Chapter XV

Managing a Virtual Team

While participating on a virtual team, a team member has his or her own set of challenges, and managing the virtual team involves some additional responsibilities. A people manager or program manager is expected to lead, be an example for the rest of the team, and help pull the members together to accomplish something collectively that they could not accomplish alone. Time, budget, and scope are the three main attributes of a program that can be documented, managed, and measured. Operating principles and culture are the soft skills that can contribute to the success or failure of the program or project on which a team is working.

Be an Example

If you are managing a virtual team, you will personally need to be in or quickly move toward the operate or capitalize stage of the virtual team maturity curve. Leaders of a virtual team who are in the avoid stage are bound for failure, while those in the tolerate stage will not enable the team to be as effective as it could be. Whether you are aware of it or not, your team members will be looking to you to set the tone for how the team will operate. Even if you do not consider yourself an expert at managing virtual teams, you will be more effective if you understand the common myths and best practices, and, more importantly, if you
can leverage the diversity of knowledge and expertise within your team. Find people who are in the capitalize stage to help you build your repertoire or tools and best practices. The goal of leading a virtual team should be to ensure that the team feels like they are working, not being on a virtual team and trying to get their work done. The fact that they are on a virtual team should not be a distraction or limitation to accomplishing their overall objectives.

**Best practices for managers:**
- Be an example
- Get off to a great start
- Standardize
- Be visible

**Get Off to a Great Start**

Here are some ways to make a virtual team project launch successful:

- Ensure you spend enough up-front time in planning.
- If you need virtual breakout rooms, look for those types of capabilities in audioconferencing bridges and set up separate real-time application sharing sessions.
- Make sure you keep to the agenda or build in enough flexibility so that agenda items can be moved or be shortened.
- Ensure that there are action items assigned and that follow-up discussions are scheduled to reinforce the point that this is a working meeting, not just a discussion, and that the real work will come later.

**Standardize**

Deciding which tools and best practices you will use up front will help avoid confusion and simplify the way your team operates. The following are the major decisions you will need to make: