Exercise

# Virtual Teams

Virtual teams face a high level of difficulty with some aspects of team behavior. In particular, virtual teams often have heightened problems with motivation, collaborative leadership, communication, commitment and conflict resolution. Each of these scenarios illustrates one of those problems. Identify which is the primary problem in each scenario.

1. A virtual team needed to make a decision about a critical constraint within the next few days to stay on schedule. The team leader felt it was important for everyone on the team to participate in the decision since it would have a far-reaching impact of the way forward for the team. However, none of the team members were in the same location. The seven team members were in four different countries and five different time zones. They often would schedule their conference calls so that it was evening in Europe and morning on the west coast of the USA. That was still a problem for the team member in Singapore, but she said that it did not bother her. Unfortunately, they had to work around a holiday in the USA and in Europe. When the team leader first checked schedules, it looked like the first available time for a meeting was over a week away.
2. The majority of the design team was located at the headquarters offices. However, one member of the team was located at the manufacturing site. This individual often complained that he was left out of meetings. The team leader assured him that he was invited to every formal team meeting, but that many times the decisions were being made during informal discussions. Recently the manufacturing team member was informed about design decisions that had already been made and that would require the manufacturing site to change the shop floor layout – for the fourth time. The manufacturing team member contacted the team leader and told them that he would not be attending any more team meetings since he felt that no one ever checked with him before making decisions that impact manufacturing. He would just wait until everything was completed and then he would tell them how much time and money it would take manufacturing to get ready.
3. A virtual functional team consisted of three people at the corporate office and seven people who worked from home on different aspects of the team activities. One individual who worked from home was responsible for collecting data from several sources, entering that data into a single database, and then weekly running some analytical reports on that data. These reports were to be used for monitoring performance and identifying issues. Once the team member had issued the reports, she would need to immediately start on the next week’s data and analytics. She seldom heard any feedback about the reports and when she did, it was only to identify an error or request a change. Recently, the team leader had noticed that the number of errors was increasing.
4. A virtual team was creating a new marketing campaign. Representatives from all six global sales regions were on the team. The major assignments had been spread out across all team members and each activity leader was to regularly coordinate with other team members to gain their insight. Some of the team members scheduled working conference calls and web meetings to address their activities. Most of these did not go well. There were technology problems and difficulties managing the interactions – everyone wanted to talk at once. Finally, some team members completed their activity by themselves and then asked for comments. These comments would straggle in, sometimes taking more than a week. By that time team members who used this approach were reluctant to accommodate comments since they were already working on the next activity.
5. A virtual team held a team status meeting every week. The team leader had noticed that two of the team members that were in different locations were often overly critical of each other’s work. One of those team members had just finished reviewing data that showed numerous errors by the other team member. The team member accused of making the errors angrily complained that they had received no feedback about any of the errors and that this meeting was the first time they were notified of the problem. The two team members continued arguing about the data for several minutes when the team leader stopped the topic and forced the team to move on.