

terms of language, Solomon suggests having a printed agenda so everybody can follow along during meetings, and a recap typed up at the end so everyone is on the same page and can refer to the notes if there were any confusion.

In terms of communication, 94 percent of participants found the inability to read nonverbal cues challenging while another 90 percent said the lack of face-to-face contact interfered with the ability to build relationships. In addition, 81 percent cited that it was more difficult to build trust and rapport while working virtually.

Solomon suggests practicing active listening skills, as well as holding informal water cooler-type meetings to form connections and build community within the team. She also recommends using a webcam or Skype when possible to pick up on visual clues.

Cultural barriers include slower decision making (80 percent of respondents) and frustration with different leadership styles (77 percent). Another 75 percent reported the challenge of nonparticipation by some colleagues.

Solomon emphasizes building a process and structure around meetings to include a set schedule and predefined work rules and roles. “You need to allow time for team members to think,” she says. “It requires awareness and practice to become comfortable with it.”

“When it comes down to it, people really do prefer being able to see each other,” adds Solomon, explaining that face-to-face communication will never go out of style.

But virtual teams are time-efficient and cost-effective, and are a manageable challenge given time and training.

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Gaining Control of the Remote Workforce

Workers on virtual teams report communication shortcomings and cultural barriers. By Aparna Nancherla

Are employees today working virtually or virtually working? Mostly the former, though the lack of in-person interaction comes with its share of challenges.

Only 60 percent of participants on these virtual teams consider them fully successful, according to “Virtual Teams Survey Report 2010—The Challenges of Working in Virtual Teams,” released by intercultural training consultancy RW3 CultureWizard, even though 80 percent of corporate managers work virtually at least part of the time and 63 percent consider themselves members of global virtual teams.

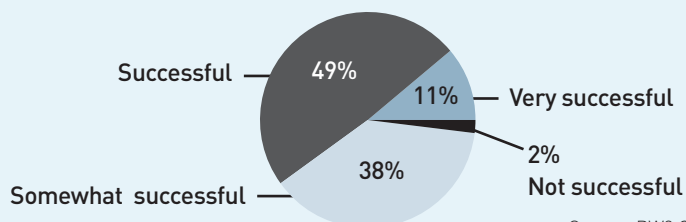
“In other business situations, we would never take that as a successful percentage of a behavior or activity,” says Charlene Solomon, executive vice president of RW3 CultureWizard. “The fact that 40 percent of respondents believe that virtual teams are not successful is pretty stunning.”

The survey isolated the main challenges of virtual teams into three areas: time zone and language difficulties, communication styles, and cultural differences.

Eighty-one percent of respondents indicated time zones as an obstacle when working on virtual teams, and 64 percent said the same of language, whether it be accents or dialects.

“Time zones and languages are things that you can’t change,” says Solomon, but she advises training around them by addressing aspects that are more flexible. For example, if a U.S.-based team is used to holding its meetings with a team in India in the morning—meaning the participants overseas are convening during nighttime—then the meeting time could be adapted as part of a compromise. In

How Successful Is Your Virtual Team?



Source: RW3 CultureWizard