Managing Virtual
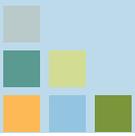# Work Teams

Frankie S. Jones Ph.D.

Employee and Labor Relations
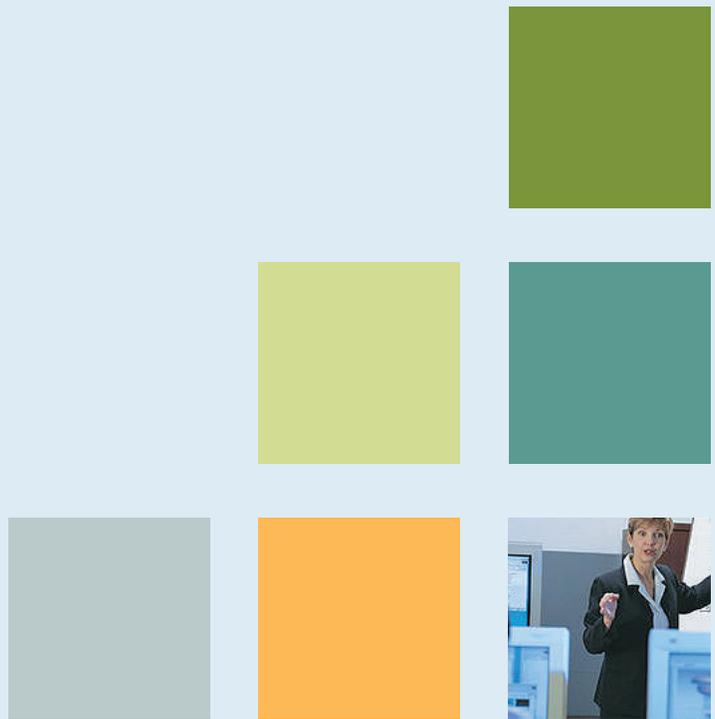
EMPLOYEE AND
LABOR RELATIONS

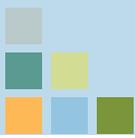**SYLLABUS**

Module Overview

This module explores issues related to managing virtual work teams, a growing segment of the work population who depend substantially more on technology to accomplish work goals. It is designed to be taught in 150 minutes (three 50-minute parts). The module is intended for an upper-level undergraduate audience.

An Introduction to Virtual Teams (50 Minutes)

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of the module, the student will be able to:

• Define virtual team.
• Explain why virtual teams are becoming so common.
• Evaluate the challenges and opportunities of leading a virtual team.
• Discuss the competencies and skills required of virtual team members and their leaders.
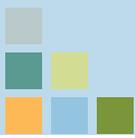
Suggested Syllabus

The syllabus provides a roadmap for teaching this module and includes the topic to be covered, the activity or concepts to be taught, the media or audiovisual requirements and the time required to teach the segment.

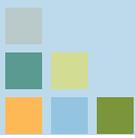| Topic	Activity	Media	Time
Introduction	The instructor introduces the learning module objectives and the foundational concepts of the content, engaging students through open discussion to explore these topics: • Definition of a virtual team • Why virtual teams are becoming so common • Challenges and opportunities of leading a virtual team • The role of the HR professional • Special competencies and skills required for virtual team members and leaders	PPT slides with instructor notes (4-6 slides)	10 min.
Case Study Part One	The instructor introduces Part One of the case study. See instructor notes on PPT and case study handout. Here is a brief summary: • Lauren has just been assigned to manage a project composed of a cross-functional team. Her boss gives her profiles of each of the six team members. Lauren is both intrigued and anxious when she sees that the project team members are in various locations. • Lauren works from the Atlanta office (eastern time), while one team member is in India, another is in Germany, and the remaining live in the U.S., but in different time zones. Two are in the eastern time zone (in Virginia and North Carolina) and two are in the central time zone (in Texas and Louisiana). [See case study handout for profiles of Lauren and the team members.] • Lauren begins to panic. She's never managed a virtual team. She wonders what special skills and competencies it takes to be successful. She decides to study their profiles and evaluate each team member's strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of working virtually. She also realizes she'll have to evaluate her own strengths and weaknesses.	PPT slides with an overview of part one of the case study and instructor notes (2 slides)	5 min.
Individual and Small Group Work	• Students individually read Lauren's and the team members' profiles. (5 minutes) • In groups of 4-5 students, students brainstorm and flip-chart the challenges/opportunities Lauren's team might face. (10 minutes)	A set of profiles for each student; flipcharts	15 min.
Debrief	Each group shares the challenges/opportunities they listed on their flipcharts. The instructor facilitates a debrief of Part One of the case study, comparing and contrasting the ideas of the small groups.		10 min.
Break for 10 minutes			

Building a Virtual Team (50 Minutes)

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of the module, the student will be able to:

- Assess the similarities and differences experienced by virtual teams and collocated teams in the team life cycle.
- Explain the characteristics of effective teams and how those characteristics are enhanced or put at risk when team members are virtual.
- Create a kick-off meeting agenda that outlines the ground rules that must be set for virtual teams.

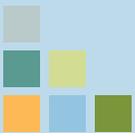| Topic	Activity	Media	Time

Building a Virtual Team	The instructor discusses the best practices for building a virtual team, engaging students through open discussion to explore these topics:
	• How is the team life cycle (forming, storming, norming, performing) affected when team members are virtual?
	• What are the characteristics of effective teams and how are those characteristics enhanced or compromised when team members are virtual?
	• What ground rules should be set at the onset of the project?
	   • How will the team build relationships and trust virtually?
	   • How will the team share information and make decisions?
	   • How will team members communicate and collaborate?
		PPT slides with instructor notes (4-6 slides)	10 min.

Case Study Part Two	The instructor introduces Part Two of the case study. See instructor notes on PPT and case study handout. Here is a brief summary: Lauren has done her homework. She's evaluated some of the challenges and opportunities that will arise as she manages her virtual team. To mitigate the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities, she decides to propose and negotiate the ground rules for how her team will operate during the team kick-off meeting next week. What topics should Lauren's agenda contain? Which ground rules should she mandate and which should she negotiate with the team? How will she build relationships and trust at this initial meeting?	PPT slides with an overview of Part Two of the case study and instructor notes (1-2 slides)	5 min.
Small Group Work	In groups of 4-5, students brainstorm and flip-chart the agenda for Lauren's kick-off meeting.	Flipcharts	15 min.
Debrief	Each group presents and justifies their agenda. The instructor facilitates the debrief, comparing and contrasting agendas of the small groups.	N/A	10 min.
Break for 10 minutes			

III. Managing Conflict Virtually (50 Minutes)

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of the module, the student will be able to:

- List and troubleshoot common conflicts experienced by virtual teams.
- Evaluate the match between technological tools and work tasks.
- Summarize the best practices of managing virtual teams.

Topic	Activity	Media	Time
Managing Conflict Virtually	The instructor discusses the challenges of managing conflict among virtual team members, engaging students through open discussion to explore these topics: • What are the most common conflicts experienced by virtual team members who communicate, collaborate, and make decisions via technology? • How important is it to match the technological tool being used to the task being performed?	PPT slides with instructor notes (4-6 slides)	5 min.
Case Study Part Three	The instructor introduces Part One of the case study. See instructor notes on PPT and case study handout. Here is a brief summary: During the kick-off meeting, Lauren reviewed each team members' roles and responsibilities, outlined processes for status reporting, and set the schedule for team meetings. She also asked their preferences for communicating. The types of communication that the team agreed on included e-mail, IM, web conferencing, and SharePoint. The team agreed to use the SharePoint site to share documents and provide visibility into each team member's tasks, responsibilities, and deadlines. Lauren even uploaded images of everyone and their résumés to establish relationships and build trust. Despite setting ground rules, the following conflicts arise: • Lags in e-mail responses generate mistrust between two team members. • One team member complains that the other team members try to use IM to solve complex problems and a resolution is never reached. • There is an uneven exchange of project knowledge. Note: Microsoft SharePoint is a web-based application that allows teams to collaborate and exchange information and documents. For more information, visit: http://www.microsoft.com/sharepoint/prodinfo/what.mspx.	PPT slides with Lauren's kick-off agenda and team conflicts with instructor notes (3-5 slides)	10 min.
Whole Group Discussion	Respond to the three conflict scenarios (one at a time). What should Lauren do? What could she have done to prevent the problems?	N/A	20 min.
Module Recap Activity	• In pairs, students list five things they've learned about managing a virtual work team. • The facilitator calls on volunteers and brings out any key ideas that they miss, such as the importance of setting ground rules and the match between tool and task.	N/A	15 min.

Required Reading

Duarte, D. L., & Snyder, N. T. (2006). Mastering virtual teams: Strategies, tools, and techniques that succeed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Suggested Readings

Andriessen, J. H. E., & Verburg, R. M. (2004). A model for the analysis of virtual teams. In S. H. Godar & S. P. Ferris (Eds.), Virtual and collaborative teams: Process, technologies and practice (pp. 269-278). London: IDEA Group Publishing.

Brown, M.K., Huettner, B., & James-Tanny, C. (2007). Managing virtual teams: Getting the most from wikis, blogs, and other collaborative tools. Plano, Texas: Worldwide Publishing, Inc.

Coovert, M. D., & Thompson, L. F. (2001). Computer supported cooperative work. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

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Dube, L., & Pare, G. (2004). The multifaceted nature of virtual teams. In D. J. Pauleen (Ed.), Virtual teams: Projects, protocols and processes (pp. 1-39). London: IDEA Publishing Group.

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Hoag, A. M., Jayakar, K. P., & Erickson, K. (2003). The role of trust in virtual and interpersonal environments: Implications for team learning & case method pedagogies. Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 57(4), 370-383.

Jarvenpaa, S. L., Knoll, K., & Leidner, D. (1998). Is anybody out there? Antecedents of trust in global virtual teams. Journal of Management Information Systems, 14(4), 29-64.

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Kreijns, K., Kirschner, P. A., Jochems, W., & Van Buuren, H. (2004). Determining sociability, social space, and social presence in (A)synchronous collaborative groups. CyberPscyhology & Behavior, 7(2), 155-172.

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Maznevski, M. L., & Chudoba, K. M. (2000). Bridging space over time: Global virtual team dynamics and effectiveness. Organization Science, 11(5), 473-492.

Vroman, K., & Kovacich, J. (2002). Computer-mediated interdisciplinary teams: Theory and reality. Journal of Interprofessional Care, 16(2), 159-170.

Walther, J. B. (1995). Relational aspects of computer-mediated communication: Experimental observations over time. Organization Science, 6(2), 186-203.

Warkentin, M. E., Sayeed, L., & Hightower, R. (1997). Virtual teams versus face-to-face teams: An exploratory study of a web-based conference system. Decision Sciences, 28(4), 975- 996.
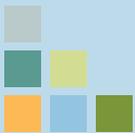
Managing Virtual
Work Teams—A Case Study

Frankie S. Jones Ph.D.

Instructor's Guide

EMPLOYEE AND
LABOR RELATIONS

This case study accompanies the learning module entitled Managing Virtual Work Teams that consists of PowerPoint presentations, a syllabus and this case study.

Teaching Notes
Part I. An Introduction to Virtual Teams
Distribute the case study and ask students to turn to Part One. Introduce the case study by reading the scenario, reviewing the activity instructions and placing students into groups of 4-5. Tell students that they will need to appoint a representative from their group to present their findings and that they will have 15 minutes to complete the activity. Let them know when they have 5 minutes left.

After 15 minutes, each group should present the challenges and opportunities they recorded on their flip charts. Facilitate the debrief, comparing and contrasting the groups' ideas.

Possible Answers
Challenges:
- Lauren's lack of experience with appropriate uses of technology.
- Lauren's weakness for managing across cultures.
- John is a face-to-face guy. How will he interact, work and build trust with others virtually?
- Santosh prefers instant messaging, but he's at least 10-12 hours away from most of the team members. When he's working, the others are asleep.
- Brenda and Helga prefer robust technologies. Will other team members feel intimidated?
- Santosh, Helga and Brenda have trouble with self and project management. How will Lauren keep them on track?
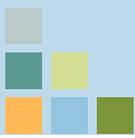
Opportunities:
- Lauren is good at building trust.
- Cross-team mentoring is possible. For example, Brenda could mentor John on robust technologies.
- Team members will receive cross-culture exposure and exposure to technologies they may not be familiar with.

SCENARIO
Lauren is assigned manager of a project with a cross-functional team. Lauren has reviewed the profiles of her six team members her boss gave her. Lauren is both intrigued and anxious when she sees that team members are geographically dispersed.

Lauren works from the Atlanta office. One team member is in India; another is in Germany; and the rest live in the United States, but in different time zones. Two staff members are in the eastern time zone (Virginia and North Carolina) and two staff members are in the central time zone (Texas and Louisiana).

Lauren has never managed a virtual team and is unsure what special skills it will take to be successful. What competencies are necessary for virtual team leaders and members? She studies the team member profiles and creates a matrix to evaluate each member's strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of working virtually. She includes herself because she realizes she needs to evaluate her own strengths and weaknesses. Lauren thinks about the challenges and opportunities she will face managing this virtual team.

Activity (15 minutes)

Review the team member matrix on page 3.

In groups of 4-5 students, brainstorm the challenges and/or opportunities Lauren's team might face. Record your ideas on a flip chart.

Choose a representative to share your group's findings with the class.

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Team Member Matrix*

Team Member	Location (Time Zone)	Communication Preferences	Virtual Experience	Strengths	Weaknesses
Lauren (Team Manager)	Atlanta, GA (Eastern)	E-mail	No	• Building and maintaining trust. • Performance management and coaching. • Networking.	• Appropriate use of information technology. • Developing and adapting standard team processes. • Managing across cultures.
Santosh	Pune, India (GMT+05:30)	Instant messaging	Yes	• Interpersonal awareness. • Use of technology.	• Self-management. • Project management.
John	Wilmington, NC (Eastern)	Telephone	No	• Networking face-to-face.	• Use of technology. • Spanning boundaries.
Joyce	Norfolk, VA (Eastern)	E-mail	Yes	• Self-management. • Project management.	• Networking.
Helga	Berlin, Germany (Central European)	SharePoint; Webconferencing (with video)	Yes	• Use of technology.	• Interpersonal awareness. • Project management.
Adam	Dallas, TX (Central)	Instant messaging, discussion boards	No	• Networking via technology. • Spanning boundaries.	• Use of technology.
Brenda	New Orleans, LA (Central)	Instant messaging; blogs; SharePoint; e-mail	Yes	• Use of technology. • Interpersonal awareness. • Networking. • Spanning boundaries.	• Self-management.

*See pages 76-88 and 130-136 of the required reading for definitions of the strengths and weaknesses: Duarte, D. L., & Snyder, N. T. (2006). Mastering virtual teams: Strategies, tools, and techniques that succeed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

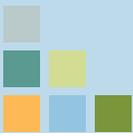### Part II. Building a Virtual Team

Teaching Notes

Tell students to turn to Part II of the case study. Read the scenario, reviewing the activity instructions and placing the students into groups of 4-5. Tell students that they will need to appoint a representative to present their group's agenda and that they will have 15 minutes to complete the activity. Let them know when they have 5 minutes left to complete the activity.

SCENARIO

Lauren has evaluated the challenges and opportunities that could arise as she manages her virtual team. To mitigate challenges and take advantage of opportunities, she decides to set the ground rules for how her team will operate during next week's team kick-off meeting. What topics should Lauren's agenda include? Which ground rules should she mandate and which should she negotiate? How will she build relationships and trust during this initial meeting?

Activity (15 minutes)

In groups of 4-5 students, brainstorm an agenda for Lauren's kick-off meeting. Record your ideas on a flip chart.
Choose a representative to share your group's agenda with the class, explaining why you chose each agenda topic.

Part III. Managing Conflict Virtually

Teaching Notes

Instruct students to read Part III of the case study. Review Lauren's agenda, included below. Tell students you will present three conflicts one at a time, and as a class, you will solve them.

SCENARIO

Lauren used the following agenda for the kick-off meeting. She set expectations for status reporting, the technologies to be used and performance management. The types of communication the team agreed on included e-mail, instant messaging and web conferencing. The team also agreed to use Microsoft SharePoint to report project status and to create a virtual community for team members to build relationships and trust. Lauren asked everyone to upload their pictures and their résumés to jump-start the community.

Lauren's Agenda
- Getting-to-Know-You Activity
- Team Goals and Objectives
- Technologies We Will Use (open discussion)
- Virtual Community (pictures and bios)
- Status Reporting
- Team Meetings
- One-on-one meetings

Despite setting ground rules, the following conflicts arise:
1. Lags in e-mail responses generate mistrust between two team members.
2. One team member complains that the other team members try to use instant messaging to solve complex problems and resolutions are never reached.
3. There is an uneven exchange of project knowledge.

Activity (20 minutes)
Think about the conflicts. Share your thoughts with the class regarding the following questions:
1. What should Lauren do?
2. What could Lauren have done to prevent the conflicts from occurring in the first place?

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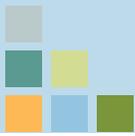_____

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SHRM

Managing Virtual
Work Teams—A Case Study

Frankie S. Jones Ph.D.

Student Workbook

EMPLOYEE AND
LABOR RELATIONS

Part I. An Introduction to Virtual Teams

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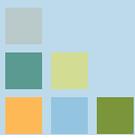
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Activity (15 minutes)

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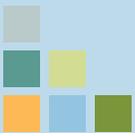
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Activity (15 minutes)

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