Chapter IX

Mostly Co-Located

We’ll start with the mostly co-located model for virtual teams. In this model, the virtual team is comprised of one or two locations of team concentration (often with members working in the same building, site, geographic location, etc.), while there are several members working remotely from other places. This model is often how many organizations get their first start with virtual teaming, as some external event (a merger or acquisition, reorganization, desire to reward a favored employee, desire to get the right person for the job, etc.) spawns the need for more creative approaches to teamwork.

One Primary Location, Several Remote Team Members

In this mostly co-located model, there is one center of concentration of employees that is supplemented by several remote team members working in alternate locations (remote sites, telecommuting environments, etc.). This model often evolves to either reward a favored employee by letting them work at home or at an alternate location (probably the wrong reasons), or when a need arises for a specific skill set that cannot be filled locally. Often, with this model, the one or two remote employees are made to feel like the odd man or woman out, and team activity centers around the central “hive” where the bulk
of the team members work. The remote team members “fly in” from time to time to the central hive for face-to-face meetings.

The model is particularly challenging for the remote members, as team interactions and work methodologies often are focused more on the face-to-face paradigms of the co-located members of the team, many of which we discussed in Chapter 4. For example, the process for routine team meetings often involves the centrally located staff gathering in a conference room while linking remote team members in via audioconferencing.

One early example of the use of the model within Hewlett-Packard occurred during the early days (early 1990s) of the aforementioned Sales Force Automation Projects. The teams that handled the project management and data center implementation role for the IT portion for these initiatives were located primarily in a central location in Atlanta, Georgia. However, hands-on implementation and project management coordination were provided by remote Technology Enablers (technology consultants) that were located in the field offices where sales representatives resided at the time. The Technology Enablers were often asked to dial into project-planning meetings via speaker phones (always poor quality, of course), while everyone else was gathered in a room together. Over time, however, the meeting methodology gradually evolved to where the entire group met exclusively via audioconferencing tools. At the beginning, it was a hard transition for the co-located bunch—meeting requests that were sent via e-mail without a specified conference room often received replies indicating, “You forgot to include the conference room in Atlanta for the meeting!” The reply back went something like, “No, we didn’t—