

Management of virtual teams in international research projects

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Big research projects carried out by international consortia of several organisations, where collaboration and coordination is being maintained mostly in the virtual form open new possibilities for all actors involved. They conduct joint research and make their knowledge, capacities, infrastructure, expertise and networks mutually available. Rapidly evolving IT-technologies provide increasingly more possibilities for virtual collaboration. However, this form of work creates also new challenges. Virtual collaboration requires not only adaptation of management style as well as targeted and efficient communication. It also demands a high level of intercultural competence (IC) of each team member as well as a raising awareness for this topic. Sensitivity towards cultural differences in e.g. direct / indirect communication, dealing with time (e.g. deadlines) or role expectations is even more crucial in virtual teams than in local teams. As face-to-face interaction is diminished in virtual teams, misunderstandings are bound to occur more often. The more important it is that team members are familiar with concepts of IC. This talk identifies and discusses key issues arising from management of virtual international project teams and suggests hands-on solutions. Recommended actions comprise e.g. kick-off trainings on IC and regular online group discussions with a trained intercultural mediator as well as virtual teamwork for the project consortium and a participative management training for key members. This talk will provide guidance on how to increase the individual commitment to the project despite the lack of personal contact and non-verbal communication. An implementation of these measures is bound save resources, improve overall project performance and positively influence the quality of project results.