

Managing Remote Teams: Management Theories

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Managing remote project teams has many challenges due to the physical separation of the team. All members of a project team will be different and have their own specific needs. As the project manager, you should apply management theories regarding the type of employee and their needs. Applying the theories of Douglas McGregor, Frederick Herzberg, Abraham Maslow and David McClelland will improve team dynamics, communications and the overall project performance.

This article will examine McGregors's X and Y Theory, Herzberg's Theory: Hygiene Factor, Maslow's Hierarchy of Need and David McClelland's Theory of Need in relation to managing remote project teams.

The success of a remote team will largely depend on the individual team members assigned to the team and the management style. The Project Manager will be required to trust the team and the individuals themselves. Having knowledge of McGregors's X and Y Theory will be beneficial in one of the key aspects of managing a remote team, team selection. Managing a remote team with the X Theory will be very difficult. The X Theory “This assumes that employees are naturally unmotivated and dislike working, and this encourages an authoritarian style of management. According to this view, management must actively intervene to get things done.” (MindTools, n.d.). Obviously, the X Theory will not be a good choice for managing remote project teams because management would not have the ability to intervene with the team due to being spread across a large geographical region and multiple time zones. The X Theory of management will work best with an on premise team.

Whereas, the Y Theory states, “This expounds a participative style of management that is decentralized. It assumes that employees are happy to work, are self-motivated and creative, and enjoy working with greater responsibility” (MindTools, n.d.). The Y Theory of management will complement remote teams and facilitate the team to thrive and be successful. Once the decision has been made to implement remote teams, then the management must trust the employees and the team, which supports the Y Theory of management.

Once the remote project team is selected, as the Project Manager it will be important to the success of the team to understand the needs of the individuals that make up the team. Understanding and applying the theories of Herzberg, Maslow and McClelland will assist the Project Manager in meeting the needs of the team and the individuals that make up the team.

Herzberg's Hygiene Factor plays an important part in the success of remote project teams. Remote employees do not report into the office each day and may start to feel disconnected. Understanding what is important in a position to the employees and being able to work with them to provide a good balance of working conditions, salary, personal life, working relationships, security and status will engage the team members.

Remote project teams will generally work from home, which for most team members will contribute to great working conditions. Team members will work from the comfort of their

home, which will eliminate a daily commute to the office, which is a huge benefit to the team members. Working from home will also contribute to a good work and personal life balance.

The hiring manager, human resources and resulting negotiations from the employee, will generally determine salary. The goal is to provide a salary that is within industry standards. If this requirement is overlooked and the salary is too low, this will cause a dissatisfaction and may lead to poor performance by the team member. Poor performance by just one team member can lead to poor team performance.

Working relationships are very important in business in general, but are extremely important when working with remote project teams. The team members are isolated and generally spend the day alone in a home office. The Project Manager should take action to have the team members engaged with each other. Examples could include:

- Initial icebreaker
- Team meetings using video conference
- Create a team charter
- Rotational leadership
- Reply all to e-mails
- Team calendar

Security is also an important aspect to any position, but especially dispersed teams. Dispersed teams may feel isolated and not part of the team, which may lead to feeling of insecurity about their future with the company. A way to avoid this is to provide regular feedback to the team members and assure them of the value they bring to the organization. In addition, by using the suggestions for creating good working relationships, the team members will feel as though they are part of the team, which will help in providing security to the team members.

Status is usually important to employees. One strategy for remote teams is to make the remote positions a higher status within the organization and only top performers are awarded remote positions.

It will be important to the success of the remote project team to consider Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and apply them to the team. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the five needs include:

- “Physiological needs are to do with the maintenance of the human body. If we are unwell, then little else matters until we recover”. (Changing Minds, n.d.)
- “Safety needs are about putting a roof over our heads and keeping us from harm. If we are rich, strong and powerful, or have good friends, we can make ourselves safe”. (Changing Minds, n.d.)
- “Belonging needs introduce our tribal nature. If we are helpful and kind to others they will want us as friends”. (Changing Minds, n.d.)
- “Esteem needs are for a higher position within a group. If people respect us, we have greater power”. (Changing Minds, n.d.)

- “Self-actualization needs are to 'become what we are capable of becoming', which would our greatest achievement”. (Changing Minds, n.d.)

The Project Manager should be prepared to respond to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Physiological needs can be met through company benefits, such as health coverage and dental coverage for the employees. Safety needs can be met through a salary that is in line with industry standards. Belonging can relate back to the working relationships. The Project Manager should strive to engage the team with technology and team building skills. For remote project teams, esteem can be accomplished by making the remote positions a higher job grade and for top performers.

The project Manager should have a clear understanding of McClelland's Theory of Need and apply them to the team. McClelland's Theory can be utilized to set goals, provide feedback, reward individuals and even structure the position. McClelland's Theory of Need can help the Project Manager better understand the drivers of the individuals and better manage the team.

According to McClelland's Theory of Need, the three needs include:

- “People who are achievement-motivated are driven by the desire to master tasks and situations”. (Boundless, 2016)
- “People who are affiliation-motivated are driven by the desire to create and maintain social relationships. They enjoy belonging to a group and want to feel loved and accepted”. (Boundless, 2016)
- “People who are power-motivated are driven by the desire to influence, teach, or encourage others”. (Boundless, 2016)

The Project Manager may consider assigning team tasks and positions based on McClelland's Theory of Need, which will help in balancing the team and ensuring each team member is in a position that is comfortable for them.

In summary, managing remote project teams has many challenges due to the physical separation of the team. Applying the theories of McGregor, Herzberg, Maslow and McClelland help the Project Manager in managing the remote project team and the project in general.

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