- Explain how virtual teams are different
- Name the 3 factors that contribute to successful virtual teams
- Describe strategies to best lead a virtual team
What are Virtual Teams

Virtual Teams are...

“a group of people who work independently with shared purpose across space, time, and organization boundaries, using technology to communicate and collaborate.”

Academy of Management Executive; Aug2002, Vol. 16 Issue 3, p67-79, 13p, 1 chart, 4 bw

© Liana Thompson, 2016
Virtual Teams in Continuing Education

- Staff teams divided among different campuses
- Online/distance instructors
- Instructors/staff working different schedules
- Resource staff/departments at different locations

© Liana Thompson, 2016
# What is Different About Virtual Teams?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BENEFITS</strong></th>
<th><strong>CHALLENGES</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexible/increased coverage</td>
<td>Technology-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attract the best talent</td>
<td>Varying levels of digital literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible Work (Universal Design)</td>
<td>Lowered communication and connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable</td>
<td>Indirect supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less work interruption</td>
<td>Lowered decision making abilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Liana Thompson, 2016
3 Factors of High Performing Virtual Teams

COMMUNICATION

TRUST

LEADERSHIP


© Liana Thompson, 2016
Communication and Virtual Teams

Activity

- Groups of 3 – assign roles, (Builder, Architect, Observer)

**BUILDER**
- Responsible for building the structure
- Follows Architect’s instructions
- May ask questions

**ARCHITECT**
- Responsible for communicating blueprint
- Gives direction to Builder
- Cannot see the Builder’s work

**OBSERVER**
- Observes builder and architect
- Cannot speak
- May swap-out the Architect

© Liana Thompson, 2016
What happened?
Communication and Virtual Teams

- Lessened, “whole body” communication
- Uneven distribution of information
- Context can be lost
- Differences in what information is salient
- Uncertainty about the meaning of silence
Tips for Communicating with Virtual Teams

- Create formal and informal modes of communication
- Create a communication schedule/structure
- Use the right tools
Tips for Building Trust with Virtual Teams

- Create ways for team members to demonstrate competence to you and other team members

- Model and promote a culture of “keeping your word”

- Engage in BigTalk

© Liana Thompson, 2016
BIG Talk

Use BIG Talk to build global empathy through the power of connection over sharing stories about our universal human experiences.

- Universal – any human could answer it
- Meaningful – thought provoking
- Open-ended – elicits a story (not just yes or no)

Kalina Silverman

© Liana Thompson, 2016
Leadership

- Spend time effort and money to build relationships
- Manage conflict early and fully
- Run effective team meetings
# How to Chair a V-Team Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the call</th>
<th>During the call</th>
<th>After the call</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Set the ground rules in advance</td>
<td>• Use names</td>
<td>• Ask for feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Send out long explanations and resources in advance</td>
<td>• Limit each person to 3 sentences, to allow others to speak</td>
<td>• Distribute minutes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Choose the right technology</td>
<td>• Make the implicit, explicit</td>
<td>• Act early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use frequent perception checks (check in)</td>
<td>• Follow up in 1:1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Liana Thompson, 2016
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Activity</th>
<th>Appropriate communication tool</th>
<th>Why it works</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorming and generating alternatives</td>
<td>Online communities e.g.</td>
<td>Removes time pressure. Allows all V-team members to contribute, regardless of their social presence or influence. Generating ideas independently avoids groupthink and herding effects, and leads to better alternatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(divergent thinking)</td>
<td>Yammer or Stormboard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making decisions</td>
<td>Informed decision by leadership, or virtual polls, e.g. Doodle or ADoodle</td>
<td>After generating and discussing strong alternatives, (anonymous) voting or further comments can help prevent groupthink and allow V-teams to take decisive action quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(convergent thinking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing reports</td>
<td>Collaboration tools, e.g.</td>
<td>Allows V-team members to work on the same document simultaneously, see the history of document changes, and keep information in the same place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Google Documents; Dropbox</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling meetings</td>
<td>Online calendar or scheduling, e.g. MeetingWizard, Doodle</td>
<td>This should be simple and as painless as possible. No need to waste human resources on something we know technology can accomplish. However, keep in mind time zones of all team members when providing options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td>In person, videoconference, telephone (in that order of preference).</td>
<td>In person relationship-building is always preferable, but not always possible. Schedule regular conversations not only with direct reports, but their direct reports. Sharing “virtual lunches” and adding “catch-up” social time to agendas builds rapport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting information verbally</td>
<td>Video conference or video</td>
<td>When interaction is the goal, keep “monologues” to a minimum and use a video conference for real-time discussion. If there is more information to present (use the 3-minute rule), it should be a video. Creating a video bank also helps with knowledge management, and bringing new team members up to speed quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing information and updates</td>
<td>Internal blog or social network (e.g. Yammer)</td>
<td>Some organizations (e.g. Tata Consultancy Services) are de-emphasizing email. Instead, they use internal blogs and social networks to share updates and provide an opportunity for V-team members to discuss the content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Workshop Review

- List an example of a virtual team in CE?
- How are virtual teams different from f2f teams?
- Name 3 factors that contribute to successful virtual teams.

- Tell me ONE strategy that you will use when you return to work
Questions?
Leading Virtual Teams

Liana Thompson, MA
CETABC Conference, May 2016

© Liana Thompson, 2016