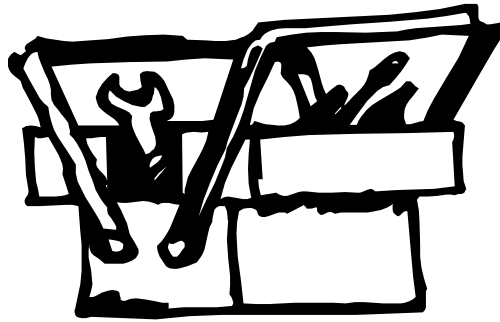


What is ahead...

- Observation
- On-Line Questionnaires
- Common Team Problems/Interventions
- Action Research
- How Virtual Should I Go?

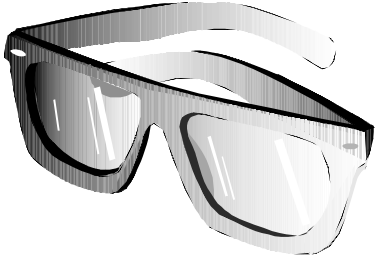
Organizational Development (OD) Tools



A virtual team environment challenges the Organizational Development (OD) practitioner to step into the land of “virtual” interventions. Traditionally, OD practitioners have worked with their clients in a face-to-face or voice-to-voice mode. The OD practitioner of the future may conduct a needs assessment, focus groups, and/or interviews electronically via a collaborative software system or group support system. These systems allow users to “turn off” their individual identities during information gathering sessions and interact with relative anonymity. A major source of historical information could be the team’s intranet site which would house all documentation as well as video/audio tapes of the group’s meetings.

Or, how about desktop videoconferencing? Think about facilitating a small group intervention via video where all participants can be viewed on your screen regardless of their geographic location. Would it be as effective as a face-to-face experience?

In this section, tools for the OD practitioner will be further discussed. The previous tabs have offered much in the way of the healthy and sub-optimal workings of virtual teams and their leaders. Many tools are embedded in that information. This section offers a few more.



Observation

Observation guides can be developed using information in the previous tabs to do “frequency counts” of (un)desirable during virtual meetings. These observation guides are used the same as traditional instruments. However, the attributes will change based upon the virtual nature of the teams. If you want to assess a meeting for its effectiveness, use the attributes listed in “Effective Virtual Team Meetings” (Communications tab). Simply list the roles and desired behaviors and stroke tally the number of times the (un)desired behaviors occurred. Also note your observations based upon your newfound virtual team knowledge! If you’re assessing the team leader, use the attributes listed for the leader, etc.

Examine the observed patterns and determine whether they are healthy, given the task and the point in the team’s life cycle. In a virtual environment, it is ideal to have two observers (hence, more than one source of data) so that observations can be validated. Review the results with the team leader and then with the team. Design intervention with the key client based upon the validated observations / diagnosis.



On-Line Questionnaires

Again, these are like the paper and pencil instruments, except they are administered on-line and are customized to virtual team’s needs.

Common Team Problems / Interventions

The following is a table adapted from *Mastering Virtual Teams* (Duarte & Snyder, 1999) to assist the OD practitioner or team leader in moving the team forward.

Symptom of Team Problem	Possible Causes / Interventions
The team cannot get out of the inception and inclusion stage.	Symptomatic of underlying issues. Review the team's composition and charter. The inception phase requires creativity and less control. Is the leader modeling these attributes?
The team appears to be stuck and is not moving toward execution.	Assess the team in terms of task and social dynamics, and environmental factors (Team building tab). Go back to the beginning and review expectations; identify obstacles to meeting those expectations.
A few team members seem to be doing all the work.	Talk (voice-to-voice) to all members – working and non-working separately to determine the reason(s) for the differences. Are tasks allocated properly? Are “workers” clustered in one geography / culture? Is communication streamlined and straight forward?
Team members do not appear to be applying sufficient effort to the team's task.	Talk (voice-to-voice) to those who are disengaged to determine the reason for below standards effort / performance. Are expectations unrealistic? Do they lack information / skills / training to be successful? Do they need a mentor? Are the non-performers in a matrixed relationship? Are there conflicting objectives?
The team misses or almost misses a deadline for deliverables.	Determine root cause and take corrective action. Employ a deeper level of project management skills or assign a trained project manager to the team.
Conflict arises that derails the team's progress.	Is the cause of the conflict task-related or social/cultural in nature? Take appropriate action.
Team members who are not co-located seem to be fading into obscurity.	Work with the team leader to keep a record of contact with team members. Encourage team leaders to spend 70-80% of their time (virtual or face-to-face) with team members who are not co-located.

Action Research

As you can see from the table, virtual teams have most of the same issues as traditional teams with the added complexity of technology and geographic, social, and cultural boundaries and differences. The Action Research steps remain the same; the application in a virtual environment may be modified somewhat from a technological perspective.

Working with virtual teams requires one to leave their comfort zone and work “from a different place.”

How Virtual Should I Go?

Only you can answer that one. How far “out on the balcony” are you willing to go? How prepared are you for the future as virtual teams expand into virtual organizations?

