PQ Institute

Spotlight Topic
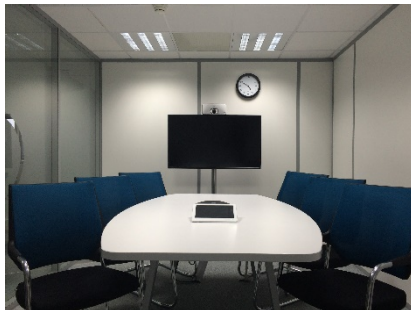
The Virtual Workplace

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Technology has become an increasingly used tool in the workplace, demonstrating both strengths and limitations. Technology has allowed people from all over the world to easily communicate and collaborate at a low cost. Work can now take place at any time and any place. On the other hand, communication via technology requires a different kind of effort. Cross-cultural teams have to accommodate time differences and the components of face-to-face interaction that we are so used to are eliminated. We now have to exercise more effort to learn how to use the virtual workplace to our advantage.

The ability to work in cross-cultural groups via technology demonstrates a great use of multiple PQ elements. With the advancement of technology, it is important to develop these PQ elements in order for us to have a successful future at work.

The virtual workplace requires the use of technological tools, all which come with a learning curve. Neuroplasticity is needed in order to adapt to using new technological tools as well as to use them to achieve the same goals that one would achieve in the physical workplace. In addition, the virtual workplace opens the doors to cross-cultural collaboration. Neuroplasticity is needed in order to work efficiently with different people and different cultures.

The use of virtual communication requires an even stronger ability for mentalizing. Verbal and physical cues are less prominent when communicating over the phone or videoconferencing. Mentalizing will facilitate the ability to read another person's emotions as well as display one's own emotions when communicating via technology.

Finally, executive functions are needed when working virtually because it is even more important to have in depth plans and deadlines to make sure everyone stays on track. When a virtual meeting is over, it is difficult to stay up to date on one another's progress. That is why a detailed step by step plan is needed to make sure that everyone is working toward the common goal.

With the novelty of the virtual workplace, many times it is hard to get the work done right. However, with the use of some different strategies, virtual work will not seem so difficult.

The virtual workplace does not promote complex communication and behavior. That is why it is important for employees to know how to communicate clearly and concisely. Before having a virtual conversation, put aside some time for preparation. Think of the key points that need to be communicated and stick to those key points when in a virtual meeting or sending an email.

Finally, with the virtual workplace comes the opportunity to work with people from all over the world. Employees should be flexible as well as respectful to different cultural practices when working virtually. It may be helpful to ask a supervisor how best to communicate with someone or to do research into the different communication styles that a culture may have.

When beginning to work virtually with a new colleague, it is important for the team to have a first meeting face-to-face, if possible. If a face-to-face meeting is too difficult, an introductory meeting should suffice. Having an introductory meeting acts as an ice-breaker and fosters the ability to mentalize in the team. This occurs because the first meeting involves learning about the team members. When learning about team members before getting straight to work, it increases the ability to read one another's emotions and thus increases trust between team members[1]. Trust is essential for success when working collaboratively in the virtual workplace because trust motivates positive actions to increase positive results[2]. It is important that every time a new team member joins the group, that an introductory meeting is always set so that all team members are given the ability to learn about and trust one another.

Finally, it is important for organization's to note that some forms of virtual communication are better for specific kinds of tasks. For example, when a task is clear and has a black and white answer, audio technology (e.g., phone call, audio conferencing) would provide enough resources to complete the task successfully. However, an ambiguous task which requires a collaborative group effort would benefit from videoconferencing to complete the task[3]. Therefore, organizations should have the resources in place to provide the proper technology to their employees depending on the virtual work they may be doing.

All in all, technology is rapidly developing. Whether we like it or not, it will enter the workplace. It is up to us as individuals, teams, and organizations to prepare ourselves to be ready to adapt and work with technology.

References

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