



Intercultural Virtual Teams

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Erasmus+

Intercultural Virtual Teams

In a globalized world, working in intercultural virtual teams is a day-to-day reality and having the skills to navigate such modality of communication has increasingly become a necessity for modern professionals.



Characteristics of Virtual Teams

Intercultural virtual teams:

- 1) are geographically distributed and are often spread across different places, spaces, and/or time zones
- 2) make use of technology for communication (e.g. virtual spaces)
- 3) usually have to complete tasks together (Mesmer-Magnus, DeChurch, Jimenez- Rodriguez, Wildman, & Shuffler, 2011; Pazos, 2012). Collaboration is one of its keywords



Intercultural Virtual Teams

As you could probably see in the video provided in the warm-up activity of this unity, though some might think that holding intercultural communication online is easier than communicating with people from different cultures in face-to-face mode, in most cases, technology adds some challenges to such kind of teamwork.



Barriers



Communication



Intercultural Virtual Teams

So, what can we do in order to have more effective communication in intercultural virtual teams?

Cagiltay, K., Bichelmeyer, B., & Akilli, G. K. (2015) suggest many strategies that can be organized under six categories...



Strategies for Intercultural Virtual Teams



Strategies for Intercultural Virtual Teams

Under each category, we find...



Strategies for Intercultural Virtual Teams

Accepting Cultural Differences

providing a cultural orientation session at the beginning of the project

letting the team members get to know each other

Sharing real life cases or role playing to improve empathy

Motivation

a clear definition of team goals and transparency in goal setting are necessary

establishing a sense of an individual's role in the team

feedback on positive results and training

Building trust among members (f2f meetings, informal communication, etc...)

Facilitation

Questioning

fostering participation

addressing interpersonal and group dynamics,

uncovering anxieties

Team leaders need to be trained



Strategies for Intercultural Virtual Teams

Managing Communication

establish personal relationships with the rest of the team members

be particularly sensitive to cultural differences in terms of communication styles

Define a 'lengua-franca' (English?)

teams should avoid using slang or other culture specific terms

Conflict resolution

Being prepared for conflicting situations

clarify and address problems

give clear instructions

focus on the issues

work toward solutions

Emotional intelligence

Empathy

Avoid taking sides

politeness

Use of appropriate media

Consider homogeneity/diversity characteristics

Designers should determine "the lowest common denominator"

task-technology-structure fit



Strategies for Intercultural Virtual Teams

Besides all the strategies suggested, in times of fast-changing technology, one should always be ready to apply creativity for overcoming barriers to intercultural communication in virtual teams.

Whenever you try something new that works, write it down. This way, you will be able to create your own portfolio of solutions and will also have the opportunity to share it with colleagues afterwards.

