Working In Contemporary Teams

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Lecture - 02

Welcome back to this course on Introduction to Contemporary Teams and Virtual Teams. I am Dr. M.P. Ganesh from IIT Hyderabad. I am one of the instructors of this course.

This is our second lecture from this course. I will quickly summarize what we spoke about in the first lecture. So this is going to be the chapter outline for this entire chapter. So we are going to talk about, we spoke about definition of teams, we spoke about what are contemporary teams and what are the challenges in managing contemporary teams.

We are also going to talk about virtual teams and also how performance in virtual teams are influenced by various different factors. So when we define teams, we looked at the difference between the term groups and teams. So the general idea which differentiates teams and groups is, teams and groups are collection of people, but the difference is teams members have interdependence and groups members do not have interdependence. And in teams, because there is interdependence and members work together as a entity, they can create synergy. We also spoke about different types of interdependence.

Interdependence can be task interdependence, it can be goal interdependence. We also spoke about autonomy can vary within teams. So at the very extreme end, self-managing work teams, they have complete autonomy to decide their goal, how they perform, how to assign team tasks, etc. At the lower extreme, everything is prescribed by the parent entity to the team. So in most organizational context, teams are part of larger entity, which can be the organization or a department or a larger project group.

We also spoke about the contemporary teams, where some of these terminologies are changing. For example, in the recent past, because of advancements in AI and robotics, these entities are also becoming part of work teams. And interdependence have changed because of various factors like technology usage for communication, cross cultural collaborations, crossing boundaries, and things like that. So we spoke about some of

these things in the previous class. We also spoke about the definition of contemporary teams.

  Contemporary teams means present day teams. And also it means newer forms of teams. Why it is important to understand contemporary teams and what has resulted in contemporary teams? What is different is the context. And this is what makes the contemporary teams challenging to work in or to manage. So what is the context? What is the newer context? Nature of work and tasks have changed because of technological advancement, cultural changes, or generational changes.

 And also nature of boundaries have changed. What I mean by boundaries is the limits which define a particular team.   So the limits can be cultural limits, it can be organizational limits, or it can be just the limits of who becomes member of a team. So in the newer context, in the new century or the new decade, teams have relationship with other teams. For example, one team will work closely with another team so that people between these teams interchangeably move from one team to another team.

  So this is called boundary crossing, which used to be common earlier also. If there are teams within a larger organization, between teams there might be collaboration. But what has changed is because of cross-cultural mobility or collaboration between different organizations of different countries and newer forms of work, people are crossing cultural boundaries. Teams work with other organizations which belong to other cultures. And teams from one organization work closely with teams from other organizations.

  And this has created challenges in terms of identity. And also nature of interaction have changed because of technology usage. Like I said earlier, people used to interact face to face more. But now because of various reasons, usage of communication tools have increased within the team for the communication. And also nature of hierarchy have changed.

  Teams have become more flat. People from diverse backgrounds are coming and working in a team.   So that has created certain challenges, even though there are advantages related to that. And also nature of employees have changed. So what I mean by nature of employees have changed? People from different backgrounds are working.

  People of different value systems are coming and working. People also work part time. We call it temp working, which means there are teams where individuals work in these teams on a temporary basis. So they do not belong to the organization, but they work in the team as part of the team. So those things create various kinds of challenges and nuances in teams.

So that is why contemporary teams have become a challenging thing to manage. So some of the newer forms of teams are distributed teams. Distributed teams are virtual teams. People work from different geographical locations. It can be from different countries or it can be from different offices in the same country or even within the same building, people work in different offices.

They may not meet face to face, but they collaborate using technological tools. Cross-cultural teams have also increased because cultural collaborations have also been increasing. Self-managed work teams, because of the reduced hierarchical structure in organizations, teams have become more autonomous and that has led to more and more self-managed work teams, which take care of their own goals and own ways of doing their work. And we also spoke about startup teams. The organization itself is a small organization, so it works like a team.

Human robot teams have also become more and more common. And also there are teams like agile teams. So this is where we stopped in the previous lecture. We touched upon some of the challenges because of or some of the challenges found in these contemporary teams. Managing communication knowledge sharing is a major challenge in these contemporary teams, in all of these contemporary teams.

For example, in a virtual team, because people use communication tools, media tools, it may create a sense of distance. People may feel they are not close enough to share their confident information or it can lead to lack of trust because people are not meeting face to face. So the kind of communication and trust involved in sharing knowledge might be a challenge. Similarly, in cross-cultural teams, even though they all speak the same language, meanings of certain words may vary or the way people use certain words in certain contexts might vary and that can lead to communication challenges. So these are some of the challenges in terms of communication and knowledge sharing in contemporary teams.

Similarly, team dynamics will be very different compared to earlier forms of teams and newer contemporary teams. Like I said, diversity have increased, generational differences have increased, technological tools have created various forms of challenges. Conflicts might be very different compared to earlier forms of teams. I am not saying there will be more conflicts in contemporary teams, but the nature of conflicts may be new. And also in contemporary teams, evaluating effectiveness.

Effectiveness means impactfulness, whether a particular team is impactful or not. It is difficult because the definition of what is being impactful, is it just performance? or is it

whether people are cohesive or whether it is about long-term sustainability. So how do you define effectiveness or impactfulness and how do you measure them? That itself is a very challenging task. Measuring performance, even if it is performance, how do you measure performance? Because performance may not necessarily be what you do directly in a job. It can also be how you contribute indirectly as a team member.

For example, you may not be involved in creating the outcome, but your input or your support, which can also be emotional support or which can also be support in terms of helping people to communicate better or helping people to share information better or building trust. So these kinds of issues can also, these kinds of factors can also contribute to team performance. And how do you measure these behaviors? Because without these behaviors, the actual performance may not happen. So how do you define performance and how do you measure performance itself is a challenging task in contemporary teams. In fact, this is challenging in earlier forms of teams also.

But in contemporary teams, there are many other challenges like this because of various factors which create a newer kind of an environment. And also a very important challenge in newer kind of teams is how these teams interact with other entities in the environment. So when I say environment, environment means things which surround the team. It can be social systems, it can be physical systems, it can be organizational systems. For example, let's say there is a cross-cultural team which works together in our organization.

There might be others in the organization who may not be, they may not be diverse in terms of culture. This team might be a very unique team because there are people from different cultures collaborating. But others in the organization may belong to one culture. So how these uniformity influence diversity in the team. So it can be, this can be the social environment influencing the team.

It can also be the physical environment influencing the team. For example, let's say you belong to a certain kind of a climate of a particular region and you work in another place where the climate or the weather changes are very extreme. So how do you cope with this kind of physical or ecological environment. It can also be structural environment which means there are two teams which are collaborating from different organizations. So each organization the structures are different, the formal rules are different, the kind of regulations are different, cultures are different.

So when they collaborate these structures which these joint teams work might be very different and that might influence the performance or dynamics of the team. Earlier most teams were from the same organization. So whatever environment change happened

which happened within the organization. But now since inter-organizational teams collaborate, intercultural, cross-cultural teams collaborate, these challenges are become very unique and the environments they work are becoming more and more complex. In fact, there is a term called VUCA world, V-U-C-A, VUCA world which has been used very popularly in management context.

So VUCA means volatile, uncertain, complex and very unpredictable kind of an environment. So in organizations these kind of uncertainties have increased because there are many factors which influence the way organizations work and these uncertainties have influenced the way teams also work. So we spoke about contemporary teams, what are contemporary teams and what is the team, difference between team and a group. Now we are going to talk about a very specific kind of a team which is virtual teams. So what is a virtual team? Have you heard of this term virtual team? In fact, after pandemic most of us are part of some form or the other virtual team.

So virtual team, before getting into what is virtual team, I will just explain very simple words what is virtual team. We are going to look at the definition of virtual team later. So virtual team means a team where people work from different places. They don't meet or they meet rarely.

They work from different places. They don't actually meet face to face. Even if they meet, they meet very rarely, but they communicate with technological tools. Sometimes they may work from different geographical locations and also time zones. Because they work from different geographical locations, the time zones might be different. For example, let's say I work in India, somebody else works in US.

So I'll be sleeping in India, the person, my team member for him or her it will be daytime. Or I might be going for my morning run in one place, my team member might be going home from work. So there will be time zone differences. There might be cultural differences because they belong to different cultures. There might be functional differences because people from different geographical locations also means that there's a need for people from different technical backgrounds to come together and work.

So their backgrounds might also be different. So all these distances, virtual teams are also called as distributed teams. So these distance between people, the distance can be geographical distance, cultural difference, functional difference. So all these differences create a certain kind of challenge in these kind of teams and these teams are called as virtual teams. So they're not spatially sitting together, they are spatially disturbed or distributed, spatially diverse and distributed.

So that is what is a virtual team. A very basic criteria for a virtual team is a team uses extensive media tools for communication between the members. A very simple way of understanding virtual teams. So before pandemic, there were virtual teams. Like for example, outsourcing teams or organizations which collaborate with other organizations. So there were teams where, like I said, two organizational members, they work together and they were collaborating.

Most of the times they'll collaborate virtually. But post pandemic, what happened is starting from school children to officers, all these things become remote. The idea of remote working, working from home or working from wherever you are there You don't need to come to the office. So that has created this need for people to collaborate virtually. You cannot go to your office, you're not allowed to enter your office. So you need to work from home, use virtual tools, use video conferencing, use email to collaborate.

So after pandemic, virtual teams have become more and more common. In fact, my PhD research, when I did my PhD in 2008 from IIT Bombay, I finished my PhD in 2008 from IIT Bombay, my PhD research was on virtual teams. So when I was working, virtual teams are very few and mostly bigger organizations, certain type of organizations, for example, IT organizations, they used virtual teams and that too teams which collaborated with people from other organizations, they only used virtual teams to work, virtual technologies to work. And even though there's this idea of remote working, we call it telecommuting, working from home was promoted by organizations because working from home leads to certain kind of advantage for the employee and also for the organization. Many people were reluctant, especially in Indian context, the idea of working from home was very, very rare before pandemic.

Suddenly when pandemic happened, people understood that this has certain advantages. In fact, now when organizations want their employees to come back to their offices, employees are resisting. Initially, they found it difficult to work from home during pandemic, but after certain years they got used to it and they have understood the advantage or the freedom they get in working from home. They don't have to commute, they don't have to physically be there, they can have work-life balance, all those things. So people have understood working from home or remote working or telecommuting has certain advantage.

So they have become more comfortable with that. So the point is, even though virtual teams were there earlier, the buy-in from employees or even from organizations, organizations were not trying remote working or virtual teams to a larger extent because they have their own concerns in terms of data security or lack of supervision on

employees and things like that. But now both organizations and employees have understood working virtually or working remotely has certain advantages. So it has become more and more common. In fact, this NPTEL or these MOOC courses, massive online open courses, used to be there earlier also. But the takers were relatively less because people felt that or students feel that, used to feel that if you have to learn you have to be sitting in the classroom, physically sitting in the classroom, listening to the teacher and things like that.

But now after pandemic, especially during pandemic, number of people who enrolled these MOOC courses or courses like NPTEL courses have increased. In fact, now a lot of universities use online platforms to teach their courses, many courses. So people are getting used to it. This idea of working remotely or using virtual way of working has become more and more common and this is going to increase also. And at some point maybe the entire work system can become virtual also.

They talk about virtual organizations, organizations which have people who don't sit in one physical space. In fact, they may not even have a head office or an office space. Everyone will work in different places and there'll be no such idea of office. So these are called virtual organizations. Maybe in very near future, there might be more and more virtual organizations.

In fact even now there are virtual organizations. Some of these startups, there are no offices. There might be people working, let's say there are 50 people, each one of them will be working from their own home and it might be one organization. So the point here is more and more teams are becoming virtual teams. One major reason before pandemic for teams to become virtual teams is globalization. Like I said, organizations, multinational organizations or organizations from different countries coming together due to mergers, acquisitions, or even one organization starting its operations in another country.

So all those things because of globalization, opening of global economy has led to multinational organizations and also outsourcing has increased. So obviously when outsourcing happens, you cannot send all the team members to the client location. So people have to communicate, teams need to communicate, team members need to communicate. And also technological tools are increasing.

Earlier only telephones were there. Some 20 years ago, the idea of internet was a luxury. Now everyone has internet in their hands. In fact, there are more number of people who access internet through phone rather than a computer and a smartphone has become a very common thing among people. And there is one study in India that says

there are more mobile phones than toilets in India. And now you see mobile phones with internet connectivity has become very, very common.

  So technology has become more affordable. Newer forms of technology which are very easy to use, even children can use those technologies. So earlier, if you have to use a computer, you need to know certain programming language or you need to have certain understanding of how to use a computer. But now with tablets or touch screen, it has become more and more intuitive. You don't need to, let's say if you need to make a video call, it's very easy to make a video call.

  It becomes quite easy for anyone to make a video call. For example, a WhatsApp call. Some five years or ten years ago, video call is something is like very high level organizations they only used. I still remember I was doing a course with Swiss and Indian students, Switzerland and Indian students. So we used to connect these teams using various technologies.

  That time we had very basic form of video conferencing. You need to have high speed internet, you need to have a certain system for audio transfer and you need to have a certain camera to connect between these two video conferencing systems, all those things. It used to be a big task. You needed a big infrastructure. But now with mobile phone, you can make group calls, video calls also.

  You don't need all those advanced technologies. So some of these technologies have become very, very common. They are very simple, but very, very useful, extensively useful, extremely useful and extremely affordable. So that has created even smaller organizations, even common people between friends, they are making video calls, between relatives, they are making video calls. In that sense, it has become a virtual get together.

  People doing virtual parties together, people dating virtually. People having their birthday celebrations virtually. People having marriages virtually. It has become, we are moving towards a virtual world and towards a comfortable place where people are quite easily using these kind of newer forms of collaborations. They may not even know the sophistication involved in these kind of technologies, these kind of, for example, let's say virtual birthday parties. Can you imagine? Have you ever imagined a virtual birthday party some five years ago? Now it has become common, isn't it? Like web hosting, weddings and things like that.

  So the point here is whether we understand the complexity or not, whether we are comfortable or whether we are skilled enough to use these technologies or not, whether

we are ready to use these technologies or not, these technologies, these forms of working and collaborating is going to happen more and more. So having said that, more and more teams are becoming virtual nowadays. Like I said, post-pandemic, even if you are not a multinational company, even if your work doesn't demand virtual work, people are comfortable doing it. Even if there is an option to go to your office and work, if there is an option to work from home, there might be people who will choose to work from home. Another important change which has created people's openness towards working in virtual team or working remotely is the newer generation.

Some of these generation, for example, GenX and before, for them, technology is a tool which they have to adapt to. They have to put some effort to learn. For example, if there is a new smartphone technology, I need to learn. But the newer generation, they don't need to even learn. They are so comfortable, they immediately are able to, they immediately embrace the new technology.

So for them, working from home is something which they are okay with. In fact, they are happy with, because they are comfortable with technological tools, they are comfortable to that way of working. But the earlier generation, there might be some form of resistance. And for them, working is about working in office. They might feel working means I need to wear a certain kind of a dress, I need to have a certain kind of an environment. But working from home is like you can work, you might be wearing a formal shirt and attending a meeting, but you might be wearing a pyjama or a track pant.

So you need to have a certain level of comfort in doing that also. So the hypothesis is the newer generation, the younger generation, they are more comfortable doing it. And thus, it has led to more and more remote working and virtual teams. So having said that, more and more people are willing to move towards virtual teams, more and more organizations are willing to use virtual teams for making their work done. There are a lot of advantages in working in virtual teams or using virtual teams as a form of organizational structure or as a way of doing work. One major advantage for the employees is they don't need to relocate, especially if you have to collaborate with people of organizations which are there in other countries.

For example, your client is in America, USA. So you need to travel there. And let's say if you have to work there for a year, you need to take everyone with you, you have to relocate with your family. So this leads to many challenges, finding a school for your child, finding a job for your spouse, or you have to go and work there, you will miss your family, you will have to adapt to the culture and things like that. But in fact, there used to be a very different kind of a challenge in terms of managing expatriates, expatriates means people from one country working in other countries. So managing or

helping expatriates to adjust well, that's a very major challenge for organizations. They need to give money for them to relocate, they need to create that support system to find a school for their children or their parents or to work for a spouse, all those things.

But now, people can work from their own home country for an organization which is there in a different continent, they don't need to relocate. You have the comfort of working in your home country from your own locality, community, but you are working for an organization which is there in another continent. You don't need to relocate. Organizations doesn't have the headache of helping these expatriates adjust to the new environment, all those things. And also no travel time, especially if you are working from home, your office is there, some one hour travel time.

So you are saving on the travel time, especially in metros, cities like Bangalore or Delhi or Bombay, travel time is like very high. And also it is very, very tiring. So more than working, the travel becomes a major burden on the employees, major stressor on the employees. So when there are virtual teams or when there is remote working, you don't need to travel and it saves time for you, it saves time for the organization, it saves fuel cost, it helps the environment because of all these travel related fossil fuel burning and things like that. In fact, when lockdown was opened after pandemic, many people are still working from home and the roads were like quite free.

All these school buses were not there, office buses were not there. Otherwise during office time peak hours, the entire roads will be like full of buses, full of two wheelers, cars, it used to be hell. But when people worked from home, roads were cleaner, roads were like empty or commuting was very easy. So it helps the ecosystem also. And telecommuting, telecommuting means working from home.

Working from home is a major advantage for employees. But again, there are downsides of working from home for the employees also, but there are advantages also. The major advantage is employees can choose when they want to work, how they want to work. They don't like if there's a meeting, it's not like you have to wear a formal wear, just like be comfortable in your own home space. And also, if you're having people in the home who needs care, working from home is a great advantage. For example, young mothers, mothers who have young children, or parents who have young children, or employees who have elderly parents who are at home.

I have seen many a times people who have elderly parents, they are worried about their parents, what will happen to them at home. They need to find someone, very trustworthy person to take care of their parents or children. So when people work from home, that burden is not there. So even if there's a babysitter, or even if there's someone

who can take care of your elderly parents, many times employees are worried that whether the proper care is given or not.

  So when you're working from home, that burden, that psychological burden and stress comes down. And working from home has other advantages in terms of let's say, you're working from home and you have to learn, let's say you're learning, you're doing a course or you're doing a, let's say you're doing some meditation kind of a course or something. You can do it, let's say at 10AM or you can go to your swimming class at 10AM, come back and work. If you're going to office, you have to miss your swimming class or you're jogging or exercising or undergoing a course or something. So when you work from home, you have total control over your time.

  So these are some of the advantages of remote working. When I say remote working, you work in your place, in your own place, but you work in a team where you work using technological tools to coordinate and communicate with your team members. Even the organizations have a lot of advantages when they use remote working or virtual teams. One, organizations can use these teams to work on parallel projects. Earlier, if all the team members are in the same location, they can work only on one particular project. But when people work from different geographical locations, the advantage of time zone differences, for example, at some point you work in one project and when this location, it is night, people of different other geographical location when there is day, they will continue working on the same project.

  Similarly, at the same time, people can work in multiple projects. Same team can work in multiple projects or one team member can work in different teams. So this team member can be part of a team which is there in another country and also they are part of a team which is their own organization which is in the same country. So, for example, many of these IT companies, project-based companies, same team member will be in different teams.

  She will be part of a team which works in a UK company, UK project. They will also be part of a team. She will also be a part of a team which works in their home organization.   So parallel projects are possible connecting different stakeholders, customers and suppliers. Supplier is in a different country, customer is in a different country. So by virtually collaborating, you can make them come together.

  You can serve both these stakeholders at the same time. So parallel projects are possible if you use virtual teams. You can also, as an organization, take help of best possible expertise. You don't need to like every time bring them here to work in your project. When I say bring them here, spend them that money, relocate them, ensure that

as expatriates they adjust well to the new environment.

All those things are not there. For example, earlier before pandemic, professors like me used to go to other colleges or other universities in other parts of the country because they call us for giving a talk or they call us as part of their doctoral committee or they have their own syllabus, academic council meeting and things like that. So for one hour meeting, they have to spend us on airfare, putting us in a hotel, all these travel elements, all those things. The meeting might be only one hour, but sometimes when they are in far off places, they have to spend a lot of money on us to bring us there. But now everything has become online.

PhD viva voce has become online, presentations have become online, interviews have become online. As an expert in an interview panel, I can sit from my office in Hyderabad and conduct interview, which happens for some other university and the person who attends the interview also might sit in his or her own place and attend the interview. So you get the best expertise without spending much. And also because of virtual teams, it becomes easy to create that environment where different organizations can come and work. Earlier, for example, let's say there's a Japanese university and Indian university.

Earlier, only when somebody from India goes to Japan, you can meet them and establish ties. But now you don't need to go there. You just look at the website and say, okay, this professor is working in this area, write to that professor and say, I am also working in that area, can we work on a project? And that project can also be virtual. You don't need to collect data going physically also.

You can work by online questionnaires or online interview. So everything has become easier for the organization. All these travel costs, all these material costs, for example, questionnaires or prototypes, developing prototypes. Now we call virtual reality. Through virtual reality, even prototyping has become virtual. You don't need to physically create something.

Some of these experiments of creating something, you can create them virtually also. So all these things have helped organization cut down cost, enhance efficiency. And also like I said earlier, relocation costs have come down extensively. So I'll stop here because we're going to look at the definition of virtual teams. Even though I spoke about what is virtual team, how it is changing the way people work and what are the advantages, the definition of virtual team itself is changing now.

The earlier definition of virtual team is teams which extensively use technology to

collaborate. But now this idea of extensive use of technology itself is changing. And also the idea of virtual team is using technology. But there can be other things which can create a sense of virtualness in the teams.

 So those are some of the things we are going to see in the next lecture. So I'll stop here. We'll meet in the next class.