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Communication Behavior of Leaders in Virtual Teams

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Current studies into leadership practices are getting more and more topical due to the interest in virtual leadership. Despite the variety of ways how to manage teams effectively, virtual teams present new obstacles that leaders have to take into consideration. The concept of communication behavior is based on the fundamental notion of communication. Communication may be viewed as not a dependent part of organizations, but rather as an organization itself. This refers to a constitutive approach, which emphasizes that communication makes the social world and, as a consequence, organizations. As leaders and leadership are essential components of organizations, the communicative approach can be applied to them as well. Leaders can not manage, motivate and inspire without communication. Thus, the notion of communication behavior is used. Communication behavior refers to acts, interacts, and double interacts, which aim at making progress or regress in reaching goals [3]. This means that communication patterns are social in their nature, as they are used to engage in relationships with other members of the group. At the same time, communication behavior links actions on an individual (macro) level with collective (macro) structures [5].The notion of communication behavior refers to people being active agents with behaviors driven by various motivations. These behaviors can be socially learned, copied, self-corrected depending on the goal of an agent.Leadership may be viewed as a result of personality or mental characteristics (trait approach), a phenomenon of organizational context (situational approach), a functional role in a group (functional approach), a specific type of relationship in organizations (relational approach), or a specific exchange in an organization (transformational approach). The variety of approaches shows different perspectives on the complex nature of leadership. At the same time, all approaches include communication and communicative behavior as an element of leadership.It's worth noting that leadership as a concept is socially constructed, that's why there are so many approaches and possible behavioral scenarios that are adapted to the situation. In terms of virtual teams, the notion of virtual leadership or "e-leadership" [1] emerges. Despite similar general principles in the concept of leadership, e-leadership has 4 distinct principles to take into consideration [2]: communication environment, information flow, the effects of leadership in various contexts and the novelty of processes and strategies.To overcome all these difficulties, researchers come up with several strategies that can help to manage a virtual team successfully [6]. The first recommendation to address this problem is to establish and maintain trust through communicative technologies. In particular, trust can be gained through the establishment of norms on how the information is communicated to avoid misunderstandings between the parties. The next recommendation is to acknowledge the diversity of team members and make the benefit of it. One more recommendation refers to using meetings as a tool to improve employee engagement and to clarify misunderstandings. As meetings, in general, tend to get off track, leaders should limit the discussion to the direction of work and control the process. Being the guardian in this case is essential, as it emphasizes the role of the leader as well as highlights the key points of work. The next recommendation is to provide support and coaching when necessary. One of the biggest strengths of a virtual team for a leader is the ability to see the progress online and offer

help in a synchronous or asynchronous format. The final recommendation is to ensure that the work benefits the employees and to reward them. This step is typical for offline work settings, but may present a difficulty for a virtual leader. Based on various research [4] a virtual leader also has to take into consideration the frequency of contacts and the number of media. As virtual teams seem to be distant from traditional offline work, employees want to feel engaged in work, so a leader has to increase the number of communication contacts. It is important to make sure that communication systems are well-established and well-maintained. In terms of media channels, the more media an employee has, the more difficult it is to keep up with all of them. Therefore, it is essential to keep it simple to avoid overload. There is also a recommendation to increase personal and informal interactions between virtual team members, which seems to be partially troublesome for a virtual leader. If employees know each other informally, they are likely to be more engaged in work. In conclusion, the paper suggests practical implimentation of the theoretical framework into School of Foreign Languages (Higher School of Economics).

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