

VIRTUAL TEAMS: Challenges & Recommendations

Challenge	Recommendation
<p>1. Scheduling meetings: Time zones are all different from each other.</p>	<p>1. Rotate the hours, so that everyone has a chance to participate from home at times. Bring in lunch or dinner if employees must come in to a central location for the meetings in a given location</p>
<p>2. Language: Even though English may be the official language, it will still be difficult for employees to communicate effectively if it is second language to some participants. And if those ESL participants remained quiet in a teleconferencing call, their creative ideas and their commitment would subsequently be lost.</p>	<p>2. At the start of each tele-conference, each participant might tell a two-minute story about some event in his/her business or personal life. Everyone then has practice in both speaking English and listening to English in various accents. Also, they will learn more about each other personally, which helps to build trust, and they will get a sense of what skills other members bring to the team's efforts.</p>
<p>3. Side talk and 'dominating' as distractions: People in conference rooms will hold side conversations, or dominate the discussion by being most vocal. When attending from one person's office, that person might be looking at their own e-mail instead of participating on a phone conference.</p>	<p>3. Direct participants to each attend from his own office, using some form of groupware. The downside will be additional cost, but team members can more easily see and hear the content on their own PC's, and must be focused on the screen and the phone call.</p>
<p>4. E-mail communications: Conflict may arise due to difference in culture and personality styles, i.e. one culture's directness sounds rude to another. One culture's politeness sounds "wishy-washy" to another. Not everyone understands "e-mail etiquette," i.e. bolding and underlining words for emphasis.</p>	<p>4. Consultants from each other's countries can help teach communication styles. For example, team members can learn to be polite but still be explicit and direct in requesting what they need from the other person. Teach participants e-mail 'etiquette,' i.e. what underlining and bold letters mean, so that their attempt to emphasize a point is not interpreted as yelling or anger.</p>
<p>5. Follow-Up After Virtual Meetings: People will walk away with different notes and may interpret action items and due dates differently, even if the leader announces those at the end of a conference or video call</p>	<p>5. The leader or a designee should always publish a summary of decisions, further action items, and timeframes within 24 hours after the virtual meeting, to ensure everyone's understanding. If there is disagreement from members, they must voice it immediately.</p>

Reference: Snyder, Bill (2003, May). Teams that span time zones face new work rules. In Stanford Graduate School of Business Magazine. Retrieved from http://www.gsb.stanford.edu/News/bmag/sbsm0305/feature_virtual_teams.shtml