
From the Editors

By Karen V. Beaman and Gerry Falkowski



Collectively, this issue's authors provide a wide diversity of approaches and techniques to increase your odds of managing projects and people working across time zones and cultures. Because we are practitioners and not social scientists, we don't need to debate the definition of culture. Instead, we focus on a universal workplace reality: *not everyone thinks and acts as we do*. "Normal" in one country may not be normal in another. What is expected of one group may be considered shocking or rude to a different group. What is accepted protocol in one branch office may be frowned upon in another. In virtual collaboration environments, we deal with both geographical cultures and business cultures; each is potentially important to teaming behaviors.

David Sirota presents a client case that highlights how culture can be the greatest barrier to teamwork. He was asked to be a coach and mentor to a group of 11 executives in the technology organization of a major financial services organization. Each was a direct report to the CIO and each had specific expertise in the various components of technology. This should have been a super team, but instead it was fatally flawed because of culture and turf issues. Mr. Sirota looked to a tool called Life Orientations (LIFO) to assess and help individuals understand how they and their co-workers preferred to be treated. He also used a tool called Organization Network Analysis (ONA), which looks at the way individuals share information. To function effectively as a leadership team, he looked at three attributes: sharing, innovation and reuse. The results provided a wake-up call to the executive team.

Next, Scott Matta provides insights on how to select and maintain multinational teams in the real world. He tells us that on a local level, determining who should be assigned to a particular project or a specific team can be a difficult task. He writes that in the real world, team members are often thrust upon us based simply on availability. A key point in his article is that this forced staffing may *not* be a bad thing. This article will help you understand the considerations necessary for putting together a successful multinational team.

Robin Stegner and Bill Kofahl provide a case study on how the application of the Human Performance Improvement model (HPI) and electronic communication tools can be leveraged to improve key global teaming processes. Their study demonstrates the impact of using a standard approach to improve human performance in the New Product Introduction (NPI) processes and describes ways to use communication tools to support the work of process improvement teams. You will get an understanding of their techniques on applying the HPI model and a template that you can follow in leading future global corporate initiatives.

Nancy Massar discusses how to facilitate your multi-cultural team to greatness with a real life case of how divergent/convergent thinking styles were at play (or, at odds). You will learn that people with a divergent style of thinking tend to look for more options, more data, and are comfortable with ambiguity. Those who prefer a convergent mode seek closure quickly. By not judging either preference as good or bad, team members can benefit from both approaches. People seek an environment where their individual skills, ideas, experiences, values and perceptions are accepted and supported. Differences, when acknowledged and appreciated, become a source of collective strength.

Our next author, John Bing writes that managing and leading complex organizations is challenging, at least in part because the most utilized tools to assess management's approaches are end-point financial measures. Reviewing quarterly profit/loss statements as a guide to management's skill is a bit like measuring a doctor's skills by determining whether the patient is alive or dead. Mr. Bing says we need other measures that assess both the application of specific managerial approaches and policies in addition to the output measures of financial returns. In so doing, we increase the opportunities open to managers to understand the effects of their policies and approaches and how they relate to the bottom line.

Karen Beaman shares her research on what makes a successful expatriate, and the importance of the role that expatriates play in making effective, multi-cultural teams.

The article will help you move to a more integrated, multi-dimensional approach to global human resources management by promoting, leveraging, and diffusing a new mindset – a global orientation – to develop more effective international assignees and foster healthier teamwork on global projects. Ms. Beaman stresses the role of "global mindset" in selecting individuals for international assignments and in building effective multicultural teams that have the maximum likelihood of success.

Regular column contributors, Gerry Falkowski and Steve Troutman, along with guest writer Alex Kosnik, provide an understanding of how to manage cultural differences in a virtual environment. They have found that paying attention to six key cultural elements go a long way towards keeping your team working efficiently, effectively and in harmony.

Synco Jonkeren shares his insights on building effective multicultural teams by using the example of the surprises at the European Soccer Championship tournament held in Portugal this summer. Greece, the surprise winner, beat homeland Portugal in the finals. It was only Greece's second appearance at a large tournament ever. The win created a wave of Greek nationalism across the world, demonstrating that the power of the team can add more value than individual brilliance. In business as well as sports, cultural diversity has become a constant phenomenon of our business environment and consequently we have been witnessing the emergence of multicultural teams.

We hope that you find the diversity of these articles on building effective multicultural teams useful. As always your comments and suggestions are encouraged.

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