Chapter X

Mostly Virtual

In the mostly virtual model, team members are spread around the globe. This model sometimes can evolve slowly. Perhaps a team starts with one or two members working remotely. Then, company reorganizations, mergers, or acquisitions may spark the need for additional geographically distributed team members. Alternatively, we’ve also seen cases where a team was formed to be mostly virtual and distributed from the beginning in order to meet a business need (the PC COC team we mentioned earlier serves as a key example).
Advantages of a Mostly Virtual Team

Based on our experience, here are some of the advantages that the mostly virtual team model provides, compared to the mostly co-located models.

• There is a level playing field amongst all team members. Everyone is distributed and must rely on and use the tools available for team interactions.

• Provides fewer opportunities for what we often label center-of-the-universe syndrome. Center-of-the-universe syndrome can emerge when there is an area of large concentration of co-location for a particular virtual team. Team members in that location often develop the mindset that their location is the center of the universe and that any face-to-face meetings should occur there, virtual meetings should be scheduled to best accommodate that time zone, and so forth. For example, the PC COE team, a mostly virtual team, did not exhibit extreme center-of-the-universe syndrome. The periodic face-to-face meetings were held in various locations such as Fort Collins, Colorado; Atlanta, Georgia; Palo Alto, California; and so forth. Of course, the European and Asia-Pacific members of the team would probably describe the team as using the United States as the center of the universe.

• In this model, management staff is typically distributed, as well. This provides opportunities for everyone to interface face-to-face with management on occasion.

Challenges of a Completely Virtual Team

Of course, there are also challenges to working in the mostly virtual environment. Here are some of the key challenges that we’ve encountered. Several of them are discussed in more detail in our chapter on international issues, as they tend to be more prevalent as teams become distributed across time zones and cultures.
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