

Managing Virtual Teams in a Pandemic: A Case Study on Downsizing and Performance Improvisation

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Abstract: *This case study explores the challenges and strategies involved in managing and downsizing virtual teams during a pandemic. It presents an in - depth analysis of a global IT services organizations approach to change management and organizational restructuring. The study provides valuable insights into the complexities of remote work, cost - cutting, and performance management in a crisis. The purpose of this case study is to explore the strategies and challenges involved in managing and downsizing virtual teams during a pandemic, with a focus on the role of regional managers.*

Keywords: Virtual Teams, Downsizing, Pandemic, Change Management, Performance Improvisation, Case Study

1. Introduction

This case study outlines an inter - mediation within a global IT services organization headquartered in Mumbai with offices and branches throughout India and globe. It is a very well - established prominent organisation and highly regarded for the wide array of the online payment transaction services offered to the major banks in India and Abroad.

The study employs a case study approach, drawing on first - hand accounts from ex - colleagues working in the organization under study. The material presented is based on my notes collected during a one - on - one meeting with my ex - colleagues, working in this organization as an Assistant Vice President within this prestigious organization.

About Gagan Singh (Name is fictional)

When lockdown was declared on 21st March 2020, the new normal was a challenging phase for every individual. We all had to adapt the work from home (WFH) culture overnight. Gagan singh was started his morning by checking his mail, as usual from his work from home location. While going through with the mails, one of the emails made him stop and think. It was from his superior Mr. Venugopal Swami (Name is fictional), the Vice president of IT services organization from Mumbai. He wrote - Firstly, the company is finding it difficult to keep a balance between on site, remote and regional workplaces. It is very clear now, that due to high work demand, we all need to enable our regional mangers at every location to be virtually aligned with the system. Secondly, due to the low supply of funds and payments from the clients, the company need to give a thought to cost cutting of your respective department resources at headquarter and regional level. Where will the organization be heading ? How much would be percentage of job cutting planned by the management board? Whether I am secured in my job or not? In my team whom should I fire and whom to retain?

Downsizing and Restructuring

This case study is significant as it provides insights into the complexities of managing virtual teams during a crisis, offering potential strategies for organizations facing similar challenges. It is very clear now, that due to high work demand, we all need to enable our managers at every location to be virtually aligned with the system along with being habitual to this new normal. It is easy to lose your focus on work with all the demand on human resources today. Covid 19 has forced us to adapt the changes in our day - to - day work. The need to develop your change management skills and retrain your virtual teams, so that the organisation will be ready with the changes & upcoming challenges as well.

Here's an example to illustrate the point:

This is based on a true story about Mr. X, an Assistant Vice President of Recruitment for a major IT company. It all started when the Head of Human resources (PAN INDIA), his boss texted him to attend a virtual meeting on conference call. The IT firm serves major banking clients, so it was strictly prohibited for them to conduct any sort of video calling with the free available platforms e. g. Google meet, Zoom, Microsoft teams etc.

When Mr. X entered the virtual con call he noticed that the horizontal line of Assistant Vice President (s) of different domains were already there in that call. The head of Human resources broke the silence - "Welcome all, we need your advice on the recent problem which our company is facing for regional employees cost cutting, because you have previously also experienced and implemented the change development and retraining in the organization, we need your help." He went on saying - As you all are aware of the next 5 years growth plans and various new global bank client mergers, providing online 24*7 support to our clients, keeping the online transactions smooth etc. We need to start creating the urgency of this task, build a team, do a SWOT analysis of our zonal and regional teams, and identify the employee's perception towards work from home. I want all of you to put your plan and get back to me after 2 weeks.

Mr. X generously replied: I will give my best and will update you after 2 weeks. Although he was very anxious as to how to ask his own regional team member to leave the organization and that too during this tough Covid time. But he must come up with it, as promised. Immediately he acted on the first step of "Succession Planning." He researched on few topics and identified five categories of related topics that he thought might help him.

- Strategic Planning
- Change Management
- Organizational Diagnosis
- Digital transformation
- Organizational development

Out of these five categories, organizational development and strategic planning was not of much to see right now. But surely, he can combine change management with the amalgamation of organizational diagnostics with digital transformation. Companies now need to equip their workforce with changing times to become more stronger with maximum upcoming competition. The experts say, the organization who look forward in training and retraining of their employees always come up as winners on the other side of the crisis.

Based on the analysis of creating a combination of change management, organizational diagnostics with digital transformation XYZ created a plan of action:

Phase 1: Define the change management strategy and identify all the symptoms:

The average age of top management senior executives is 58 - 59 years. Most of them will retire in next 1 or 2 year. The total number of regional managers in Tier 2 cities are 17, out of which the physical location presence is of 15 regional offices, rest are on field.

Phase 2: Identify a coherent statement including the impact analysis

In the next 5 years, the company will not be able to fill the retired Top management positions from within the organization. The regional heads are looking for vertical growth in the organization.

Conclusion: The case study underscores the complexities of managing virtual teams during a pandemic, highlighting the need for strategic planning, change management, and performance management. It suggests that organizations that adapt quickly to changing circumstances can maintain operational efficiency even in a crisis.

Case study Questions:

- Q1. What would be the strategic planning by Mr. XYZ?
- Q2. What are the various employee engagement tools can be suggested for solving the current issue of remote working?
- Q3. Is there any key role of performance management system in the entire case study? If Yes, kindly elaborate.
- Q4. If you will be in place of the AVP, what would be your key learning in the similar scenario?

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