RAISING STUDENTS' AWARENSS OF DISTRIBUTED TEAM CHALLENGES & THE

NEED FOR EFFECTIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Abstract

Over the last decade, geographically dispersed (virtual) and particularly global teams have been increasingly becoming more prevalent. There are a number of challenges associated with distributed collaboration and organizations have spent significant resources aimed at addressing these in order to facilitate key team outcomes. Some organizations have invested in talent management of their high-potential employees as a way to facilitate the work of distributed teams. The aim of this roundtable discussion is to summarize key challenges students studying teamwork should be aware of as well as provide the basis for a discussion of talent management practices.

Keywords: distributed teams, talent management, stars

Introduction

Organizations frequently rely on distributed teams to access talent and expertise regardless of the worker's location (Gibbs, Boyraz, Sivunen, & Nordbäck, 2020). Fluid, diverse, and distributed teams have been increasingly utilized by global organizations to bring together expertise and a variety of perspectives, which in turn facilitate key outcomes, such as innovation (Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007; Hung, Cheng, Hou, & Chen, 2020; Lisak, Erez, Sui, & Lee, 2016). Over 60% of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) rely on dispersed teams (Society for Human Resource Management, 2012), including globally distributed teams, which are expected to continue growing in prevalence (Gilson, Maynard, Jones Young, Vartiainen, & Hakonen, 2015). This is especially the case, given the post-pandemic climate where many organizations noted that their workers were able to work in geographically distributed environments even in unprecedented conditions. Yet, distributed teams are characterized by highly diverse and multicultural team members who are frequently separated not just by distance and cultural boundaries but also by organizational ones, which make effective team collaboration more complex (Cramton & Hinds, 2005; Gibbs et al., 2020). The importance and complexity of managing distributed teams has highlighted the need to examine factors that influence team dynamics and performance. This includes approaches to talent management.

This Roundtable Discussion will provide an opportunity for conference participants to engage in a lively session to go over key challenges facing today's teams and talent management approaches to address them. The discussion will be relevant to those teaching classes such as Foundations of Management, Leadership, Organizational Behavior, Human Resources Management, Teamwork, among others.

Theoretical Foundation

Organizations have utilized a variety of approaches to address challenges associated with global teams, including talent management. An increasingly important area in the Human Resources Management field, talent management is recognized for its potential to manage employees with high levels of human capital such as High Potentials, Stars, 'A' players, and high performers in a variety of organizational settings (Tarique & Schuler, 2010). These Stars represent employees which meet criteria across three different dimensions: demonstrate exceptional performance over time, have visibility and social capital that is recognized by others (Call, Nyberg, & Thatcher, 2015). Stars are associated with a range of benefits, such as improving team performance, but may also make team dynamics more complex. Since dispersed teams and particularly globally dispersed teams are increasingly common, it is important to understand key factors that influence talent management of Star employees in the context of global teams. Finding ways to effectively manage Star employees, particularly so they can facilitate the work of a distributed team is complex.

There are a multitude of reasons that contribute to the complexity of managing Star employees effectively, particularly in the context of distributed teams that are characterized by various boundaries separating team members. These boundaries are frequently not only associated with geographical distance but also cultural, time zone, and status differences among team members, based on a range of reasons that include their office location and centrality, among others (Eisenberg, Glikson, & Lisak, 2021; Eisenberg & Mattarelli, 2017; Gibbs et al., 2020). Star employees can act as brokers, helping to bridge boundaries that divide team members, but they can also introduce feelings of inadequacy among fellow teammates and contribute to greater division, negatively influencing team performance. Thus, the role of Stars

needs to be evaluated. Additionally, as part of talent management, the following key areas should be evaluated: identifying, developing, mobilizing, and rewarding/incentivizing stars. Further, there are multiple factors that can prevent star team members from exerting positive influence in their distributed teams, which are also key considerations.

Globally distributed teams can offer greater opportunities for organizations seeking talent while remaining flexible. However, there is a lack of understanding related to how Stars can be best managed and utilized in global teams to facilitate their team effectiveness and key outcomes, such as team innovation and team performance. For example, industries that compete based on innovation rely on stars more than other industries, influencing the effectiveness of their role in distributed teams that are often used for innovation focused projects. Students should be aware of the various challenges facing the key organizational structure in use today – distributed teams as well as talent management approaches that rely on stars to bridge differences and boundaries separating team members.

Session Description

Our 60 minute session will have the following structure:

First 15 minutes: We (the organizers) will share an overview of the relevant literature as well as latest trends in the literature and in the industry.

Next 30 minutes: We will separate session participants into 4 groups for the purposes of running small group discussions with a designated leader in each group. Each group will have an opportunity to discuss their concerns related to teaching students about distributed team challenges and the role of talent management of stars in addressing these:

1. Identifying stars

Stars identification is more intense in some industries than others because they are in more prominent and critical roles where they have more power and influence resulting in greater impact (e.g. research and development, pharmaceutical, medicine, and financial trading as well as prominent professional sports teams, such as MBA/WMBA, IPL (cricket), etc.).

2. Developing stars

   a. *In developing stars, it is important to discuss how to focus on talent management in such a way that stars can productively work with other star and non-star team members to improve distributed team outcomes.*

   b. *Encouraging stars to develop other team members to take on star-type roles in the future. This is especially true when a star's effectiveness may decline over time or due to a change in the team environment.*

3. Mobilizing stars

   a. *Entry & exit of stars to a team*

   b. *Moving a star from one team to another*

4. Rewarding/incentivizing stars

   Monetary vs. non-monetary rewards (opportunities to further develop talents, reputation/status, power & influence)

We will prepare sample student team projects, small case discussion, and exercises that can be utilized to simulate distributed team challenges and also bring in talent management techniques involving stars that can be used to illustrate relevant concepts. After introducing these tools, we will offer an opportunity for participants to engage in critical discussion of these sample

projects/cases/exercises with the aim of having each group come up with a set of tools to be used in teaching these concepts in a range of classes mentioned above.

Last 15 minutes: Re-group to discuss the "findings" of each sub-group and summarize the "tools" developed by each group to effectively introduce the challenges and solutions associated with working across boundaries in distributed teams and how talent management can be utilized for this purpose. Session participants will have an opportunity to sign up to receive a copy of the detailed notes that we will take and distribute after the conclusion of the MOBTS conference.

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