



Telework, Team and Resilience

Working remotely, in teams and in the long term?



Following our article about *Decontainment management in companies*, it is obvious that the share of teleworking and virtual work that we are currently experiencing is destined to continue beyond this period of crisis; by choice or by necessity.

But are we, despite the personal and organizational adaptation efforts already made, sufficiently prepared to work at the same time from a distance, as a team, and this in the long term?

According to scientific literature¹, several constraints can occur under these conditions; some **acute** (e.g. time pressure, understaffing, etc.) and others more **chronic**, but also just as damaging (e.g. lack of competence of a member, late submission of reports, non-attending or being passive at virtual meetings, etc.).

Thus, dwelling on these « banalities » of daily life becomes fundamental so that the teams in place do not see their **cohesion, well-being and performance** crumble over time. We are therefore talking here about team resilience capacity, i.e. how to resist stress factors and overcome them in order to continue to function, without exhausting all its resources.

« A group of resilient individuals does not make for a resilient team! »

Therefore, in order to strengthen this resilience in virtual teams, it could be helpful to implement a simple mode of reflection, i.e.:

- **Practice self-reflection** during difficult situations by not letting yourself be guided by automatic self-interpretations such as "he's doing this out of laziness; she doesn't belong here; he's rude, etc. » but by actively identifying the real causes and planning concrete actions.
- Then, it is therefore a question of **taking action** in two basic ways:
 - **Regulating emotional expression:** e.g. speaking openly at the first sign of potential problems, asking questions when in doubt, celebrating yourself when successful, varying your communication channels according to necessity, letting go, etc.
 - **Promote inclusion of members:** e.g. give more space for passive members to speak, express that the lack of individual skills is a team challenge to be solved, openly encourage individual participation, etc.

Secondly, with regard to teams as a whole and **acute stress** factors, according to research² it is possible to intervene **before, during and after** a difficult situation.

BEFORE

- **Anticipate** and plan for the unexpected by conducting simulations under different emergency scenarios to clarify team management (e.g. change in market conditions, passage of legislation, etc.)
- **Assessing** one's level of readiness to cope by communicating with each other about one's current level of ability.
- **Identify warning signs** by sharing experiences among members in order to adjust and be more prepared for the situation and therefore less surprised.
- **Draft a document** specifying Standard Operating Procedures to keep core activities running and redirect some resources to what is urgent.

WHILE

- **Assess the abnormal situation** by making sure that all team members know when the team goes from "business as usual" to "emergency" mode.
- **Dealing with stressors** by recognizing and offering support/assistance when a team member needs help or is unable to act.
- **Maintain core processes** by using Standard Operating Procedures, keeping each other updated and pursuing constructive routines in the face of stress (e.g. regular meetings or communications, base checklist, assigning a member to a specific task).
- **Seek advice** from members with expertise, rather than from those above, as well as from people outside the team to obtain valuable knowledge and tailor-made services.

AFTER

- **Common understanding of the new situation** by clarifying if and how the situation has changed, identifying where individuals/teams may need to recover (signs of post-event stress).
- **Debriefing the team after the event** makes 20-25% more resilient by allowing them to let off steam, share ideas, bring out critical information, reflect on what worked and what didn't, identify lessons learned, generate action plans on how to work together in the future.
- **Responding to concerns** by validating follow-up actions, adjustments to procedures, as well as dealing with any sticking points between team members or outsiders due to the stressful experience.
- **Express appreciation** to team members and outsiders for their help and support (helps to strengthen bonds among members, establishes useful team norms, and provides incentives for continued and future cooperation).

1) Degbey, W.Y. & Einola, K. (2019). Resilience in Virtual Teams: Developing the Capacity to Bounce Back. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*.

2) Alliger, G.M., Cerasoli, C.P., Tannenbaum, S.I., & Vessey, W.B. (2015). Team resilience. *Organizational Dynamics*, 44, 176–184.