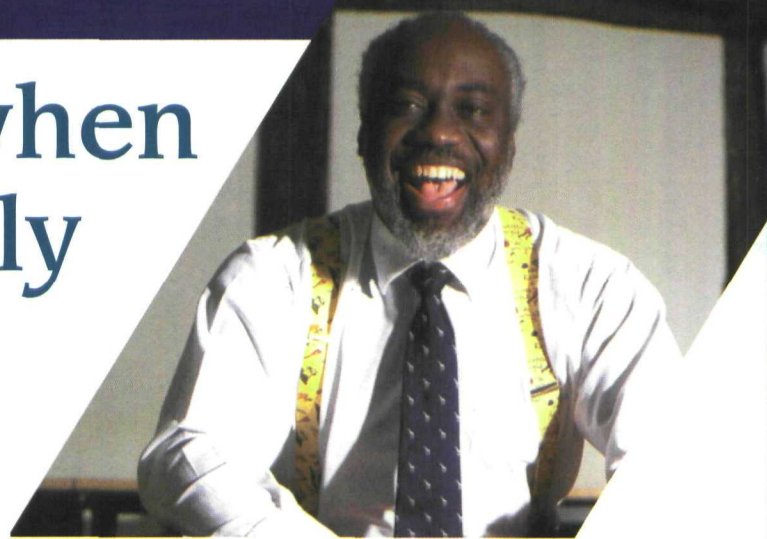


What to do when virtual is really all you have!

Eddie gives top tips for cyberspace tools



The die has been cast. The straw has been drawn. And it's yours. Your organisation has decided on madness - a cross-organisational global project involving divisions and affiliated companies around the world - and you're leading it. And for support what have they offered you? What was it your VP said? 'You'll have to run it with a virtual team.' You'd nodded and tried to look cool. What on earth had he meant by 'virtual team'? The first thing you'd done back in the office was consult the dictionary. You'd read the excerpt below.

virtual / 've:rchuuol / *adjective* 'having the effect without the traditional form'. (see virtual reality) :- rem. **virtue**:- / virtue in meeting the challenges of New World, demonstrating non-conventional approaches- **virtual organisation** information based, cyberspace based, - / effective people, **virtual team**, non-hierarchical building block of a virtual organisation effective across barriers of space, time, and cultural mindset / *noun* / *winning in a virtual world* see eddie, "fon'nlearning- /ptvbs

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Great definition, but what do you practically do for success? And anyway who is that 'eddie' referred to?

For once I feel guilty. You see, back at the beginning of the 1990s it was me and a team I was working with in Mercury Communications who coined the term and gave it life. We did this by training up hundreds of young bright managers on a custom-built course called 'Achieving results through virtual teams'. The first questions everyone asked were: 'What is a virtual team?' 'Why virtual?' 'Why not just a team?'

The world has moved on, the term has

entered the language and managerial consciousness. It still means that when you work, irrespective of what part of the organisation or the world your team members are in, they should achieve and experience the effect of a team although they are not configured in the traditional form. This is the secret to success in virtual teaming.

And now, as I work in a virtual business school, I'm condemned forever to only belonging to virtual teams.

But everyone is at it. As the New World continues to ensure that the pace of change outrips the pace that hierarchical organisations can learn, organisations need a filler for the gaps and cracks created as the rigid structure tries to flow flexibly and gracefully to meet its challenges. Virtual teams are the filler.

We know about real teams. It's not a team if it doesn't have a shared or common goal, interdependence and each person has a sense of personal accountability and contribution. But we also know that interdependence can only grow from trust. Trust is a result of making every one feel

included in the team, suitably open and with the right level of control over what's going on. But this trust must be built at a distance, across cultures and time zones.

How do you do this? I guess more effective communication could help to lubricate the development of trust. But communicating face to face is hard enough; communicating with people you've never met, who have completely different views, across a cyberspace void, is a nightmare.

'Communication is not two-way. It is a one-way process. A one-way process fraught with difficulty. You need to deliver the goods. And the person being communicated with needs to confirm that they're the right goods. But even the journey back is just as difficult. In everyday life this is bad enough, but in projects where things only happen once, and are not repeated day in day out, it is essential to get that one-way trip right each and every time.'

Most aspects of virtual teams blossom and thrive on effective communication. But virtual teams also provide a special challenge. Some things often go wrong but we can anticipate and therefore avoid them by:

