

## Tips for virtual team managers

### Managing virtual teams can be tough

Leading a virtual team can be challenging: individual team members often complain of a sense of isolation and a lack of connection with others in the team. Common factors compounding this are geographical distance, difference in time zones and a diverse mix of communication styles. Virtual managers need to be adept at keeping their virtual team engaged and maintaining a feeling of inclusivity.

Companies often favour virtual project teams for financial reasons; working virtually minimises travel expenses and more importantly, makes use of employees working across different time zones who are able to 'follow the sun' and running a project non-stop by handing over to each other as their business day ends.

To accomplish this smoothly depends on each virtual team member having a clear understanding of their role and working in close collaboration with the others. It also requires good communication skills and strong leadership. The benefits can be enormous; a good virtual team is able to harness the skills and expertise from the organisation's best talent worldwide - to achieve great results.

### So how do I choose my team?

If you are lucky enough to have a budget for team building or profiling tools you could consider TMP\*, the team management profile. This assesses individual working preferences and helps you to identify more easily people whose working styles complement each other. Alternatively, The International Profiler\* is a useful tool for those who want to understand the complexities of international working.

If, as is often the case, you have to rely on your own assessment, here are some pointers to help you look beyond purely technical skills when choosing members of your team:

### 6 essential qualities of a virtual team member

- **Team player** with ability to build and maintain relationships.
- **Keen collaborator** but also happy to work autonomously – a willingness to keep colleagues up to date and ensure information flows is essential.
- **Culturally sensitive** and able to adapt to aspects of new cultures which may not be aligned with their own.
- **Good communicator** able to adapt personal communication style to context and other team members. Knowing your own communication style and how it impacts on others is something relatively few people are able to do.
- **Flexible worker** as they may need to participate in meetings out of hours. Flexibility also means being able to accept different ways of working which may be culturally bound such as different preferences around planning, attending meetings or giving feedback.
- **Competent technology user** - depending on the tasks involved, teams will need to be comfortable in using a virtual dashboard of different technologies to enable them to follow processes and keep information flowing. Offer training to those who are less experienced in using the chosen tools.

### **Getting the best from your virtual team**

Once the team has been assembled a face-to-face kick off meeting is an ideal way for team members to get to know each other and build strong relationships. If this is not possible then organise a video conference with time allocated for team building with small talk and personal presentations. It is at this stage in the team's life span that a good virtual manager will suggest drawing up a set of protocols for the team. This provides a foundation for collaboration. It also allows individuals to voice expectations and raise doubts before miscommunication and confusion arise. Investing time and energy in getting the relationships and procedures right during the early stages of your virtual project will lead to greater efficiency and productivity further down the line.