

Working In Contemporary Teams

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Lecture - 01

Hello everyone. Warm welcome to this course on introduction to contemporary teams and virtual teams. I'll give you a brief introduction about myself. I am Dr. M.P.Ganesh. I work in the department of entrepreneurship and management in IIT Hyderabad. I am one of the co-instructors for this course. We also have another instructor who will be handling the next half of the course.

Before we get into the specifics of this course, I would like to talk about a bit of context for why I am offering, why we are offering this course. One reason why we are offering this course is I have already offered a course called organizational behavior in the NPTEL and it was well received. That course talks about the broader aspects of how individuals behave in organization and how organizational factors influence a group dynamics, individual dynamics and things like that. So as an extension of the course, we thought we will offer a course which exclusively talks about teams and more specifically teams of contemporary times. We will talk about what is contemporary times little later.

So that is one reason. The second reason being the co-instructor as well as myself, we have done a lot of research in the area of team dynamics, cross-cultural virtual teams, team aspects in a newer context and things like that. So we thought whatever knowledge we have generated as research, it will be better to offer them as a course so that practitioners can benefit from it. Having said that, this course is not only for practitioners, this course is also for people who are interested to know more about contemporary teams. So I will quickly tell you the outline of today's lecture.

First, we are going to talk about what do we mean by contemporary teams and then we will talk about what are the different challenges people face in contemporary teams and then we will move specifically to virtual teams and then we will talk about what are the factors which influence virtual teams. So before we start, I would like to understand what is your opinion about contemporary teams. What do we mean by contemporary teams? Just take a moment and think about what is this term contemporary teams mean. So I will give you a minute to think about it. But even before that, we need to understand what do

we mean by teams.

So when we say teams, how are they different from the idea of groups? So there are many ways in which people define teams and groups. But very simple way of understanding the difference between team and group is, group is a collection of people, may or may not be working together cohesively or even if they are working together cohesively, they may not have the interdependencies which may make them work in synergy. There are few terms which I am using here, group of people, working together, interdependence and synergy. So groups might have certain number of people who might work together. But the difference between teams and groups is, in teams, people work interdependently and also because they work interdependently, they are able to create some level of synergy.

So I will explain what it means by interdependence. There is a very important difference between dependence and interdependence. Dependence means one entity depends on the other entity for either the performance or to achieve its goal. For example, in a classroom, there are different people. We have teacher, we have students, so we can call it as a group.

A class can be a group. Here, there is dependency. Students depend on teachers to deliver the knowledge or lecture. So there is only dependency. Interdependency is, let us say, there is a crew, airline crew.

So in a flight, there is a pilot, there are people who help the pilot, technical assistance, people who can use technical assistance, there are ground staff, there are people who work within the flight when the flight takes off, stewards and support staff. They work together in a way that one person depends on the other person for his or her performance or achievement of goal. So work, the entire work will happen only when everybody works together as a team cohesively because they depend on each other to perform their task. So when we say interdependence, interdependence can be of different types. So it's sometimes interdependence may lie on the interdependence of task, which means if I have to fulfill my task, I depend on the other person to support me or the other person to finish his or her task and give it to me.

And then I'll work on that and then I will pass on the task to the other person. So performance of my task depends on how others in the team help me or do their task. So this is task interdependence. There is something called goal interdependence. Goal interdependence is we rely on each other in a team to achieve the goal.

They may not be dependent on each other for fulfilling the task, but they might be

depending on each other to achieve the larger goal of the team or the organization. But many a times, task interdependence and goal interdependence can have overlap. So we may work together to fulfill each other's task. By doing that, we are fulfilling the larger goal. So that can also happen.

So interdependence is something which differentiates a group and a team. In group, people may not have or will not have interdependence. They may work together, but there is no interdependence. For example, like I said, a classroom may not be a team.

It might be a group. It can also be a team when teacher and the students interact and they learn from each other, co-learning. If that happens, probably a class can be a team. But in a typical classroom setup, it's just a group. So team has interdependence. Interdependence can be task interdependence, goal interdependence.

I also mentioned about synergy. Synergy means, synergy differentiates groups and teams. Synergy means when people work together and they have interdependencies, they create something which is much beyond what individuals can create separately. So it is related to this idea of the sum is larger than, sorry, the whole is larger than the sum of the parts. In Gestalt's theory in psychology, they talk about individually when people perform and their performances are added, that will be lesser than people coming together, collectively working together and creating something large.

So I repeat it again. The whole is larger than some of its parts. When people come together and work, what they can produce as a team is much better than what they can produce individually, separately. So this is what is called synergy. Teams are able to create that synergy compared to groups because there's a lot of interdependence.

They help each other. People support each other. They complement each other's skills. If I am good at doing something and if somebody else is not good at doing the same task, I will help them. Similarly, if I am not good at something, if somebody else is an expert in that area, they might complement my weaknesses or areas which I don't have expertise. So that is what is the beauty of teams.

So this is about definition of teams. And also other elements like teams will have goals. They will have group of people. So every team is a group, but every group cannot be a team. So group is the largest set, team is the subset.

And what differentiates a team is it has interdependence and it has synergy. But all the other things like it has group of people, it has collection of people. Typically, when you say groups, it should be more than three people. And similarly, if there are more than

certain number of people, it might be called as some other entity. Let's say if there are 25 people or 50 people, it may not necessarily be a group in a very strict sense.

It might be some other entity. For example, project groups or department in an organizational context, it might be called as department. So departments are not strictly groups. They are certain size which is beyond the scope of the idea of groups. So let's not get into all those specificities, but I want you to understand the difference between groups and teams. There are other characteristics which we have to understand about teams.

One is interdependence, second is synergy, third is every team will have a goal. So when we say goal, the goal can be either defined by the organization or the team itself defines its goals. So every team will have certain level of independence or autonomy, especially if the team exists within the larger organizational context, the team will have certain level of autonomy and also certain level of conformity or certain level of dependence on the larger organization. For example, let's say there is a large software development project. So this software development project will have different modules.

So each of these modules will be handled by a team of people, team of software professionals. So each of these team is embedded in the or is part of the larger project, project group, let's say. So every team, sub-team or this smaller team in the larger project will have certain level of authority where they can control their own task. They can decide, they can schedule how they want to do their task, they can schedule job assignment within the team and things like that. So again, this autonomy may not always be complete.

Certain teams will have 100 percent autonomy, which means they can even decide what goals they want to achieve. But in most of the cases, goals of the teams, especially if the teams are part of the larger organization or a larger project group, the goals are set by the parent entity, isn't it? But to some level, each team will have some freedom to do what they want to do, how they want to do. So there is some autonomy, there is some control from the parent entity. In a very extreme case or in a very unique case, what can happen is these teams can decide even what goal they want to achieve. So the autonomy might range from very less to very high.

Very less autonomy means everything is dictated by the larger entity, the parent entity. In very high levels, everything can be decided by the team itself. So for example, let's say a movie making group, a movie making project. So a movie making unit where there are like hundreds or even thousands of people, there might be departments like editing section, music and things like that. So each of these subgroups will have some level of freedom to decide what they have to do and how they have to do.

So they might be falling in the middle of the spectrum. Let's say in teams like police teams or legal teams, everything is given as a rule to them. So they may fall at the lower end of the autonomy spectrum. So these creative teams may fall at the middle of the spectrum. There might be some teams, let's say a cricket team, they have complete freedom to decide what they, to handle the situation, except there are some broader rules.

A sports team, because there is a lot of uncertainty, there is a lot of things which change. So the team can decide how they want to play, what they want to play or the captain can decide how they want to play and how to assign tasks, even to some extent, what kind of goals and tactics they need to follow. So there's a broad spectrum of autonomy and especially goals. We are talking about goals. Especially goals, there are some cases the teams themselves can decide the goals, but most of the times the goals are set by the larger parent entity.

So when these teams set their own goals and they have complete autonomy, these schemes are called self-managed work groups. They are completely on their own and they manage their own goals and tasks and sharing of tasks and things like that. So why I am talking about all these things is to give you some idea about the difference between groups and teams and some of these components which are there in the definition of teams. So again, I quickly summarize. We looked at what differentiates a team and a group.

Team is sort of a subset of the idea of group. So groups and teams both have collection of people, but what differentiates a team from a group is in a team there is interdependency and this interdependency between the team members and the interdependencies might vary in terms of task interdependency, goal interdependency. In most of the cases, task interdependency and goal interdependency go with each other. And the second thing which differentiates a team and the group is there is synergy in the team, which means when people work together collectively, they can achieve much more than what they can achieve as a collection of individuals. So that is what is synergy. We also looked at every team will have goals and these goals can be either given to them or they can decide what types of goals they want to set.

Again, it depends on how much freedom they have to set their goals, decide their task, allocate tasks within the team and things like that. So now there are some interesting things I want you to think. One, when we say teams will have group of people, is it always necessary that teams should have people? So that is why we talk about contemporary teams. Traditionally teams means there are people, but newer forms of teams we talk about artificial intelligence, especially a lot of AI getting into tasks related

to human behavior, all these machine learning, artificial intelligence. So they are slowly are able to do things which humans can also do.

They are slowly replacing human self, certain tasks which otherwise we thought only humans can do, like decision making, driving a car and things like that. So nowadays in very near future or even now, there are teams which has non-human members like artificial intelligence or a robot. So these are the kind of teams, are emerging kind of teams and these are the teams exactly we are talking about. These are the teams which are contemporary teams.

So they can be non-human members. They can also be certain contexts where it is very, very new, which did not exist earlier traditionally. So those kinds of contexts define or influence the way teams perform or teams work together. So these are the things which we are going to talk about in this chapter. When we talk about contemporary teams, that is what we meant. If you remember, I asked you to think about what do we mean by contemporary teams.

So I gave you this long background about what is a team, how is it different from group and certain things we need to understand when you have to understand the definition of team, all those things. Now we are going to talk about what is a contemporary team. Contemporary team means present day teams. Contemporary means currently, what we have now. So teams which exist now and also teams which are new forms or new forms of teams which were not there earlier.

New forms of teams which are emerging into certain forms which might be very, very new compared to what existed earlier. You can't even imagine, for example, like I said, team, when we typically talk about team, we talk about people, managing people and understanding emotions and things like that. Now we are talking about artificial intelligence. We are talking about machines, thinking machines as part of teams. Will there be emotions involved? Will there be helping behavior involved? Will there be team unity involved if there is a robo or artificial intelligence.

So these are some of the instances which are emerging, newer forms where people cannot even anticipate. So this is what we meant by contemporary teams where certain aspects which are very unique, very new, which didn't exist earlier. So can you think of any other newer forms of teams or newer ways of teams which are emerging apart from this AI and robot? So one contemporary team we are going to talk about is virtual teams. In fact, this chapter, later in this chapter, I am going to talk about virtual teams. Before that, I would like to little bit talk about what has changed, why we are interested in knowing about contemporary teams or why is it important to understand what is changing

and why contemporary teams are becoming more and more important.

Why contemporary teams are important to understand? Because one reason is the nature of work and tasks are changing. Like I said earlier, certain things which are not there 10 years ago now, it has become very common. So how people work and what kind of work people do, it has completely changed. Certain jobs which are not there 10 years ago, now it has become very common. For example, all this gig work, people delivering food, people delivering groceries or Ola drivers or Uber drivers who can be called anytime and they will come to your doorstep.

So those things never existed some 10 years ago or 15 years ago. So certain jobs are new and certain tasks are also new or people are doing those tasks in a very different way. For example, earlier if you want to send a letter, if you want to send a mail, you have to literally write a letter, post it, put a stamp, go to post office, post it there, there will be someone who will be taking it, delivering it and all those stuff. But now the whole idea of sending mail, very few people think about sending hard copy mails. You think about sending emails. Similarly, many things have changed, isn't it? Many tasks have changed, newer works have emerged.

So this has created a certain kind of teams and this has changed the way teams manage work and teams work together. So it is very important to understand how work and change in work and changing tasks have created or influenced newer kind of teams. And second reason why it is important to understand contemporary teams is because the newer context of boundaries. When I say boundaries, earlier in organizations when they have teams, teams work in a very closed boundary, which means let's say there are 10 different teams in a project or in an organization.

Each of these teams will work on their own. There will be less of cross team communication or cross team collaboration. The major reason being there is no or there are very few technologies which help them to facilitate information transfer or collaboration between team collaboration. But now because of technology, because of newer forms of organizations, teams are forced to cross their boundaries, which means they are supposed to work with other teams. They are supposed to interact with other team members, which means members of the other teams. So this is okay, I mean within the organization there is some level of inter team collaboration and inter team crossing the boundary happens.

But now what has happened is because of newer forms of organizations where organizations are collaborating, there are outsourcing kind of tasks which happen where one organization helps the other organization to do their task. And obviously what will

happen is certain team members of this organization which helps other organization fulfilling their task, these team members have to interact with their team members. So here team members of one organization are crossing not just their team boundaries but also their organizational boundaries. Do you understand what I am saying? Earlier there is some level of interaction between one team and another team in an organization. Now because of some of these newer forms of organizations like outsourcing and mergers and acquisitions or collaborations, organizations are coming together and working together.

So in that case team members from one organization are collaborating with team members of other organizations. So this is what we call boundary spanning or crossing the boundary. So because of these boundaries, because of merger of these boundaries or because of crossing of the boundaries some of these team dynamics are changing. These boundaries can be like I said team boundaries or organizational boundaries, sometimes they can be cultural boundaries. So what I mean by cultural boundaries is these organizations work in different countries, cultural contexts.

So they have to like not just understand how the other organization works, how the other team works but also how the other culture works. Certain things which are relevant in this culture in India, let us say you are an Indian company, you are collaborating with a German company. So you need to understand how German teams work that is crossing the team boundary, you need to understand how a German company work. That is crossing the organizational boundary. You should also understand how Germans work which is crossing the cultural boundary.

So now because of many of these boundaries are crossed, team members need to understand how these boundaries, crossing these boundaries influence their work. Especially we are going to talk about cross-cultural teams. How crossing cultural boundaries influence the effectiveness of the teams. So since newer forms of organizations cross many boundaries, their teams are also crossing many boundaries.

Because of that many things are changing. One important thing I would like to talk about when especially when organization boundaries are crossed is team members may feel loss of identity. I will explain it quickly. Let us say you are a member of a team of organization A which works very closely with another team which is team B in organization B. So you work so closely with team B of another organization, you might be getting used to their way of working and not aligning to the culture or the interest of your own organization. What I mean to say is you are working so closely with a team of another organization, you lose touch with your own organizational culture and become so close to the culture of the other organization.

The example could be let us say you are a Indian company which is helping an American company for their payroll and things like that, IT function and you work extensively with, in fact you are also like in America working in their own campus in America. Let us say organization A, American company, organization I, Indian company, they send team members to American companies and they work in America but they belong to Indian team. But since they work in American team extensively, they become part of the American team even though technically they are part of Indian team. Because they cross the boundary, they lose their identity and they may start representing their American team rather than the Indian team which they belong to. So these are some of the issues which may arise when people cross boundaries in team or when teams cross boundaries.

These things are new, relatively new, like all these outsourcing, all these people working in other companies representing their company, all those things are relatively new. So these things have changed many of the dynamics. So nature of work and tasks have changed and that has influenced the newer forms of teams or that have created newer forms of teams. Boundaries are changing, boundaries are cross that is leading to certain kind of new forms of teams and also nature of interaction have changed.

Especially because of increased use of information technology or media tools. People have started using more of technology tools to communicate rather than face-to-face communication. Especially after pandemic, many people who join their work during pandemic time, they are used to working from home. In fact, there are people who have never seen their organization physically, they have joined during this pandemic time, they have never gone to their organization and there are cases where many of these employees have not seen their team members face-to-face in their organization. They would have interacted with them one or two years but almost always they would have interacted with, interacted using either audio conferencing, video conferencing or e-mail and things like that. So people have started using many technological tools and that has changed how people interact.

It is not just the media tools which are changing the way people interact, it is also the kind of hierarchies teams have. So some of these newer forms of teams, every team member has a lot of freedom, so there is no hierarchy in the team. So it's not like there is one team leader and there are people who work under the team leader. There are certain kind of teams everybody has their own power, there is no team leader, team leadership emerges, different kind of leadership positions emerge, there is no one leader, there are like some people who are leaders in technical elements, some people who are leaders in coordinating people. So some of these dimensions of leadership or power are changing and that is also changing the nature of interaction within the team and also nature of employees are changing.

One simple example could be there is a lot of diversity nowadays in the team. Why? Because diversity in organizations are also changing or increasing. Earlier let's say if it is an organization which is in a certain state of India, only people from that state will be there in the organization, but now there is a lot of cultural diversity between people from different states, different cultures, different nationalities, even gender differences, not just men and women, there are like we talk about gender diversity, disability, people with different disabilities also participate, so people of different value systems. Because of diversity, team dynamics also changes. There are challenges in terms of how to manage diversity and also there are generational diversity also. Now lot of young people are coming to workforce and the same team will have people of certain generation and also there are members of younger generation.

So when there is diversity, when there is amalgamation of people from different backgrounds, that can lead to many challenges to the team and that is also a good thing, but that can also create various other forms of problems or challenges. So this is what are the factors or these are the factors which influence or create a certain kind of challenges and that leads to emergence of newer forms of teams. In terms of exactly what we mean by contemporary teams, there are newer forms of teams like I said, for example distributed teams. Distributed teams means teams in which people work from different geographical locations, they may not even meet face to face once, one person might be in America, one person might be in India, one person might be in Japan, people are like distributed, may not necessarily different countries, they might be in the same city, but since they are working from home or their offices are in different places, people work from different places.

So these are distributed teams. Cross-cultural teams are teams in which have people of different cultural backgrounds. Cultural background not necessarily means nationality difference, it's not always means Americans, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, it can also be people of different belief systems, people of different values. So cross-cultural virtual teams are some of the new forms of teams. Self-managed teams, teams which are completely autonomous, like I said they can decide how they want to do their task, what they want to do, what kind of goals they want to set, complete freedom to do what they want to do, how they want to do, these are self-managed teams. Self-managed teams used to be there earlier also, but nowadays more and more teams are becoming self-managed and they're also startup teams.

The uniqueness about startup teams is startup teams are also organizations by themselves, they are smaller organizations but they are so small that you cannot, they fall under this definition of teams. They might be like eight or ten people or startups. So there

are certain challenges in managing or handling startup teams and also there can be human robot teams like I mentioned earlier. Nowadays there are teams which have AI, teams which have robots as part of teams. I mean in maybe another five, ten years there might be teams which might be having only robots or predominantly robots.

That is not very far, the time is not very far. There are also agile teams, agile teams with certain ways of handling tasks. So I will be handling, like I said I'm the co-instructor of the course, I'll be handling virtual teams, cross-cultural teams and startup teams. So I'll be talking about these three forms of teams, distributed teams which are also called virtual teams, cross-cultural teams and also startup teams. So some of the common challenges in managing these teams, these newer forms of teams is one, managing communication is a very important challenge because like I said in cross-cultural virtual teams people belong to different value systems, different beliefs systems, different ways of doing things. So that may create communication issues and also when people extensively use technology for communication that may have certain kind of influence, that may reduce the cohesiveness or the human touch in the team.

Team dynamics may change, the kind of conflict which arise, the kind of relationships people form, how networks within the team forms, all those things may change. So that can be a challenge. How do we evaluate effectiveness? How do we say this team is an effective team? That becomes a challenge because the definition of effectiveness itself may change and also performance, how do we measure performance? Some teams, it's very difficult to define the performance itself, how do you define and measure performance? How do we manage its relationship with other entities? The team might work in a certain context and the context will have some certain challenges, the environment will give you certain challenges. How do you manage those environmental challenges? When you say environment, the outside elements, the other teams in the organization or the society in which the team works, the new technological things which change in the larger industry, how it influences the team, all those things become some of the challenges.

So, I will talk about each one of them elaborately in the next lecture. So, I will stop here. I will quickly summarize what happened. So, we spoke about the difference between teams and groups. We spoke about what is a contemporary team and what has led to contemporary teams and what are the specific contemporary teams which are existing now and what are some of the major challenges in these contemporary teams. So, I hope this lecture was useful and engaging. We will meet in the next class.